

would be interested in a series about strange fantasy stories. On the basis of its good public response, the writer, Rod Serling, was given the go-ahead to produce more stories in a similar vein. "The Time Element" is an hour-long story that is a "Twilight Zone" episode in all but name. Martin Balsam and William Bendix play a

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psychiatrist and a patient who is having puzzling dreams.

Elsewhere this issue is a review of the 22nd Tournee of Animation.

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The problem with people who have no vices is that generally you can be pretty sure they're going to have some pretty annoying virtues.

-- Elizabeth Taylor

PUTTING ON THE RITZ by Joe Keenan
Penguin, 1992 (1991c), ISBN 0-14-014989-9, \$10.
A book review by Evelyn C. Leeper
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Life in New York will never be the same. First there was Gilbert and Moira's wedding. Not that they actually loved each other, or could even stand the sight of each other, but they did have a lot of rich step-relatives who could be counted on to be generous with the presents and they had one trait in common--greed. But that story was all told in B_l_u_e_H_e_a_v_e_n (which you should run out immediately and read), so I'll stick to P_u_t_t_i_n_g_o_n_t_h_e_R_i_t_z here.

Philip Cavanaugh (Gilbert's best man) and Claire Simmons have just had a Broadway flop--through no fault of their own, I should add, though since Philip is the narrator his opinions should perhaps be viewed with some suspicion. But Gilbert, ever helpful, has found them a new job--writing and arranging the music for a rich social matron's singing debut. That it is all a cover for having Philip try to dig up some dirt on the matron's husband for the editor of a

rival culture magazine to use in their feud is a minor detail, as is the fact that what the matron makes up in money she lacks in talent. Philip knows he shouldn't get involved--as he says, "I ... said [to Gilbert] that, while I had no desire to hurt his feelings or mar his delight over his new project, I felt nonetheless compelled to remind him that he was born under a malignant star, that everything he touched ended in sorrow and weeping, and that any person so bereft of reason to assist him in one of his ventures should first consult a good dentist, as prolonged and intense gnashing of teeth might be confidently expected." Then Philip meets Gilbert's sponsor for all this, and sanity flies out the window as love (or at least lust) comes through the door. Of course, this makes him Gilbert's rival for this man, so their teamwork in this somewhat dubious plot is made even shakier by each of them attempting to outdo the other and so gain the prize.

I had claimed that B_l_u_e_H_e_a_v_e_n was the funniest book I had read in years, and P_u_t_t_i_n_g_o_n_t_h_e_R_i_t_z is every bit as funny as its predecessor. I wholeheartedly recommend both of them.

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22ND INTERNATIONAL TOURNEE OF ANIMATION

A film review by Mark R. Leeper

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Once again it's time for a release of an I_n_t_e_r_n_a_t_i_o_n_a_l_T_o_u_r_n_e'_e_o_f_A_n_i_m_a_t_i_o_n. Each year a feature film is edited together from award-winning short animated films and from other films judged to be deserving by the producers. The resulting film then tours the country where typically it will show only in major cities and play in one theater at a time. For all I know there may be only one print that tours the country. Generally once I publish a review of a T_o_u_r_n_e'_e I get asked by people if it will be coming to their city or if the films are available on cassette. I am sorry, but I cannot be very helpful with the first question. Sometimes before or after I see the T_o_u_r_n_e'_e I hear that it has played in another city, but I have no advance information. You can, however, get the best of the last two T_o_u_r_n_e'_es on video. An ad given out at the T_o_u_r_n_e'_e offers cassettes of "the best" of the 1_9_t_h and 2_0_t_h_T_o_u_r_n_e'_e (no telling how long the selections are). Each is available for \$44 (including shipping and handling) from Animation, P.O. Box 25547, Los Angeles CA 90025.

The quality of the films chosen is spotty with the worst selections being "just okay." The best are often very impressive. I am, for example, a great admirer of a short made for the BBC called "Skywhales" and I saw it for the first time at the 1_9_t_h_T_o_u_r_n_e'_e_o_f_A_n_i_m_a_t_i_o_n.

