



Night Beauties and Beasties



—From "Beauties of the Night."

Gerard Philipe—"only in his dreams does he find a society receptive to his art."

WHY true fantasy should turn up so rarely on the screen is a disturbing question, especially since the film medium would seem to be ideally suited to such imaginative excursions away from reality. The freedom to move from place to place, from era to era, to thumb the nose at the laws of man and nature could afford the creative film-maker a challenge every bit as exciting as the incessant search for realism. But, even though there has always been an abundance of unabashedly escapist films, the escape into fantasy has been neither frequent nor notably successful. Too often it has been hamstrung by that nagging question: will the audience understand? Too often, lest there be the slightest possibility of misunderstanding, the fantasy is explained, excused, interpreted in words of one syllable. Instead of embarking on a flight of fancy, audiences are generally conducted on a guided tour of fantasyland, with all the exits clearly marked.

To this unfortunate rule René Clair's "Beauties of the Night" (Lopert) is a happy exception. True, as the title suggests, his fantasies live in the world of dreams, may even be explained as dreams. But what delicious dreaming! His hero is a young composer and music teacher unable to

cope with the world around him, distressed by the racket and roar of the twentieth century. Only in his dreams does he seem to find a society properly receptive to his art—first in the polite salons at the turn of the century, then in the exciting era of France's colonial expansion under Louis-Philippe, again in the days of the French Revolution and even, for a very brief moment, back in the time of D'Artagnan and his Musketeers. Each dream brings him not only success but also a sympathetic and exceptionally beautiful woman. (These same lovely creatures turn up in his waking hours as well, but there the young man scarcely notices them.) Before long his dream world has become so very desirable that he just can't wait to doze off.

The delightful thing about all this is that the dreams actually work like dreams, merging with each other, racing from century to century at the convenience of the dreamer. There is even an amusing interpenetration of dream and reality (as when, awakened in the midst of a glorious love-feast in an Algerian harem, his arm in a sling, the hero promptly wraps the bedsheets about his arm and drops back into his dream again). His dream world provides a delicately ironic comment on the world about us:

the director of the Paris Opéra declares his intentions in *bel canto*, the French army captain is officially decorated for his successes in *l'amour*, and the same venerable gentleman is on hand in each century to recall what a happier world it was when he was young. But Clair soon pricks these pleasantly nostalgic bubbles. One night his hero is late getting to bed, and as he dashes desperately from century to century he piles catastrophe on catastrophe (including a hilarious vision of his opera being performed by an orchestra that includes pneumatic drill, auto horns, and saws scraping on lead pipes). He awakes to the discovery that no era is perfect, while miracles can still happen today.

Actually, despite all of Clair's wit and invention, the dreams do have a tendency to become a bit repetitious before the end. It is almost as if, intrigued by the comic possibilities in each century, he invented too many variations and then found it impossible to eliminate any. In all truth, even the unprejudiced observer would have some difficulty saying just which details might best be dropped, so many wryly devastating moments crop up at every turn—a real embarrassment of riches. It is also unfortunate that the final sequence, with the young composer back again in reality, does not sustain the verve and humor of the dreams. After all, the scene is the Paris Opéra, and Clair himself once demonstrated what fun could be had there. Even so, "Beauties of the Night" ranks easily among his best works, a fantasy that invites its audiences to loose their own imagination. Clair is ably assisted by Gérard Philipe and Raymond Bussières as the composer and his friend, by delectable Gina Lollobrigida and Martine Carol in the title roles, and by Georges Van Parys, who has provided a musical score that manages at all times to match the picture's pointed humor.

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After the beauties conjured up by M. Clair, Nunnally Johnson directs our attention to other and decidedly less attractive nocturnal creatures. "Night People" (20th Cent.-Fox) refers to the Communists of East Berlin, who, as one character in the film observes, seem congenitally incapable of working except under the cover of darkness. The picture starts—long before the credits appear—with the kidnapping of an American G.I. from the Western Zone, while the story itself gets under way when the boy's father, a hard-headed and influential businessman (Broderick Crawford), rushes to Germany to get some

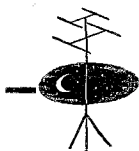
"action." What he learns as he watches the operations of Intelligence Officer Gregory Peck is that the Russians are playing a subtle, complicated game involving unpredictable pressures for unspecified gains. His boy, it develops, has been snatched to be exchanged for a couple that the Reds are really after. Effecting this exchange proves an intricate but thoroughly fascinating business because Johnson has managed to keep his characters, situations, and language both racy and believable. Filmed in Germany in Cinemascope, "Night People" takes splendid advantage of the wide screen for its Berlin exteriors; although the more intimate scenes, often spun out at considerable length and taken from a single point of view, tend to produce an uncomfortably theatrical effect that even the tautness of the dialogue cannot completely conceal. Even so, chalk this up as one of the more successful wide-screen efforts, with a special salute to Nunnally Johnson as writer, producer, and director.

