THE NEW SCHOOL FILM SERIES 33: Program #4 March 2 1979

BOUDE DE SUIF (France, 1945) Produced and directed by Christian Jacque; Screenplay by Henri Jeanson, Louis D'Hees and Christian Jacque from the stories "Boule de Suif" and "Mademoiselle Fifi" by Guy de Maupassant; Camera, Christian Matras; Art Direction, Leon Barbacq; released in the U.S. in 1947 under the title "The Angel and the Sinner"; 90 mins. English titles.

With Micheline Presle, Louis Salou, Palau, Roger Karli, Marcel Simon, Alfred Adam, Jean Brochard, Michel Saline, Dennis D'Innis.

(The following notes are abridged from a much longer coverage of the film in the February 1977 issue of "Films in Review").

While certainly good enough to deserve revival on its own merits, "Boule de Suif" is a fascinating example of how a film can acquire added levels of interest over the years. After the war, it served the dual purpose of taking a kick at the departing Germans and justifying France's enforced collaboration during the occupation. France as yet was displaying no guilt feelings concerning the latter, and it would take nearly 30 years for such soul-searching to surface in films like "Lacombe, Lucien". Since "Boule de Suif" is a period story, its comments on the collaboration are largely allegorical, and as with Carne's "Les Visiteurs du Soir", produced during the occupation, it is a film of triumph rather than apology. Apart from this historical-social more than apology, ten other aspects of the film are more pertinent today. Art director Barbaq's superb sets, costumes and design; "Caligari's Cabinet and Other Grand Illusions", has now been published (and brilliantly added to by Elliot Stein, a highly recommended book) - and the film is a fine illustration of both the work and the theories that he outlines in that book.

Secondly, and most interesting of all, the film is a flawless text-book illustration of the influence of John Ford on a European film-maker. Made before the over-analysis of Ford's style would have made much influence open to the suspicion of being merely fashionable, it is a genuine homage from one director to another, and doubtless done with the conviction that audiences would not be aware of the "ghost" style. Contemporary reviews certainly made no allusion at all to the film's astonishing relationship to "Stagecoach".

When Ford and Dudley Nichols made "Stagecoach" in 1939 they openly admitted their allegiance to the de Maupassant story; in fact they really owed more to it than to Ernest Haycox's "Stage to Lordsburg", which, although the story that "Stagecoach" is officially based on, is little more than an atmospheric sketch, devoid of individual characters. "Stagecoach" was one of the last Hollywood films to reach France before the war, and it was exhibited there throughout the occupation. If Ford had flattered the French by acknowledging that he had borrowed from one of their literary masters, then Jacque returns the compliment by giving de Maupassant a posthumous debt to Ford! "Boule De Suif" and "Mademoiselle Fifi" have each been filmed more than once, and undoubtedly the obviously parallel World War 2 story is one of the reasons why audiences remake anyway, but it is quite safe to say that if "Stagecoach" had not existed, this "Boule De Suif" would be vastly different. Its whole structure is so shaped as to give the stagecoach journey far more prominence than in the original story (where it is merely a linking device) and to allow for the development of deliberate parallels with the Ford film. Many of the characters are turned into counterparts of Ford's, and while it lacks a dominant hero, a role that John Wayne manages anyway, and is frequently shot in a John Wayne stance. Visually, all of the stagecoach scenes recall specific Ford images. There are frequent long shots of the coach disappearing down a long trail at twilight, as though seeking a Gallic Monument Valley, silhouettes against a low-frame skyline, subjective shots from the driver's point of view - and even a direct (if reversed) copy of one of "Stagecoach"s most memorable images - the panning to the Indians preparing for their attack. (Here Jacque starts with a group of partisans, and pans back to the coach!)

Ten Minute Intermission

HOLIDAY FOR HENRIETTA (France, 1954) Directed by Julien Duvisier; original screenplay by Henri Jeanson and Duvisier; Camera, Roger Hubert, Rene Guissart; Music: Georges Auric; a Regence Film Production; English titles; 100 minutes.


Movies have been kidding themselves ever since they began, satirising their successes and their cliches — but usually in a broad way that the public could understand, and not in such a way as to destroy their own mystique. Preston Sturges' early 40's "Sullivan's Travels" was one of the first films (25 years before Fellini's 8½) to reflect about the director's role in making a film, and to be witty and honest at the same time, not playing down to the audience. In its wake, after...
the war, a number of films - American as well as European - deflated, in an amusing way, the art, the artifice - and the pomposity - of movie-making. The German "Film Without a Title" was a particularly apt self-satire, though it was so tied in to the moods and styles of then-current film-making, that much of its pungency has evaporated today.

Not so "Holiday for Henrietta", which is a charming romantic frolic on its own, as well as an extremely funny put-down of the arty European. While many of its gags are the funnier if one remembers the films and directors of that period, it isn't necessary to be a film student to enjoy the film, and if the occasional reference to a "Don Camillo" or a "Bicycle Thieves" slips by, the film has much more to offer. It's the kind of film just made for film lovers, and is done with an extraordinarily zestful good humor. Julien Duvivier's heavier films of the 30's tend to hold up extremely well today, while his lighter or at least more romantic films (such as "Un Carnet du Bal") have dated rather badly. In that sense, he resembles Hollywood's Lewis Milestone. But "Holiday for Henrietta", never considered one of his major films, is perhaps fresher today than when it was made and its appeal should be wider, since film study has been extended so much in the past 25 years. The cast is pleasantly light-weight, no one star dominating, though Hildegarde Kneff is particularly effective (coincidentally, she starred in the earlier but parallel German film, "Film Without a Title" too). Michel Auclair amiably spoofs the kind of role he played straight in Clouzot's "Manon", and in a small character role one finds Paulette Dubost - Keaton's charming leady lady in last season's "King of the Champs Elysees''.

"Holiday for Henrietta" was remade by Paramount as "Paris When It Sizzles", starring Audrey Hepburn and William Holden. It wasn't an un-enteraining film, but it was heavy-handed and almost desperate in its determination to be a wacky comedy, thus getting far too close to "Hellzapoppin" territory at times.

William K. Everson

We must apologise for the rather sub-standard condition of both of tonight's prints. They are fully complete, and original prints, but they have been through the mill a little, and have rather more scratches and splices than we would like, though not to an irritating degree. One of the problems with the majority of French films is that after they have run the allotted span of their initial rights period, those rights are usually not renewed, and materials are returned to France. The perennially, like the Cocteau films, escape this fate of course, but the majority don't. When they are no longer in official distribution, it becomes extremely difficult to find them at all, and when one does track them down, one doesn't have too much choice in available prints. Although we have an expert projectionist and good equipment, and don't anticipate problems, we ask you to bear with us should there be the occasional projection problem this evening due to heavy splices or possibly slightly shrunken areas.

Program ends approx. 11.00 p.m. (No discussion session this evening).