Surprisingly absent from the T_o_u_r_n_e'_e was Pixar, Inc., who do nice work with computer animation. In general I find that the films that have been nominated for Academy Awards are not the best films and the Academy Award winner is the weakest of the nominees. This year the two best films were the Academy Award nominees. They were "The Cow" and "Balance." I have a minor preference for "The Cow," but "Balance" was the Academy's choice. It is a much more intelligent film than they have chosen in the past, and I do not fault them for the choice.

That is probably sufficient for general comments; let me get to discussion of the films themselves. I will rate them on a scale of -4 to +4, though my lowest rating here is -1 and the highest is +3.

Unadvertised, and punctuating the T_o_u_r_n_e'_e at various points, are a set of enjoyable little sketches from MTV called "Plymptoons." These are little animated films about twenty seconds in length that start with a caption and then show about fifteen seconds of scene. The humor is much like that of Gary Larson's "Far Side" cartoons and are often just as funny. We saw three groups shown at different times with about four in each group. These have no great animation

techniques, but they certainly are enjoyable. Rating: +2.

- "Kakania" (Karen Aqua; First Place--New York Film & Video Expo; USA; 3:53): The title apparently refers to a dance and that is all there is to this film: figures dancing. Mixed in are Amerind images but that purpose is obscure. Rating: 0.
- "A Touch of Deceit" (Michael Gagne; Canada; 2:04): This is sort of a gag on film, but much longer than a Plymtoon and not as funny. It is just not substantial enough to rate very high, though there is some feel of a send-up of Disney traditions. Rating: +1.
- "The Cow" (Alexander Petrov; Academy Award nominee 1989; USSR; 10:00): I found this a very moving film. It is apparently the narrator's memories of a cow on his farm when he was a boy. Life was hard for him but, as he thinks back with some guilt, much harder for the cow who was treated as if she were a piece of machinery. Her calf was taken away and sold as meat. She was forced to give her milk to people. She was harnessed to a plow. In the end she is killed in a vain attempt to find her calf and she is eaten by the family that owned her. The film could have become maudlin or ridiculous, but doesn't. The animation technique is very unusual, but well-suited to illustrating memories. It starts with a painting, then the artists paint over those parts that have moved and they fade from one picture to the next. I consider it to be the best piece in the entire T_o_u_r_n_e' and rate it a +3.
- "Cat & Rat" (Jim Richardson; Student Academy Award Winner; USA; 3:46): This film uses several kinds of animation, from line drawings to three-dimensional models, but the ideas can all be found in old Warner Brothers cartoons and if you have seen those you don't really need to see this. Rating: +1.
- "A Very, Very Long Time Ago" (Olive Jar Animation Studios; USA; 2:38): This is a very short film that seems as if it is going one way and then takes a sharp right turn right out of Monty Python. What the film is about is the first attempt of a sea animal to crawl onto the land. Amusing. Rating: +1.

- "Sand Dance" (Richard Quade; Student Academy Award Winner; USA; 3:53): Like "Kakania," this is just figures dancing to music, but what sets this film apart is that the individual frames are sand paintings. And surprise! sand paintings turn out to be a very inappropriate medium for animation. The figures are hazy and without the needed definition. Nice try, but somebody should have realized early on that this was not working.
Rating: -1.

- "Pictures from Memory" (Nedjelko Dragic; Best Animation--Golden Gate Awards Competition; Yugoslavia; 11:58): Supposedly animated photographs from the life of the artist's father. They, in fact, piece together to show the viewer a quick thumbnail picture of the history of Yugoslavia in the 20th Century. There is surprising historic scope in this one short film. The animation is not greatly original, but I would rate the film a +2.

- "Shadrach" (Nathaniel Hornblower, Chris Casady; USA; 4:05): This is a rap song by the Beastie Boys with paintings on the screen that are impressions of a rap concert. The paintings are sequential but this is not really animation to any great extent. It is just illustrated music with a lot of corners cut. Rating: -1.

