

FILM REVIEWS

Peter Carter's

Rituals

i: Peter Carter, **sc:** Ian Sutherland, **ph:** René Verzier, **ed:** George Appleby, **sd:** Douglas Canton, **m:** Hagood Hardy, **l.p.:** Hal Holbrook (Harry), Lawrence Dane (Mitti), Robin Gammell (Martin), Ken James (Abel), Gary Reineke (D.J.), **exec. p.:** Harold Greenberg and Robert A. Kantor, **p:** Lawrence Dane, **p.c.:** Astral Bellevue Pathé Limited and Canart Films Limited, 1976, **col:** 35 mm, **dist:** Astral Films, **running time:** 100 min.

A few years ago, Mayor Jean Drapeau decided to push through a bylaw banning newspaper vending machines from the sidewalks as part of his continuing program to make Montreal celestial. He felt they were an eyesore. Considering the decrepit state of much of the city, the local television news people found the whole thing screamingly funny and put together a little five minute item *à la* Drapeau. The film consisted of shot panning past scrap yards, garbage dumps and smoke stacks, accompanied by sweet flowery music intercut with short shots zooming into the offending newspaper machines with loud jarring discords on the soundtrack. **Rituals** has about the same cinematic subtlety. The only way you know it is a horror movie is because of a couple of zooms, accompanied by a chord of scary music. The rest is a banal adventure story with bad acting, bad dialogue and bad music, all precariously balanced on a shaky and unoriginal plot.

Five doctors on a camping trip are flown into the middle of the wilderness. On arrival they are all bubbly and frothy in an atmosphere with the same gripping intensity of those beer commercials on television (you know the ones with Harry and the boys getting together for some weekend fishing and someone falls in the water).



The end of a hard day in **Rituals**

After about half an hour of this yuk-yuk merriment, there are a couple of zoom shots and loud chords and the doctors start getting chopped up by a nasty in the woods. If you think zoom shots of dismembered heads on a stake is too trite, think again.

From the very start, **Rituals** was a risky venture. You can get away with a mediocre dramatic film but if you make a comedy, it had better be funny, and if you attempt a horror film, it had better be scary. The Saturday night audience with which I saw the film collectively gasped only twice in the hour and a half. Someone screamed, but it was in the wrong place. There are several ways you can unnerve people; my favorite is *à la* Hitchcock where the world goes slightly askew, as in a distorting mirror. People like Corman don't bother with this subtlety, and are content to keep the screen liberally splashing with gore. This film halfheartedly attempts both and, except for one or two moments near the beginning, achieves neither. Added into the pot is the last refuge of a desperate screenwriter — symbolism. The river they are travelling is

haunted with Indian legends that have "a beginning and an end and that's the middle", whatever that's supposed to mean. For the Jungians among us, there are lots of snake crosses and animal entrails flashed around the screen.

Unfortunately, no amount of cerebral icing can cover up the emptiness of the script. The film is technically competent, in parts even slick, but the sad fact is that we just don't give a damn about these guys, much less about what's happening to them. Halfway through the film we are made aware that one of the doctors is a good guy, and one is just cut to save his own skin, and we find out that somebody's father had a drinking problem. The trouble is that this introduction of human content is almost a screenwriting afterthought and it comes too little, too crudely and too late. That is really the major problem with the film; all of the thin action rests on the crudely portrayed characters. You end up not caring about the protagonists, not identifying with them and it's game over; no drama, no horror, no film.

Ronald Blumer

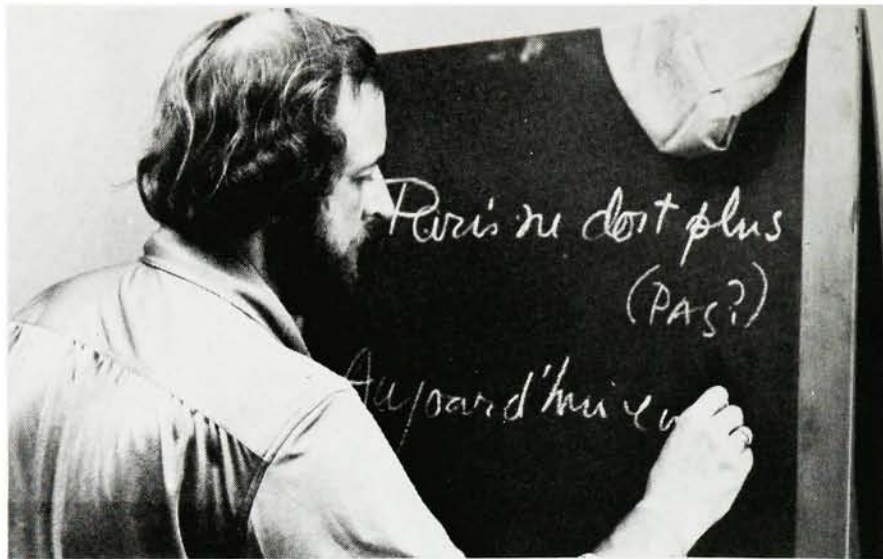
Film Credit Abbreviations: d. Director asst d. Assistant Director sc. Script adapt. Adaptation dial. Dialogue ph. Photography sp ph. eff. Special Photographic Effects ed. Editor sup. ed. Supervising Editor sd. sound sd. ed. Sound Editor sd. rec. Sound Recording i. des. Production Designer a. d. Art Director set dec. set Decorator m. Music m. d. Music Director cost. costumes choreo. Choreography l. p. Leading Players exc. p. Executive Producer p. Producer assoc. p. associate Producer p. sup. Production Supervisor p. man. Production Manager p. c. Production Company col. colour Process dist. Distributors narr. Narration

