

'Belle de Jour'

Movie Lacks Real Artistry

"Belle de Jour," starring Catherine Deneuve as the world's most beautiful woman and playing at the Center Theater, is initially an intriguing movie.

At its most literal level, Catherine plays the role of a woman who cannot sexually respond to her young, prosperous husband. Because she was molested as a child, she is left guilt-ridden and frigid. Sex to her is dirty and must be forced upon her if she is to enjoy it.

The movie opens with a fantasy. She imagines herself riding in a coach with her husband, enveloped in the sumptuous colors of autumn. When she fails to respond to his tender advances, she imagines that he orders her taken out, stripped, whipped and raped. But instead of being horrified she responds to her attacker.

Goaded incessantly by fantasy and desire, she acts upon impulse and is impelled to seek out a brothel, where she begins to work each afternoon from 2-5. She adopts the pseudonym of Belle de Jour, since she works only in the afternoon, and is initiated into the world of sex-

A Review

ual perversion. None of the acts have been directed to produce disgust: they are more humorous than shocking, more mysterious than explicit.

Though the characters in the brothel are portrayed well, especially the madame, the movie begins to lack vitality once Belle has become immersed into this sordid world. From this point, the camera lingers on incidental details: a chair, the placing of a tray, and long close-ups of Belle's face, as if to say that only mundane details compose reality.

The viewer expects to witness a tragic downfall of Belle which she herself has foretold. The film does end with a tragic incident, but the ending itself is not tragic; it is pure melodrama and slightly ridiculous. The viewer is entertained; the camera work is good, the colors at times are like an impressionistic painting; the scenes of Paris are exciting; and Catherine is always beautifully attired, when she is clothed. Leaving the movie, I felt cheated and unsatisfied by the way in which the woman's dilemma is resolved.

Perhaps the problem comes from Catherine Deneuve herself who does not seem to convey the deep sense of turmoil within a woman who must lead



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a dual life and is destined for tragedy. Perhaps the fault lies with the director, Louis Bunuel, who wished to make the woman more mysterious than easily analyzed.

If the movie is interpreted on its most literal level, and begin to conjecture that everything that takes place within the brothel is pure fantasy (since the movie begins and ends with the camera focused on the moving carriage, it could lead to such an interpretation) then the film does more than become a study of the constant interplay between fantasy and reality; it becomes incomprehensible.

A work of art should give insights into life and character. "Belle de Jour" does neither, yet it seems that "Belle de Jour" was intended as a work of art. It portrays neither fantasy nor reality, and fails to give the viewer a meaningful insight into the interrelationship of the two.

But the sheer entertainment value, however, "Belle de Jour" is a competent movie.

by Anthony N. Fragola

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