- "Vykrutasy" (Garri Bardin; First Prize--Los Angeles International Animation Celebration; USSR; 10:15): This is a parable illustrated in figures made from shaping wire from a coil. The story deals with a man who builds a farm and then must protect it from trespassers who would inadvertently and carelessly destroy his crops. The man has to decide how far to go to protect his farm. Not great but generally pretty good.
Rating: +2.

- "Gise`le Ke'roze`ne" (Jan Kounen; First Prize--Avioraz Film Festival; France; 4:40): This is a fun piece of slapstick about modern witches with mechanical flying brooms fighting it out

against the backdrop of a modern building complex. No profundity, a little blood and a little bad taste. Still, it is good-natured and fun. Rating: +1.

- "The Bedroom" (Maarten Koopman; Netherlands; 1:08): This is a very short piece of animation with a non-humorous surprise ending. Apparently in a small bedroom furniture is coming out of the walls and moving itself into place. To guess the surprise--and there really is no reason you should--you have to look at what pieces of furniture are going where. An okay little gimmick film. Rating: +1.
- "Balance" (Christoph and Wolfgang Lauenstein; Academy Award Winner 1989; West Germany; 7:38): This is another parable but a more intelligent one and also one with a good deal of suspense. Imagine a platform floating in space (or on water?) with five sepulchral men in grey coats standing on it. They stand in a circle to balance their weight so that the platform does not tip and drop them off. If one steps away from the center, they all must in order to maintain the balance. Then one finds a valuable box and they all want it. But how to get it without tipping the platform? This is an Oscar winner and deservedly so. Rating: +2.

- "Train Gang" (Paul Driessen; Canada, Netherlands; 2:01): Very unoriginal animation techniques tell a story whose point I must have missed. Rating : low 0.
- "Juke-Bar" (Martin Barry/National Film Board; Grand Prix--World Film festival, Montreal; Canada; 10:15): A diner, infested with cockroaches, gets a new juke-box. The cockroaches, have humorous faces, see the juke-box as a great addition. They play the juke-box and start really partying, led by one wild and crazy cockroach, Three-dimensional animation is used to tell a fun story. This is not profound or creative, but is a lot of fun with partying cockroaches reminiscent of partying little monsters in _ G _ r _ e _ m _ l _ i _ n _ s. Rating: +1.
- "Animated Self-Portraits" (David Ehrlich; Silver Plaque--Chicago Film Festival; USA, Yugoslavia, Estonia USSR,

Czechoslovakia, Japan; 7:56): This piece is itself an anthology. An international cast of animators--at least ten--each does a very short animated film including a picture of him or herself. Almost as funny as the Plymptoons, this has not much depth but a lot of off-the-wall ideas. Rating: +2.

- "A Warm Reception in L.A." (Vincent Cafarelli and Candy Kugel; Golden Plaque--Chicago Film Festival; USA; 5:04): This was the only piece I had seen before. It is a music video for the ballad of the main character's attempts to sell some of his writing to a film studio. The animation is in day-glow on a black background. Just okay. Rating: +1.

- "The Arnold Waltz" (Craig Bartlett; USA; 2:51): Having amusing animation in three dimensions, this story nonetheless goes no place. The unoriginal story shows a misfit schoolboy with fantasies of a more exciting life. Not really very funny or very interesting. Rating: +1.

- "All My Relations" (Joanna Priestly; USA; 4:53): This is a cartoon with a few amusing scenes but overall it is a pretty lackluster piece to end the T_o_u_r_n_e'_e with. It is really just the story of a number of people going through the crises of life. It has no real conclusion, and not much punch. Rating: +1.

This was a very nicely rounded edition of the I_n_t_e_r_n_a_t_i_o_n_a_l
T_o_u_r_n_e'_e o_f A_n_i_m_a_t_i_o_n with some more substantial and serious pieces than in previous years. Now I want to get "The Cow" on video.