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| Clair, René (1898-1985) |
| **[Enter any *variant forms* of your headword – OPTIONAL]** |
| Filmmaker, novelist, and critic René Clair (original name René-Lucien Chomette) was one of the foremost French film directors of the 1920s and 1930s. His first film, *Paris qui dort* (*The Crazy Ray*, 1923) combined surrealism and science fiction and generated images of a Paris frozen in time. His second, *Entr’acte* (1924), created to be shown between the acts of Francis Picabia’s Dada ballet *Relache*, became the epitome of Dadaist film with its innovative comedy and random images. His lyrical Eiffel Tower documentary, *La Tour* (*The Tower*, 1928), presents an impressionistic montage of the structure’s details. Clair’s silent features, such as *Un Chapeau de paille d’Italie* (*An Italian Straw Hat*, 1927), achieved international renown, and he dominated the early sound period with *Sous les toits de Paris* (*Under the Roofs of Paris*, 1930) and *A nous la liberté* (1931). The latter’s sophisticated use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound demonstrated a profound mastery of the new technology. Its surrealism-tinged take on capitalism arguably influenced sections of Chaplin’s *Modern Times* (1936). A recurring Clair theme concerns his protagonist achieving wealth and then losing it but nonetheless (re)gaining happiness. Clair’s career continued with comedies and fantasies in England and America and a post-war return to France, but his critical standing never regained its 1930s’ heights, partly due to the biases of *nouvelle vague* (French New Wave) critics. |
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| Further reading:  (Dale)  (Dale, The Films of René Clair, Volume II: Documentation)  (Greene)  (McGerr) |