

Document Citation

Title	'Light years away' at MFA
Author(s)	Joe Leydon
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Light years away, Tanner, Alain, 1981



Mick Ford and Trevor Howard in fable by Alain Tanner



'Light Years Away' at MFA

LIGHT YEARS AWAY — Gaumont release of P.A. Phenix-Statint-S.S.R. production. Written and directed by Alain Tanner, based on a novel by Daniel Odier. Cast features Trevor Howard, Mick Ford, Odile Schmitt, Bernice Stegers and Henri Cortogoux. 8 p.m. Friday at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Running time: 105 minutes. No singing.

by JOE LEYDON

Sometimes a film can coast on sustained atmosphere, finely detailed performances and exquisite cinematography. That parts of it are dull, other parts are silly, and much of it makes no sense if all doesn't really matter.

CONSIDER, IF YOU will, *Light Years Away*, a bizarre little fable about discipline and transcendence, directed by — of all people — Alain Tanner.

If you're at all familiar with this Swiss-born filmmaker, you're aware of his best-known for such naturalistic dramas as *La Salamandre*, *The Middle of the World*, and *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*. But here, for some strange reason, he's abandoned his normal sociopolitical concerns to wander off on a magical mystical tour.

Elliptical and often cryptic, *Light Years Away* — based on a novel by Daniel Odier, who wrote the novel on which the film *Divas* is based — concerns a sort of Zen apprenticeship on the misty moors of Ireland.

JONAS (MICK FORD), a scruffy young layabout, accepts an oblique invitation to visit the secluded auto junkyard of Yoshka (Trevor Howard), a cranky 65-year-old eccentric.

Aimless and vaguely discontent, Jonas drifts into servitude without realizing how or why. Under Yoshka's command, he performs a variety of seemingly pointless tasks — manning an empty gas pump, rearranging the debris of the junkyard, burying Yoshka up to his neck in mud.

While doing all this, Jonas somehow

gains enlightenment. Then Yoshka shares his most treasured secret with the young man: Yoshka can fly. And he's about to take it on the wing, to zip away from earthly cares and entanglements. But to safely complete the journey, he needs to closely observe an eagle. So would Jonas be so kind as to fetch him an eagle, quickly?

That Jonas actually does so, and Yoshka actually flies, seem perfectly logical in the slightly off-centered universe Tanner creates.

Thanks to Ford's open-faced enthusiasm as Jonas, and Howard's ruddy-faced cantankerousness as Yoshka, the characters appear firmly rooted in reality, so that their flights (literal and otherwise) into fantasy have a ring of conviction.

MORE IMPORTANT, Tanner is too practical-minded a storyteller to let *Light Years Away* come across as the usual otherworldly nature-vs.-civilization conflict.

Yoshka learns the hard way that boundless freedom is risky business and that nature can be just as cruel as man-made restraints. And Jonas discovers, much to his great pleasure, that being celibate is not a prerequisite for learning the secrets of the universe. Indeed, after meeting and bedding down a topless dancer, he finds even the most carnal of creatures can appreciate what mysteries the spirit can contain.

THERE'S PROBABLY a moral in the middle of all this. But for the life of me I can't figure out what it might be. Still, I must admit that, except for some slow stretches during the first third, I was never bored with *Light Years Away*, and always curious to find out what might happen next.

The leads are charismatic, Arie Dzierlatka's musical score is seductively soothing, and the Irish countryside is breathtakingly beautiful.

Jean-Francois Robin's cinematography is marvelously lyrical, bathing even the scrap heaps in Yoshka's junkyard with a golden, life-affirming glow.

So go see it, and figure it all out for yourself.

Review