

BOOKSHELF

by george l. george

Recent French Books

Film reviews and essays by the late Georges Saoul, preeminent historian of the movies, are assembled in an absorbing volume, **Chroniques du cinéma français**. Covering the 1939-1967 period, this collection of perceptive and often prophetic writings testifies to Saoul's critical insight and illuminates the uneven revolutionary progression that marked the French cinema (UGE FF20).

In **Le cinéma des Français**, Jean-Pierre Jeancolas considers the multifaceted aspects of film as entertainment, industry, mirror of our society, servant of the government. The impact of these various factors on the artistic and social development of cinema is probed in this descriptive critique of French film production which assesses movies in the light of their impact on audiences (Stock FF90).

Edgardo Cozarinski has collected in **Jorge Luis Borges: sur le cinéma** reviews by the well-known South American writer published in "Sur," the noted Argentine literary magazine. Borges' approach to cinema as an alternative reality caused him to regard favorably "Citizen Kane" as well as some now forgotten trashy films, finding in them poetic elements that bolstered his faith in the art (Albatros FF39).

In **Greta Garbo la somnambule**, Françoise Ducout offers an intriguing version of the star's personality and career based on her maladjustment to a life of exhibitionism that went against her deepest instincts as a woman. A selective consideration of Garbo's films supports her theory in numerous references to arcane subtleties of the scripts and judicious quotes from Garbo's familiars (Stock FF90).

To celebrate the 80th birthday of a pioneer of the documentary film, Claire Devarrioux, in **Entretiens avec Joris Ivens**, surveys the eminent Dutch filmmaker's contribution to a genre he so greatly enriched. Whether dealing with Spain, Vietnam, Cuba, Chile or China, his films always were on time to focus on events of world significance and to stress the continuing struggle for man's liberation (Albatros FF35).

A semanticist's dissection of the films of Alain Robbe-Grillet, **Nouveau cinéma**,

nouvelle sémiologie provides Dominique Chateau and François Jost with an opportunity to re-examine this advanced philosophical discipline in terms of specific structuralist story elements. As the authors so clearly and succinctly state, "rarely hypotaxic, more often parataxic, the intersequential relationship requires from the spectator a diegetic inference not generally dependent on syntagmatic treatment of segments but on their global signifieds" (UGE FF17).

In opposition to a semiological perspective on movies, Gérard Legrand's **Cinéma** advocates a sensorial and impressionistic approach, whose philosophical implications are left to each individual's sensitivity. Repeated viewing of films generates a closeness not to the filmmaker's intentions but to the product itself, whose meaning is transmitted by the *mise-en-scène* — "that translucent shaping of space, lights, bodies, gestures and voices" (Stock FF90).

A book by a young politicized Italian poet, Franco Fortini, is the basis for a film by Jean-Marie Staub and Danièle Huillet. **Fortini/Cani** contains the film's shooting script, as well as the original Fortini text, "Les chiens du Sinaï." Dealing with the Judeo-Arab conflict, the film transcends its subject by doctrinal considerations of literature and cinema (Albatros FF39).

In **La révolution figurée**, Eisenstein's classical film "October" is the starting point for a discussion of a political event — the Russian Revolution of 1917 — as the causative motivation for cinematic imagery. A detailed analysis of Eisenstein's film brings out its temporal structure within its historic context, as defined by authors Michèle Lagny, Marie-Claire Ropars and Pierre Sorlin (Albatros FF44).

Aspects of Cinema

While making a clear distinction between ideologies and aspirations of Soviet Communism and German Nazism, Richard Taylor, in **Film Propaganda**, compares these regimes in their use of the cinema medium. Beyond the basic concept of public opinion manipulation, he finds that it is the audience itself that finally determines the effectiveness of the propaganda effort (Barnes & Noble \$25).

Dealing with a film industry little known outside Europe and largely identified with Joris Ivens, John Ferno and Bert Haanstra, **Dutch Cinema** by Peter Cowie presents a number of gifted directors

from the Netherlands. Their background and goals are perceptively described, and their films knowledgeably analyzed in this informative, illustrated survey (Barnes \$12).

Sex objects, contrary to widely held views, are also male actors who have topped movie popularity polls throughout Hollywood history, asserts Michael Malone in **Heroes of Eros**. This earnest study of male sexuality from Rudolph Valentino to Robert Redford makes its point in a persuasive text supported by numerous illustrations (Dutton \$9.95).

An erudite approach to X-rated movies as part of a general study of eroticism, **The Sadeian Woman** by Angela Carter clarifies the Marquis de Sade's theory of the relationship of sexuality to power, and relates them to the sexual fantasies of pornographic films (Pantheon \$7.95).

Italian cinema during most of the Fascist period is analyzed in **The Fabulous Thirties**, an attractive and fully illustrated volume edited by Adriana Apra and Patrizia Pistagnesi. Covering 1929 through 1944, it views with benevolence the precursors of the neo-realist school and more specifically the practitioners of the light approach known as "commedia all'italiana" (Rizzoli \$12.95).

In **Future Tense**, John Brosnan surveys some 400 sci-fi movies in an authoritative historic appraisal of the genre's technique and content. He discusses the trends and influences that shaped its evolution and offers lengthy quotes by filmmakers and sci-fi writers about their experiences in working on these films (St. Martin's \$15). □

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