FILM REVIEWS

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's

Le vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort

d: Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, **asst. d:** Alain Maline, **sc:** Lefebvre and Mireille Amiel, **ph:** Guy Dufaux, **ed:** Marguerite Duparc, **sd:** Jacques Blain, **m:** Claude Fonfrède, **cost:** Nicole Rachline, **i.p.:** Marcel Sabourin (Abel), Anouk Ferjac (Anne), Myriam Boyer (Jeanne), **exec. p.:** Jean-Henri Deleau, **p:** Marguerite Duparc-Lefebvre and Hubert Niogret, **p.c.:** Cinak (Mtl), Filmoblic (Paris), 1976, **col:** 35mm, **running time:** 113 min.



Abel in Paris

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's new film *Le vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort* was shown in Montreal recently at the Quebec critics' festival (Le Festival international du film de la critique québécoise). And though the audience jumped up after the screening to sing "Gens du Pays" to Lefebvre, "*Mon cher Jean-Pierre, c'est à ton tour de te laisser parler d'amour*" (My dear Jean-Pierre, it's your turn now to be spoken to of love, — the unofficial Quebec nationalist anthem). I left the theatre feeling essentially isolated. Charmed by some moments in the film and by its zealous and sincere reception, but estranged from the emotions behind that reception.

For what Lefebvre had managed to do with this film was to create a character, who, by the simple discovery of what he is not, politically and culturally, is instilled with a sense of political and cultural affirmation. That affirmation of the Quebecois sensibility becomes the central statement of the film; experiencing it demands a leap of faith which I, for one, could not make, personally.

To be fair to Lefebvre, who has shown himself sternly committed to the New Quebec, this film is not a mere exploitation of the ripening political atmosphere since the November '76 election. The central character of this film, Abel, was introduced to Quebec audiences a decade ago in *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça*.

**It should be added that "Gens du Pays" has also officially replaced "Bonne Fête", the French version of "Happy Birthday". The film was screened on Lefebvre's birthday.*

Whereas the early film, the first in a trilogy of which *Le vieux pays où Rimbaud est mort* is the second film, looks at Abel through a Quebec context, in this film Abel travels to France to discover what is tangible and explicit about having roots in that nation, "*s'il y a encore des français en France et s'ils nous ressemblent*" (whether there are any French in France and whether we are like them), but being something other.

In Paris, where the film opens (it was shot entirely in France), we find the mild mannered Abel (Marcel Sabourin) doing those things tourists in Paris do, "sitting" for a portrait by one of the street artists, taking coffee in a bistro, visiting the flower market.

He meets Jeanne (Myriam Boyer), a young worker saddled with problems: her delinquent brother, her drunken father and her own loneliness — she is a widow. On the Cote d'Azur, where Abel travels when he tires of Paris, he meets Anne (Anouk Ferjac) who, though professionally secure as a child court judge, lives an uneventful life, cut off from her husband and her emotions. (On a Saturday afternoon in Paris, Anne walks the artist's alley where a vendor stares mutely, as if she were the tourist, and she stares back.) The three of them are seen alone, until the script brings them together as friends and, the women, as Abel's lovers.

Describing them now, they seem dry, clichéd characters, and, in one sense, they are meant to be. As outsiders, displaced persons, they lend credence to Lefebvre's disenchantment with modern France. On the other hand, and this is where Lefebvre is at his best, he also shapes these

characters with irony, a bit of humor and much sympathy. (He is aided here by the excellent performances of the three lead actors.) We are never estranged from them but by the way in which they are manipulated.

When Abel purchases flowers from a street vendor and find he hasn't the right change, he takes the whole lot and sits down, smugly, to enjoy them. The chair he and his flowers occupy however must be rented. We see him paying off the good woman with flowers only to be accosted by a police officer who moves in to demand he show his seller's license. The charm of this episode, like many others, erodes quickly when we put it in context.

