



Four Nights of a Dreamer Quatre nuits d'un rêveur

Director: Robert Bresson

Production Companies: Albina Productions, I Film dell'Orso, Victoria Films, ORTF - Office de Radiodiffusion Télévision Française

Unit Manager: Daniel Deschamps

Production Manager: Georges Casati

Assistant Directors: Mylène van der Mersch, Munni Kabir, André Bitoun, Jean-Pierre Ghys

Script Supervisor: Irene Lhomme

Screenplay: Robert Bresson

Based on the story 'White Nights' by:

Fyodor Dostoevsky

Director of Photography: Pierre Lhomme

Director of Photography ('Amour, tu nous tiens'): Ghislain Cloquet *

Camera Operators: Guy Testarossa, Jacques Renard

Editor: Raymond Lamy

Assistant Editor: Geneviève Billo

Art Director: Pierre Charbonnier

Assistant Art Director: Arakel Araquelian

Music: Michel Magne, Groupe Batuki, Christopher Hayward, Louis Guitar, F.R. David

Sound Engineer: Roger Letellier

Assistant Sound Engineer: Michel Kharat

Sound Mixer: Jacques Carrère

Cast:

Isabelle Weingarten (*Marthe*)

Guillaume des Forêts (*Jacques*)

Jean-Maurice Monnoyer (*the lodger*)

Giorgio Maulini (*locksmith*)

Lydia Biondi (*Marthe's mother*)

Patrick Jouané (*gangster in 'Amour, tu nous tiens'*)

Jérôme Massart

(*youth who visits Jacques' apartment*) *

Groupe Batuki (*musicians on bateau-mouche*) *

Jonathan Rosenbaum (*extra*) *

France-Italy 1971

82 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

* Uncredited

Restored by mk2 Films under the supervision of Mylène Bresson, at Eclair Classics (Paris) and L.E. Diapason, with the support of the Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée (CNC)

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Four Nights of a Dreamer

Robert Bresson on 'Four Nights of a Dreamer'

You first turned to Dostoevsky for *A Gentle Creature* and returned to him for *White Nights*, which you called *Four Nights of a Dreamer*. Why?

It was partly because of lack of time. Let me add that I would never dare to adapt the novels (*The Idiot*, *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment*, etc.), which are formally perfect and complete in themselves. The two Dostoevsky stories from which I made my films are rather skimped, but perfect for my purpose. And naturally there is always a solidity, an accuracy in Dostoevsky which permits reasonable adaptation in a comparatively short time. For *Four Nights of a Dreamer*, a sum of money was suddenly made available to me and I welcomed the chance to make a new film. At that time I was putting down on paper another project, but it still needed a whole year's work before shooting could start. I remembered then reading *White Nights* a long time ago. I immediately went back to it. In both *A Gentle Creature* and *Four Nights* I try to avoid a simple rendering. Although the films keep to the plots of Dostoevsky, I try to communicate impressions that are mine and part of my own experience.

These last two films, the Dostoevsky adaptations, seem so much more secular than your other recent films; than, for instance, *Mouchette*.

It's true that in *Mouchette* there was a musical motif of Monteverdi's *Magnificat* introduced at the beginning and at the end of the narrative that seemed clearly to indicate the mystical aspect. But Jacques, the hero of *Four Nights*, is so wary of the conventional world that this very mistrust becomes an almost mystical view of man. You will find it all in Dostoevsky. I invented nothing.

Yet the character emerges as pure Bresson, even to the stoop-shouldered gait which is the mark of all your heroes.

Je fais mon miel comme je peux. As for the mystical aspect of *A Gentle Creature*, there is the crucifix which appears twice in the film: the heroine at first rejects it as a useless object, only to recognise its symbolic meaning later on, when she takes her own life.

There is another aspect to *Four Nights* which is not in Dostoevsky, and that is the erotic.

Nowadays, films can show almost everything. I preferred a vertical couple standing nude and motionless, holding each other close, to the eternal scene of lovers tossing about horizontally. Also, the sense of their stillness is reinforced by the awareness of the mother moving about in the hall. I believe in the value of concentration in this respect as in every other.

