Anne-Claire Poirier's Salut Victor

One of a series of 10 television films produced for Radio-Quebec, Salut Victor is an impressive work. Based on Montreal writer Edward O. Philip's 'Michel et le Miroir,' the film is an effective document attesting to the collective fears and individual concerns of many of our aged. But more than that, it is a surprisingly moving account of the friendship that two male residents form in a private retirement home. That both of these men are gay underlines the absence of screen representations of the aged, both gay and straight.

The film chronicles the friendship that evolves between two men living in a home for the aged, presumably in Montreal. Philip, recently arrived, and demonstrating in no uncertain terms that his nature is an inherently reserved one, is introduced to the friendly Victor, the residence's self-taughtRAFT and film character of the film. Victor, played by popular Quebecois actor Jacques Godin, embodies all of those qualities which the repressed Philip (Jean-Louis Roux) outwardly appears to be opposed to—his bash, candour about his sexuality, and more than just a little revealing in his discussions of other residents. In short, the men are classic examples of the personality contrast necessary to the unfolding of a narrative cinema which is concerned with the progressive moral enlightenment of its central character. Predictably, it is Victor who convinces Philip that life is too short to allow oneself to be dictated to by constricting, oppressive notions of pride and, following their initial strained introduction, the two men soon become dependent on each other's company.

Filmmaker Anne-Claire Poirier, the "genius" of Quebecois cinema, has solidified her position as one of the Quebec industry's chief talents in this film, her first, since the disappointing La quantitative six years ago.

With a mature, sensitive hand not afforded many directors, Poirier has created a significant work of popular Canadian cinema. Responsible for selecting the short story from which the film has been adapted, Poirier has been keenly involved with the production since its inception. This is clearly evident in her polished use of form. Several of the many outstanding formal elements to be found in this film include a stylized editing which serves the film's story well by allowing each to fade and "wash" into one another, and the consistently off-homage, toned-down shots that dominate the film's images further complementing its "temporal" meshing. But it is perhaps Poirier's direction of the actors, and the accommodating manner in which they are photographed, that remains the film's essential strength.

Realizing the importance to performance of a project such as Salut Victor, Poirier has encouraged nothing less than noble performances from Godin and Roux, as well as supporting actors Marianne Druto and Julie Vincent. She is acutely aware, no doubt, that the degree of success or failure of fiction film that examines previously unexplored terrain is determined by the actors' performances. The formidable talents of Godin and Roux, especially in scenes of interaction, and Poirier's insistence that each be photographed from the other's perspective throughout the film are Salut Victor's primary means of discourse and the most progressive of all the production's ways of voicing its concerns for social reform. When Victor is introduced for the first time as one of the male employees of the residence, Godin's delivery as Victor is coolly restrained. But it is also highly communicative, suggesting that his touching of the worker was instinctual and that he could not ever be made to feel ashamed of something that gave him "le sens de la réalité."

While it is true that the film does not question issues of race, class, etc., issues that are pertinent to any discussion of the gay aged, it is difficult to be critical of the film. Poirier and the excellent cast she has assembled have confronted without apology what it means to be gay and aged in a society that does not especially value either group. This counts for a great deal. Unlike many films of the "social realism" tradition that tend to be overly sentimental at moments where points are being made, Salut Victor transcends this tendency simply by playing the rules that govern this genre. That is, it remains faithful to its subject, and does not at any point trivialize or demean the lives of its characters.

Jonathan St. George

Salut Victor

Vincenzo Lemisco et al. sc; Anne-Claire Poirier dir et Martine Boucette mtdret from Matthew and Charlie for Edward O. Philip's "Michel et le Miroir." The NFB, directed by Anne-Claire Poirier and Jacques Godin, stars Marthe Blackburn as Michel and Louise Jobin as Victor. The film is an interesting one, but it is difficult to see its purpose. The story is about two men in a retirement home who become friends. The film is shot in a very realistic manner, but it does not really say anything new. The acting is good, but the plot is not very interesting.

Anne-Claire Poirier's Salut Victor

One of a series of 10 television films produced for Radio-Quebec, Salut Victor is an impressive work. Based on Montreal writer Edward O. Philip's 'Michel et le Miroir,' the film is an effective document attesting to the collective fears and individual concerns of many of our aged. But more than that, it is a surprisingly moving account of the friendship that two male residents form in a private retirement home. That both of these men are gay underlines the absence of screen representations of the aged, both gay and straight.

The film chronicles the friendship that evolves between two men living in a home for the aged, presumably in Montreal. Philip, recently arrived, and demonstrating in no uncertain terms that his nature is an inherently reserved one, is introduced to the friendly Victor, the residence's self-taught RAFT and film character of the film. Victor, played by popular Quebecois actor Jacques Godin, embodies all of those qualities which the repressed Philip (Jean-Louis Roux) outwardly appears to be opposed to—he's bash, candour about his sexuality, and more than just a little revealing in his discussions of other residents. In short, the men are classic examples of the personality contrast necessary to the unfolding of a narrative cinema which is concerned with the progressive moral enlightenment of its central character. Predictably, it is Victor who convinces Philip that life is too short to allow oneself to be dictated to by constricting, oppressive notions of pride and, following their initial strained introduction, the two men soon become dependent on each other's company.

Filmmaker Anne-Claire Poirier, the "genius" of Quebecois cinema, has solidified her position as one of the Quebec industry's chief talents in this film, her first, since the disappointing La quantitative six years ago.

With a mature, sensitive hand not afforded many directors, Poirier has created a significant work of popular Canadian cinema. Responsible for selecting the short story from which the film has been adapted, Poirier has been keenly involved with the production since its inception. This is clearly evident in her polished use of form. Several of the many outstanding formal elements to be found in this film include a stylized editing which serves the film's story well by allowing each to fade and "wash" into one another, and the consistently off-homage, toned-down shots that dominate the film's images further complementing its "temporal" meshing. But it is perhaps Poirier's direction of the actors, and the accommodating manner in which they are photographed, that remains the film's essential strength.

Realizing the importance to performance of a project such as Salut Victor, Poirier has encouraged nothing less than noble performances from Godin and Roux, as well as supporting actors Marianne Druto and Julie Vincent. She is acutely aware, no doubt, that the degree of success or failure of fiction film that examines previously unexplored terrain is determined by the actors' performances. The formidable talents of Godin and Roux, especially in scenes of interaction, and Poirier's insistence that each be photographed from the other's perspective throughout the film are Salut Victor's primary means of discourse and the most progressive of all the production's ways of voicing its concerns for social reform. When Victor is introduced for the first time as one of the male employees of the residence, Godin's delivery as Victor is coolly restrained. But it is also highly communicative, suggesting that his touching of the worker was instinctual and that he could not ever be made to feel ashamed of something that gave him "le sens de la réalité."

While it is true that the film does not question issues of race, class, etc., issues that are pertinent to any discussion of the gay aged, it is difficult to be critical of the film. Poirier and the excellent cast she has assembled have confronted without apology what it means to be gay and aged in a society that does not especially value either group. This counts for a great deal. Unlike many films of the "social realism" tradition that tend to be overly sentimental at moments where points are being made, Salut Victor transcends this tendency simply by playing the rules that govern this genre. That is, it remains faithful to its subject, and does not at any point trivialize or demean the lives of its characters.