



CRIN BLANC (WHITE MANE) is a future LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Criterion dvd release.

17 of a possible 20 points

******1/2 of a possible *******

France 1953 black-and-white 38 minutes subtitled / dubbed in English live action short adventure drama Films Montsouris Producer: Albert Lamorisse

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 2 Direction: Albert Lamorisse**
- 2 Editing: Georges Alépée**
- 2 Cinematography: Edmond Séchan***
- 2 Lighting**
- 1 Scenario: Albert Lamorisse, adapted by Denys Colomb de Daunant**
English commentary written by James Agee
- 1 Music: Maurice LeRoux**
- 2 Locations**
- 2 Sound: Regine Artarit***
French Narrator: Jean-Pierre Grenier English Narrator: Peter Strauss
- 1 Acting**

2 Creativity

17 total points

Cast: Alain Emery (j) (Folco, a fisher-boy), Denys Colomb de Daunant (horse breeder), Laurent Roche (Folco's grandfather), Pascal Lamorisse (j) (Folco's younger brother), others

Prior to filming *Le Ballon Rouge* (The Red Balloon), director Albert Lamorisse created two short films centered on animal leads. The first of these, *Bim*, featured a donkey. It was shot in Tunisia over the course of some four months, according to the obituary for director Albert Lamorisse appearing in the *New York Times* on June 4, 1970. See [nytimes.com/1970/06/04/archives/albert-lamorisse-dies-in-air-crash-produced-and-wrote-red-balloon.html](https://www.nytimes.com/1970/06/04/archives/albert-lamorisse-dies-in-air-crash-produced-and-wrote-red-balloon.html) for more details. Perhaps not coincidentally, the director's only son and favorite human actor, Pascal, was born the year of its production in 1950. Too young to play a role in *Bim*, Pascal managed to get a prominent supporting role in Papa's next film, *Crin Blanc*. *White Mane*, shot in the Camargue region of south central France along the Mediterranean coastline, had a horse protagonist. Its main human actor was talented Alain Emery, who played a boy fisher named Folco. Folco's younger brother and game assistant was portrayed by Pascal Lamorisse, whose toddler antics with a turtle provide welcome comic relief in a film wending its poetic way to a very bleak conclusion.

In the second Lamorisse film, *Bim's* screenwriter, the esteemed Jacques Prevert, had been replaced by the director himself. An English version of the narration came from collaboration between Denys Colomb de Daunant, owner of the estate where *Crin Blanc* was shot, and American poet James Agee. Agee had previously penned the commentary for Sidney Meyers' documentary *The Quiet One*, which profiled a ten-year-old downtrodden Harlem boy from a poor family. *Crin Blanc's* young hero was roughly the same age and equally at odds with an uncaring environment. Or so Agee seemed to believe.

For Folco identified himself far more readily with an untamed, utterly independent horse than with any adults in his surroundings. He regarded

wranglers determined to domesticate the beast as jailers, trying insofar as possible to stymie their roundup and penning efforts.

Not that his own succeeded any better. Indeed, Falco's persistence in leading a white-maned nuisance home endangered himself and his smaller brother. Yet the two of them, boy tracker and pursued stallion, shared a love of unfettered freedom. Which didn't, however, stop the youngster from trying to net the animal. Nor from riding it at full gallop across coastal marshlands and into a river.

Lamorisse's fantasies always made villains of anyone and anything that obstructed nature. That recurring theme would be spotlighted in his next film, *Le Ballon Rouge* (The Red Balloon). Relocated to Paris and about four years older, Pascal advanced to a starring role. One in which he, much like Falco, left restrictive civilization for unexplored regions, areas still untainted by human possessiveness.

Falco resembled both *The Quiet One's* damaged protagonist and Pascal. Like them, he was suspicious of interfering, regulatory humans. Particularly adult and child bullies. His escape was initially in dreams, imaginary scenarios where he and White Mane traveled alone in a world completely devoid of others. Neither anonymous herd horses nor people were part of that fancied utopia. No other animal came into view, suggesting more than a tinge of selfish pleasure motivated the dreamer. He was not permitted by the plot to develop into an adult conservationist. Possibly Lamorisse viewed Falco as the child he wished to remain rather than the adult he himself had become.

Yet viewers needed not share such a grim outlook on adult conduct to relish *Crin Blanc's* magnificent cinematography and perfect blending of sounds and voices. A further treasure was the keenly focused acting of Alain Emory, whose unsnuffable optimism about turning desire into fulfillment kept him eminently watchable, whether being dragged through sandy grasslands by a galloping, desperate animal or clinched in inseparable comradeship with his equally determined equine partner.

Seldom did anyone penetrate veils of dust so lucidly as Edmond Sechan with his camera in *Crin Blanc*. Even seen today, the film continues to merit its reputation as one of the crown jewels of black-and-white cinematography,

preserving a myriad of details despite frequently furious bursts of potentially obscuring action.

Maurice Le Roux's wistful score added delightful topping to the film's atmosphere of innocence and openness to nature. Not as memorable as his melody for *The Red Balloon*, it nonetheless fit smoothly with the more rustic idyll Falco conjured from Camargue wasteland.

For its Criterion release on dvd, packagers included a brief trailer, the option to listen to English commentary or read subtitles, a restored print, and a three-page background essay by Michael Koresky. Because of its ambiguous ending and violent scenes of battling stallions, *Crin Blanc* is only suitable viewing for teens and adults. For them, it will be a revelation about the power of visual poetry and is very highly recommended.