

VISAGES D'ENFANTS

JACQUES FEYDER, FRANCE, 1925

Screening: Thursday 19th April, 7pm



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Visages d'Enfants is a masterpiece of silent cinema directed by Jacques Feyder, who is considered by many to be the father of French poetic realism. Feyder was actually Belgian, and *Visages d'Enfants* was shot using a French crew in the Swiss valleys of the Entremont and Anniviers. The film, upon its release, was considered a failure. Too progressive for its time, it failed to make an impact in the European film markets, but a print was later rediscovered and restored by the Netherlands Film Museum in 1985, and the film is now considered a central, canonical text.

The film stars Jean Forest as a young boy whose father, upon the death of his mother, opts to court and marry a young widow. The film is a portrait of grief and tragedy, told through the eyes of the young Jean, who gives an excellent central performance of a child coming to terms with the death of his mother and subsequent incorporation into his family of his father's new wife and his new step-sister, Arlette (Arlette Peyran). Jean talks to his mother's portrait every night; he devotedly visits his mother's grave every Sunday, and the film's subtle camerawork and impressive art direction convey the sense of isolation and loneliness felt by the young

boy.

As with the use of the Montmartrois street life in Feyder's other 1920s masterpiece, *Crainquebille* (1922), the Swiss alpine community which with *Visages d'Enfants* is set plays an integral role in the film's narrative. Originally called *Mont Saint-Bernard* after the mountain towering over the valley of Entremont in which the film is set, the landscape's desolation and blankness is used metaphorically within the film to convey the feelings of Jean as he comes to terms with the death of his mother. The camerawork also replicates the unsteady contours of the landscape; there is a particular shot, halfway through the film, where a high-angle point-of-view shot is used to convey Jean's sense of estrangement from his family, echoing the peaks and troughs of the Swiss valleys and their isolated communities.

Jacques Feyder had a long and varied career in filmmaking. He began by making a series of short films in France, during the First World War, before moving into features with *L'Atlantide* in 1921. *Visages d'Enfants* is Feyder fifth feature film; he would go on to continue his work in the French film industry before, in the late Twenties, moving to work within the German film industry. He is probably most renowned for *Knight Without Armour*, made in 1937 for Alexander Korda's London Film Productions, starring Marlene Dietrich and Robert Donat.

CAST

Jean Forest ...

Jean Amsler, der Sohn

Victor Vina ...

Pierre Amsler, der Vater

Pierrette Houyez ...

Pierrette Amsler, die Tochter

Jeanne Marie-Laurent ...

La domestique

Rachel Devirys ...

Jeanne Dutois, zweite Frau Amslers

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