Lefebvre tries to excuse his lack of balance, his loading of the dice, academically, in terms of post cards. It has all been, says Abel at the end of the film, a large post card "*tout ça pour moi c'est comme une immense carte postale... pis j'nous vois comme sur une immense carte postale...*" (It's all like a huge postcard to me... like we're all on a huge postcard). It isn't real. And if it isn't real then Abel hasn't changed from knowing and loving Jeanne and Anne. The film isn't about people, it's about pawns.

But for all its faults, and I detach myself from them with difficulty, this film has a moody, sultry quality that works on us. Like photos of heat waves rising off the earth, we are held behind a veil of distance and, at the same time, almost tranquillized by being there. Devices which in another film might appear awkward and out of place, such as frequent, intent gazes into the camera, don't mar the serenity of this film.

We are particularly tuned to the nuances of music and light. The music that drifts in through windows is, we discover, sung by a balladeer character who seems to have only one song, a modern *chanson de geste*. It is a convention used rarely in film but it becomes both ironic and humorous in this film as we see the character and listen to his song over and over again.

Lefebvre seems to be exploring a passive posture. In this film it is represented both by the notes that Abel writes himself on a black board, "Paris ne dort plus" (Paris isn't sleeping anymore), he scribbles when he gets up one morning, and by the static camera. This passiveness or distance might be explained only in terms of Abel's being out of himself, out of Quebec, but I think Lefebvre, though there is slight evidence of it in this film, is groping for something deeper. Perhaps he's saving it for the third part of the trilogy, *La mort du père prodigue*, scheduled for shooting sometime next year.

However important *Le vieux pays où Rimbaud est Mort* is to the Quebec Lefebvre knows and cares about, the film falls short of representing more than cultural wounds.

Joan Irving

REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

The World of Wizards

d. Pen Densham, John Watson, ph. Robert New, Pen Densham, sc. Pen Densham, James Randi, sd. rec. Richard Nichol, John Megill, Bryan Day, sd. ed. Robert Grieve, Patrick Drummond, p. man. Nancy Falconer, m. John Mills-Cockell, p.c. Insight Productions Inc., 1977, color, 16mm, running time 50 min.

Coming up on CBC television on October 8 is a fascinating look at *The World of Wizards*. No longer the fear-



ed practitioners of obscure diabolical sciences, moulding the powers of life and death, time and space to their whims, today's wizards weave their spells of enchantment to create wonder and delight. Magic is used to entertain and amuse, as well as to intrigue an audience. It is a means by which we rekindle the mysterious wonderment of the child in us whose entire world is woven with the cloth of enchantment.

The World of Wizards fully captures the fascinating subject of professional wizards plying their trade in all of its magical mystery. Two years in the making, this "docutainment", by Toronto's innovative Insight Productions, offers up a strange land peopled by exotic men in long robes and peaked hats, who carry gleaming-eyed cats and speak in the mystical language of the ancients.

The camera takes us on a tour of magic and illusion in North America, from the spooky Magic Castle in Los Angeles where world famous sorcerers come to relax from their labors, to the sombre 50th anniversary Houdini seance in Niagara Falls. The oldest magic store in America is conjured up for us, as is a behind-the-scenes look at a magic factory. We also visit the annual magicians' convention held in the unlikely town of

Colon, Michigan, the Magic Capital of the World.

Throughout the magical hour, we are treated to famous and unknown magicians practising their craft in lavish theatres, in parks, small town squares and on the streets of lower Manhattan - wherever a crowd might gather to stare and wonder. Even the simplest of conjurers gets an enthusiastic round of applause whenever the audience feels mystified. In a sometime harshly real world, an audience craves enchantment. In the faces of the people on the street, you can read this need to believe in magic.

At one point, Canadian wizard Doug Henning sums it all up by saying that when you watch how a great magician moves his hands and how he talks, you finally realize that it is magic you are seeing; magic is everywhere.

Numerous feats of prestidigitation, levitation, occultism, necromancy, conjuring and manipulation are sprinkled like magic dust throughout the program and it is a singular delight to watch the slick, the humble and the casual magicians of today perform their marvellous craft. But even more engaging is some of the vintage footage discovered by the Insight crew on three continents; footage which shows geniuses of the art such as Harry Blackstone Sr. and the incomparable Harry Houdini, actually performing some of their death defying stunts.

Hosted by the Great Randi, a Canadian magician well versed in the misty world of Wizards, the hour moves along at a delightful clip, never becoming too involved in the technical mechanics of the sorcery craft but preferring to dwell on the light heartedness, the humor and the childlike sense of wonder evoked by magic.

In all, *The World of Wizards* is a marvellous romp through a magic land that boasts some fine old footage of past masters, excellent documentation of modern magicians honing their skills, and a hair raising finale where a modern escape artist is suspended over a frigid Niagara Falls in sub zero weather and attempts to escape from shackles and a strait jacket. This feat, staged especially for the film, took place last February under a heavy blanket of secrecy. The revelation of the mystery escape artist's identity offers us a surprising glimpse into the tremendous abilities of the wizards that move among us.

Günter Ott