

## Grosse Fatigue

A new French film called *Grosse Fatigue* has its protagonist—actor Michel Blanc playing a character named “Michel Blanc”—living a nightmare. Messr. Blanc, playing more or less the writer/director/comic he is in real life, suffers inexplicable harassment from the police for acts he knows he did not commit. After a whole series of frustrations, Michel comes to realize gradually, along with the audience, the central conceit of the film: there is an exact Michel Blanc look-alike who is doing all sorts of nasty things in his name!

Blanc eventually confronts the impostor, a provincial hustler named Patrick Olivier (played, of course, by Blanc), and they form a pact to share the persona of the public Michel Blanc, the “real” Blanc taking the high road of high-toned writing and serious film, while the charlatan Patrick gets the vulgar stuff (vapid TV appearances, facile “commercial” flicks, etc.).

The final irony is that, once Patrick is loose in Paris again, he so convincingly impersonates Michel that the real Blanc is supplanted by the *faux* one, causing the real actor to go completely round the bend and land in real trouble with the law. The last of all the twists and switches comes when the real Michel tries to get bit parts in movies as a stand-in for...Michel Blanc. All of this is extremely clever, perhaps even witty, as the film tries to raise provocative questions about the nature and price of celebrity through a meditation on identity that aims for the Pirandellesque. The trouble is...*Grosse Fatigue* is a farce that just isn't very *funny*.

Michel Blanc is definitely the *auteur* of *Grosse Fatigue*: he wrote and directed it, hired the cast (of mainly movie-making friends), and starred--twice--in it. Blanc, who has the face of a pie pan with features, has been in films for two decades, including the occasional English-language film such as *The Tenant* and *Prospero's Books*. Fans of French cinema may remember him best as the dour voyeur in Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire* (1989). He has been called a Gallic Woody Allen, both for his multiple talents and for his nebbish nature, and he even evokes Allen in this film, both by name and in scenes that recall one of Woody's more self-referential films, *Stardust Memories*. His woebegone look, punctuated by sad eyes and drooping eye brows, is certainly right for this film, but he can't get past the sorrowful to the comic for this reviewer.

This may be another case of humor not traveling. Not having competent French, I certainly missed some jokes, but many that I did understand were either too wrapped up in internecine French film references or too obviously crass--sadly trying, I thought, to be imitative of rawer American humor. For too many viewers, I fear, this film that aims at droll will just end up dull.

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