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"Yesterday and Today" (United Artists) is an entertaining compilation of clips from old movies. Put together and narrated by George Jessel, the pictures—most of them dating from the first decade or so of the movies—are perhaps less significant than Jessel imagines (he suffers from that old toastmaster predilection of hailing everything as "the first"). But though not too accurate on matters of film history, Jessel's wise-cracking commentary does keep "Yesterday and Today" both lively and amusing.

"The Lonely Night" (Mayer-Kingsley), a feature-length documentary film by Irving Jacoby, was produced primarily for use in mental-health clinics. Without frills or foolishness, it offers a clear, objective study of a mentally disturbed young woman, then presents the case-history explanation of her emotional state. Marian Seldes, currently appearing in "Ondine," plays the girl with extraordinary conviction; the rest of the cast is largely nonprofessional. For its theatrical engagements, "The Lonely Night" has cannily been paired with "The Eternal Mask," a classic in the field of psychological fiction films that hasn't been seen in these parts for many years.

—ARTHUR KNIGHT.



TV AND RADIO

WELL, it won't be long now till that sharp spring day when nine uniformed young men will rush out on the diamond, the band will strike up "The Star Spangled Banner," there will be heard the familiar smack of a ball against a glove, and out of our television sets will come those inspiring words which always announce the opening of our national pastime—"It's the beer that chill can't kill!"

That will be Mel Allen to the Yankee fans on behalf of Ballantine. "No matter what the temperature is outdoors," Mel will be saying, "it's always winter in your refrigerator." And in between innings he'll be urging me to go out to my refrigerator to see if he's not right. And while I'm there I'll open another bottle of the stuff, so the trip shouldn't be a total loss.

Over at Ebbetts Field Connie Desmond will be reminding his viewers that the hand of the makers of Schaeffer's Beer has never lost its skill. And Connie also urges us to go out to the kitchen and try a bottle.

Being a fan of Mel and Connie I must tell you that last season you would have been amazed at the number of games I was a little hazy about which team scored the winning run by the time the ninth inning came around.

Last year it was Red Barber who was smacking his lips as he described a tall foaming glass of Schaeffer's for the Dodger fans. This year Mr. Barber is not with the Brooklyn organization. He has transferred his sales talk to the Yankee club. In one of the spring-training radio broadcasts the other afternoon between the Yankees and the Dodgers I heard Red rhapsodizing about the world's finest brew—Ballantine. It's all quite confusing.

And as if that isn't confusing enough there are the broadcasts of the Giants' games. Here Russ Hodges holds forth about Chesterfield cigarettes. I don't recall too vividly the kind of ball the Giants played last year, if that was indeed ball they were playing. I do remember they showed up for the games and went through the motions. And after coming away from my television set I would hate to have taken an oath whether the final score of the game was five to one, or whether Barney's Delicatessen and Smoke Shoppe in Queens was selling Ches-

terfields five to one over other leading brands.

To complicate matters further, when Mel Allen isn't selling Ballantine beer he's dealing in White Owl Cigars, which come in the handy five pack. When Connie Desmond isn't hawking Schaeffer's he's peddling Lucky Strikes. Russ, at least, is a one-product man—Chesterfield cigarettes. Except on fight nights when he takes on a line of Pabst Blue Ribbon Beer.

AND the picture gets even more diffused when we see the St. Louis Cardinals, owned by Anheuser-Busch, playing ball at Ebbetts Field under the sponsorship of Schaeffer's Beer. To say nothing of the Schaeffer commercials coming out of Busch Stadium when the Dodgers visit the Cardinals in St. Louis.

Drinking and smoking seem to be the stuff athletic broadcasts are made of. It makes darling viewing for the kids for whom baseball holds such fascination. It's a little frightening to watch one of the little monsters who has maneuvered his parent into taking him to a live ballgame after weeks of watching it played on television and to hear a small voice squeak above the din of a home run: "It's a Ballantine Blast—a White Owl Wallop!"

It's a far cry from that bygone day when baseball heroes used to tell the kids about the breakfast cereal the champions ate that made them champions. What happened to those kids? That's easy. They grew up to be big, strong, ulcerated advertising men who write the copy for the beers and cigarettes in the baseball commercials on television these days.

—GOODMAN ACE.

I Too Am on the Side of the Angels

By Georgie Starbuck Galbraith

WHEREFORE I don't disparage Simians, since it's clear That angels, being angels, Can move among us here Corporeally accoutred In any guise or shape. And how can I be certain An angel's not an ape?