

BOOK REVIEWS

The John Ford Movie Mystery by Andrew Sarris

Cinema One series. Secker and Warburg.
Hard cover or stiff paperback. 192 pages.

Considering his undoubted stature, there have been surprisingly few books on the work of director John Ford. All the more welcome, then, is Andrew Sarris's perceptive, witty, graceful study of the old movie magician. It marvellously adds to an uncrowded shelf in the film book basic library.

Sarris has been a Ford devotee for many years, unswayed by shifting critical fashion and undaunted by the paradox at the root of Ford's long and classic career. This paradox is the "mystery" of Sarris's title, which may at first glance be itself puzzling, since Ford was never known as a director of thrillers. Rather he himself once announced, in a delightfully inadequate but partially accurate self-appraisal: "My name's John Ford; I make westerns." The mysterious artistic complexity that Sarris rightly divines and deftly details is of a creative sensibility far more complex and truly humane than the once-prevalent image of Ford as all bluff and banter, Irish whimsey and Yankee gung-ho. I have always felt myself that *Rio Grande* is one of the films that most clearly shows (to those with eyes to see) Ford in his full mature wisdom, combining masculine and feminine elements, loud alarms and soft caresses. It ranges from the sweep of a cavalry charge to the delicate melody of a music box, redolent of family loyalty and marital affection under stress. Andrew Sarris keeps this Fordian balance, more duality than dichotomy, in view throughout his writing. It sometimes gets lost from view (for the book goes from film to film through Ford's career, which involves enough fascinating points and side issues to divert anyone momentarily from a theorist path) but always reappears with relevance, like a river beneath overhanging boughs.

Clive Denton writes and broadcasts for the CBC doing film reviews for Off Stage Voices and the Sunday Supplement. He is teaching film at McMaster and Toronto Universities, and writes and researches for the TVOntario program Saturday Night at the Movies.

A critic loves to nitpick but here I found only two real nits to pick. First, *The Rising of the Moon* is not in "tilted Cinemascope". Parts are memorably tilted, agreed, but 'scopic, no. Second, and more in a spirit of little-known facts about Hollywood, Henry Fonda was *not* under contract to Twentieth Century-Fox until he had to sign one in order to play the coveted role of Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. He was initially the property of independent producer Walther Wanger and then briefly a freelance and so not really the "third-ranking Fox leading man behind Tyrone Power and Don Ameche". Had Fonda not eventually signed with Zanuck, though, it is highly likely Tom Joad would have been played by either Power (a plausible conjecture) or Ameche (the mind not only boggles, it freaks out).

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The House of Horror

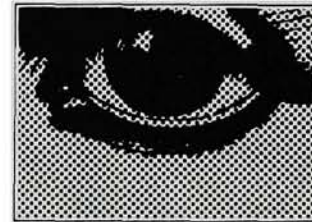
Edited by Allen Eyles, Robert Adkinson and Nicholas Fry. Lorrimer Publishing.
128 pages. Stiff paperback. \$2.25.

Lorrimer, sometimes through their Bounty Books associate, have put out several picture books with texts on general subjects of popular cinema such as *Speed*, *Cinema of Motion* and *Cinema of Mystery*. These are agreeable enough and make likely presents for youngsters, especially movie-minded youngsters who boast their own miniature coffee tables.

The present book is more valuable, however, in being specific. While it is replete with big, clear illustrations of monsters both prehistoric and futuristic, mad scientists, vampires, shapely slave girls and one half-naked Viking Queen, its theme is lightly scholarly. Here we find discussed and detailed the productions of Britain's Hammer Films company from pre-war beginnings (Paul Robeson, no less, and Lugosi in *The Mystery of the Marie Celeste*), through low-budget crime thrillers and domestic comedies to the era of horror and science fiction which has made Hammer a household word in the past twenty years. The information is full and seems reliable, including filmographies and interviews with Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, director Terence Fisher and executive Michael Carreras. Critically, the book is a shade too close to adulation for comfort but it's obviously written by enthusiasts, and they also serve.

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