And then there is a third aspect to *Four Nights*, the obsessive side, the idea of love being stronger than the love-object itself, which must have attracted you to the story. Yet it was your idea to have Marthe fall in love with the young lodger through the wall, without ever having set eyes on him.

And, of course, when they finally meet, disappointment is out of the question. This is the Dostoevsky notion of the dream overpowering reality. Also, the hero is a dreamer, a solitary young man who builds elaborate fantasies on the flimsiest realities. I thought the best way to convey his imaginary world was through the use of a tape-recorder.

Isn't that another instance of the Bresson rule that, whenever possible, sound should replace the image?

Regular Programme

Film Wallahs: Deewaar – 50th Anniversary

Sat 13 Dec 14:25

Silent Cinema: Silent Sherlock: Three Classic Cases + reading by Neil Brand

Sun 14 Dec 14:00

Seniors: Pride and Prejudice + intro

Mon 15 Dec 14:00

Relaxed Screening: I Swear + intro and post screening discussion hosted by Stims Collective co-founder, Georgia Kumari Bradburn

Mon 15 Dec 18:00

Experimenta: Haunted Landscapes and Rural Psychedelia: Experimenta Mixtape Special

Thu 18 Dec 18:10

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Yes, since the ear is more easily directed towards the inside, the eye towards the outside. You know how much I am for the ‘inside’, which I strongly believe to be the true vocation of the cinema, as opposed to theatre which remains, whatever they may say, exterior and decorative.

Would you say something about the films-within-the-film and the play-within-the-film, which are not to be found in Dostoevsky?

In *Four Nights* I profited from the chance to poke fun at a certain kind of movie: it's just a mockery of passion and romanticism, of blood and violence. I also thought that all that exaggeration would contrast with the restraint of my character, which is not really restraint but simply a refusal to indulge in theatrics. When I think that the non-acting in my films is regarded by some people as unreal and unnatural!

You used to select your non-actors according to a moral rather than a physical resemblance to the characters as they exist in your mind.

In the past, this method consumed a good deal of my time. Today, I go much faster. I rather trust my instinct and believe in luck and random chance. I realise that the characters we imagine are too constructed, too consistent, while reality presents us with a great deal of contradiction and inconsistency, which are not at all perceptible to the eye but which the camera, our extraordinary instrument, will grasp gradually while shooting. In *Four Nights*, there was less time than usual to select the ‘interpreters’. They were recommended to me by friends. They had no acting experience or ambition, but instead a literary or university background. Guillaume des Forêts, who plays Jacques, was a student of astrophysics and the son of a well-known writer. Isabelle, who plays Marthe, is the daughter of the playwright Roman Weingarten. She worked as a model.

Like Dominique Sanda, the heroine of A Gentle Creature. But don't you think that modelling is, in a way, a sort of play-acting, and that these two girls are considerably more expressive than the usual non-actress?

In Sanda's case, I knew that she would be right from the moment I spoke to her on the telephone. It was her voice which convinced me, and I simply confirmed the choice when we met the following day. As for the way in which she looked at her husband at certain moments of the film, that look which you say bespeaks all her feelings ... well, it was nothing but a blank. This goes with the flatness of the image, so that I can express myself not through the miming of the interpreters, which is often an interference, but through the inter-relation of the images. Images, for me, exist only as signs, the sense of one modifying the next. I'm not after rupture; I'm after simultaneity which is intrinsic to the film. An image must be flat if it is to gain its value when it joins the others.

Would your paintings have the same degree of concentration as your film images?

The eye must be directed and told where to look for meaning, in paintings as in films. I like the people in my films to look at each other. I like to isolate each player and each look, and concentrate on it. A look is an unspoken word. I believe Proust said something like that.

You know my films have always seemed to me ... how could I say it? ... attempts, trials ... The language of images is still so unknown, so new, so difficult to practise.

Interview by Carlos Clarens, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 1971-72