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Movies

Make Way for Giulietta Of the Rare Spirit

by Judith Crist

There are the boys and the girls and the sexpots and the men—but there's been a recurrent dearth of women in our screen fare. By women I mean very specifically female adults and would, in fact, be willing to settle for adult females.

The dearth—and I suspect it is of actresses as well as of material—is reflected in the fact that more and more serious movies are skipping on the female role or, in fact, skipping it entirely: consider the all-male (except for a glimpse of the commandant's bedmate) cast of *The Hill* (although I would guess that director Sidney Lumet will more than compensate with his starlet-ridden version of *The Group*) and of *King Rat*, in which writer-director Bryan Forbes resisted the book-given opportunity to oil up the box office with even one Malaysian beauty. Even bleak war dramas have in the past boasted a chesty cabaret bit or a camp-follower scene or two.

Directors of taste seem to be deciding to bypass the obvious. But let's consider *The Cincinnati Kid*, which is almost literally *The Hustler* in spades since poker replaces pool as the showdown game between aspiring youth and established champ, with a gambler providing the suspenseful triangle, albeit in the card melodrama they've substituted Steve McQueen, Edward G. Robinson and Rip Torn for the Paul Newman, Jackie Gleason, George C. Scott poolroom trio. *The Hustler*, made a mere four years ago, also boasted a major female figure, the crippled girl so sensitively portrayed by Piper Laurie who supplied the humanistic elements to the tale. *The Cincinnati Kid*, however, which offers one of the best poker games on film, eliminates women as anything but box-office attractions—goodness knows nothing but a box office would be attracted by the short-lipped poutings of Tuesday Weld, the almost anti-sexual cardboard-and-suetmeringue gesturings of Ann-Margret. And as if anything were needed to underline the clawless felinity of these two sex kittens there is Joan Blondell on hand as Ladyfinger, an overripe poker dealer who's played the circuits and the boys thereon and who, by her very presence, let alone every gesture in this minor role, exudes the mystique of the grown-up woman.

It is, perhaps, Simone Signoret who has become the embodiment of female maturity on screen, the



Stranger in an artificial paradise: Giulietta Masina (center) at a party in "Juliet of the Spirits."

eternal Eve wearied by her own eternities, a modern Minerva sated with the disillusion of her wisdom. Miss Signoret conveys these by her very presence and with Oskar Werner as her counterpart in weltschmerz brought whatever little quality there was to *Ship of Fools*. (And I wonder whether it is not too late to suggest that we tended to overrate both their performances because of the kvatch that surrounded them in that pretentious and pointless film?) Here we have the actress—but where is the material?

Certainly *Darling* has dealt with a woman of our times—but primarily as a girl becoming a woman, a creature of human potential caught into the attitude and the ego of a shiny society and becoming more creature than human. We had our own *All About Eve*; there has been the superb Sophia Loren of *Two Women* and the superb Sophia Loren of *Marriage Italian Style*.

And now there is the Giulietta Masina of *Juliet of the Spirits*, Federico Fellini's new film. At first glance it could be described as a female version of *8½* in Technicolor; here we explore the psyche of a woman shattered by the loss of her husband's love and in search of survival. And at first glance, and the eyes and mind cannot leave the screen for the film's two and a half hours, it is indeed the most beautiful color film we have seen, a proliferation of the mood imagery and startling symbolism that was the hallmark of *8½* transmuted into a spectral range beyond ordinary imagination, with sheer esthetics breathtaking in scope. Progressively—as she tastes her husband's indifference, suspects and then confirms his infidelity and finally realizes that she has lost—Giulietta retreats into a daydream world and seeks comfort and advice in seances, from fantastic gurus, from vicarious participation in a hedonistic paradise next door and in memories. Anyone familiar with Fellini's work can almost, but not quite, imagine the range this provides his wit, his wisdom and his creative talents. For cinematic brilliance *Juliet of the Spirits* is at very least the equal of *8½*—in Technicolor.

But this new film surpasses its black-and-white predecessor in one important aspect. It has warmth and compassion, and these are provided by Miss Masina. The one flaw in *8½* always seemed to me to be its dispassionate intelligence, its cool emphasis on the appeal to the eye and the mind; superb as Marcello Mastroianni's director was, he was a man who held our interest only on the surface; his problems appealed to the mind but neither they nor his fate touched the heart.

Here Miss Masina is transcendent. The battered, wise, never-top-banana's wife of *Variety Lights*, the pathetic prostitute of *Nights of Cabiria* and the heart-breaking clown of *La Strada* has come of age. Familiarly so—the lips purse and the soft rounded chin still rises with the appealing child's strength that is uniquely hers, the smile is still joyously vulnerable and the eyes are wide with poignancy. But they are a woman's eyes, those of a little girl grown up to the dependency that is the motif of so many lives—a dependency on a love that has become a habit, on the saints and sins established in childhood, on the domination of family, on the social circle that enclose nothing.

Fellini, through Miss Masina, explores the universals of frustration and desire, of the concrete symbols of the public life one leads and the fantasies of private existence. The two are beautifully blended: one early sequence, for example, as Giulietta daydreams on the beach, discloses that a fantastically Freudian caravan is but a household outing, the ladies' haute couture lending itself to exotic surrealism.

But most important, through the fantastic we get to know a flesh-and-blood woman, glowing with affection, quick to anger, unashamed of her pruderies, ultimately willing to fight her own devils and discover her own strengths. There is, innately, a gentleness, a childlike wonder about Miss Masina; no matter how high the fashion that clothes her she manages to look a tiny bit blowsy, to retain a simplicity amid the cynical complexities in which Fellini wraps his tale. She is a woman who is among us—a rarity on screen, a rare and wonderful creature in *Juliet of the Spirits*.

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