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The Blissful Servitude of Self-Indulgence

BY ANDREW SARRIS

When "LES ENFANTS TERRIBLES" was booked in the retrospective section of last year's New York Film Festival, I contributed the following program note: "Jean-Pierre Melville's lyrical treatment of Jean Cocteau's perverse tribute to rebel-

man's temperament reflected in Crowther's critique is not entirely alien to me. Having always felt driven by necessities of one kind or another, I have been uncomfortable with an opulence of options. Bizarre life-styles make me feel slow-witted

low Cocteau's own advice to the poet in "Orphee" by astonishing us.

I haven't yet reached the point where I'm going to wash that flick right out of my hair, but the more I hear about "Shampoo" as a social document the less satisfied I am with it. I think that a brilliant minor picture was in the works until someone (probably Warren Beatty) decided to pump it full of hot air about Nixon, Agnew, and Vietnam, which is to say that I liked the movie even when I was yawning at the fillum. I certainly can't agree with a colleague who describes the spectacle as kaleidoscopic. For one thing, the strobe lights are too studied for spontaneity's sake. For another, the movie gets lost somewhere between past and present, memory and desire. And why can't sensualists swing without implicating the body politic in their morning-after malaise? Also, when are California sybarites going to stop putting on their Puritanical pose for us New York anchorites? If Manhattan isn't the United States, neither is Beverly Hills. As for the ending, it is not remotely as poignant as it was intended to be. Nor is it as passionate as a similar ending in "Petulia" in which George C. Scott and Julie Christie make you feel the force of their irrevocable indecision. Again, I think that everybody should see "Shampoo" if only to decide on the basis of first-hand evidence whether Warren Beatty is God's gift to women or merely an imaginative con man with a flair for self-promotion.

The most moronic movie project of the year if not of the decade has to be the Carole Lombard-Clark Gable story. When will they ever learn that the image of a great star is indelible and inimitable? The latest word is that Valerie Perrine is being considered for the Lombard part. Next, I suppose, Barbra Streisand will be cast as Garbo, if a certain real-life hairdresser (not in "Shampoo") gives the nod. □

' "Les Enfants Terribles" has always struck me as the kind of self-conscious movie-making that breaks through its own brittleness.'



Dermithe takes a stand in "Les Enfants Terribles"

lious adolescence was made in 1950, but has not been seen in New York in many years. One of the most electrifying confrontations of normality by abnormality in the cinema, the film is graced with an extraordinary performance by Nicole Stéphane as the young mover and shaker of lives. The collaboration of Melville and Cocteau enriched each sensibility with what the other lacked: Melville with Cocteau's audacity; and Cocteau with Melville's depth and intensity of feeling."

A contrasting view was expressed by Bosley Crowther in The New York Times of July 29, 1952: "In this corner's estimation, 'The Strange Ones' is pretentious poppycock and the actors who have to swish through it look downright ridiculous in their roles. There may be some sympathetic patrons who will find Cocteau's fable meaningful and his images rich in symbolism, but to us the whole thing is a bore."

Obviously, "Les Enfants Terribles" is not now and has never been everyone's cup of tea. Nonetheless, I urge all my readers to catch it during its current run at the D. W. Griffith Theater at 59th Street and Second Avenue. I cannot imagine any civilized moviegoer passing up one of Jean Cocteau's most fully articulated conceits. It is not that I am addicted to the chic decadence of any era. In fact, the tired business-

and spoilsporty. But I am learning all the time that the most decadent-looking art can also be the most dedicated, the most perceptive, and the most profound. By the same token, art perched on its Magic Mountains can turn out to be more mountainous than magical.

"Les Enfants Terribles" has always struck me as the kind of self-conscious movie-making that breaks through its own brittleness. And I agree with Truffaut when he declares: "It is not necessary to research in minute detail what we owe to Cocteau or to Melville in this concerto for four hands. The two artists worked together in perfect harmony: thus, Jean Cocteau's best novel became Jean-Pierre Melville's best film."

For my own part, I retain most vividly an impression of the messy symbiosis of people and places, feelings and furniture. There is also something forbiddingly intoxicating about the flickering images of incest across the androgynous features of Nicole Stéphane, Edouard Dermithe, and Renee Cosima. And what a leap there is from the hothouse present to the icy past in which Dargelos hurls the fateful snowball at Paul's heart. Cocteau's invocation of Dargelos here and later is uniquely audacious even for that branch of cinema which presumes to call itself poetic. "Les Enfants Terribles" does indeed fol-

Reptile Care

A two-day workshop on the health care of reptiles will be given at the American Museum of Natural History on Saturday, March 8, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Sunday, March 9, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., sponsored by the University Extension of the University of California at Berkeley in cooperation with the museum's department of education. The course is designed for veterinarians, people in research and education, herpetologists, and experienced amateurs. Fee is \$60. Pre-registration is recommended but participants may also register on the first day beginning at 8 p.m. Entrance to the museum at that hour is only by the ramp below the main stairs on Central Park West. For information call 873-1300.