

# Who is Martin Guerre? Why has he come back?

*The Return of Martin Guerre*  
by Daniel Vigne

**Review by R.F. Macdonald**

This film has received some rather undue criticism since its release last summer. It seems that many critics find it overly glossy, chillingly empty or ultimately pointless.

Well, they're wrong. Not that *The Return of Martin Guerre* is any landmark in the history of cinema. It is, rather, a solidly entertaining film that marks the further consolidation of French film-making.

Let's face it, they did explore some interesting extremes in the

60's and 70's, but how many Godard films have you seen?

Anyway, *The Return of Martin Guerre* concerns a bizarre incident in French history. Martin Guerre (played by the ubiquitous Gérard Depardier), soon after marrying and fathering a son, disappears. He returns, and is forgiven and accepted back into his village and his family. Questions soon develop over his identity. I won't give away the outcome, but there is a surprise ending and lots of ambiguities that are left open to interpretation.

To say the least this is a sumptuous historical re-creation, albeit

on a moderate scale.

The Director, Daniel Vigne, in his first feature, manages to sustain an energetic tone while presenting a reasonably scholarly period piece. You will not be forced to suffer through a sociology or anthropology lesson.

The narrative, which was once a very dirty word in the French cinema, focuses your interest right up to the last frame.

Depardiere is in his usual fine form (later on this spring at Wormwoods we'll see him as Wadja's *Danton*), carrying most of the film on his shoulders.

His leading lady is Nathalie Baye, who manages, with very few lines, to express much mystery and compassion. It is her situation that raises the most ambiguity, therefore her stoic resolve is the key to any moral conclusions.

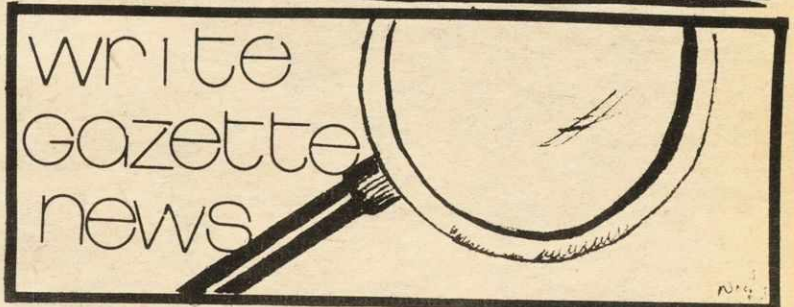
Director Vigne is content to construct Brug Lel-like images, and then dwell on them. The film technique is very conventional, which suits the subject matter well. Frenetic camerawork just didn't exist in 1550.

On the whole, then, an enjoyable flick that approaches history (always a study of grotesque generalities) in a manner reflective of these constrained times. Certainly *The Return of Martin Guerre* is a film that will do you no harm to see. By the way, notice how many patrons limped out of Yentl lately?

(Playing at Wormwood Jan. 27 to Feb. 2.)



Catherine Ricketts  
Gazette Editor  
1983-Jan. 84



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