
LOUISE BROOKS



Henri Langlois and James Card, curator of the George Eastman House in Rochester, New York, were behind the resurrection of Louise Brooks in the 1950s. Forgotten by all, she was living there humbly when James Card paid her a visit in 1955, with the intention of programming her films; he literally fell under the actress's charm. He asked Langlois to lend him *Diary of a Lost Girl* and *Pandora's Box*, of which, at the time, La

Cinémathèque française was the only one to have a print (during the Occupation, Langlois had, in fact, succeeded in exchanging a print of *Pandora's Box* with the Reichsfilmarchiv). Our Miss Brooks then began a European tour during which she met Henri Langlois in 1957. In November 1958, he devoted a memorable retrospective to her at La Cinémathèque française and invited her to come spend a month in Paris. Louise Brooks remained in her hotel during most of her stay, receiving visits from Langlois, Lotte Eisner, Kenneth Anger and Man Ray. From that period she would keep an undying memory. 'Your true genius, Henri, is in the ability to create people,' she would write him in 1959. 'It takes inspiration and courage. We all have our favourites, which some would like to turn into something important: but it takes so little to push us to drop our plans. [...] Now I see that you have created a new Louise Brooks, entirely yours.'

Beauty Prize (aka *Miss Europe*) was the third film that Louise Brooks made in Europe after the two Pabst films: *Diary of a Lost Girl* (*Tagebuch einer Verlorenen*) and *Pandora's Box* (*Die Büchse der Pandora*), both of 1929. Initially, *Beauty Prize* was to have been directed by René Clair who, following a misunderstanding with the production company, abandoned the project in behalf of Augusto Genina. 'We are struck by the semi-documentary approach, seeing the anthropological research with which the camera observes the public, the participants in the beauty contest, or the attention paid to objects as a symbol of social status and to the reactions they provoke in the female protagonist [...]. But also by the merciless eye, perhaps unintentional, with which Genina's camera records the imperfections and early signs of ageing in the body of a diva barely 24 years old and already close to the premature conclusion of her own career.'¹ Indeed, Louise Brooks would hardly make any more films after *Beauty Prize*.

¹ Alberto Boschi, *Les sons du silence dans Prix de beauté*, in *Louise Brooks l'europpéenne*, Ed. Transeuropa, 1999.

Beauty Prize / Prix de beauté

France, 1930 – 113 minutes

Direction: Augusto Genina

Idea by René Clair and Georg W. Pabst

Script: Augusto Genina, René Clair, Bernard Zimmer, Alessandro De Stefani

Production: Sofar

Photography: Rudolph Maté

Set: Robert Gys

Editing: Edmond T. Gréville

Cast: Louise Brooks, George Charlia, Jean Bradin, Henri Bandini, Yves Gland, Gaston Jacquet, Alex Bernard, Marc Ziboulsky, Raymonde Sonny, Fanny Clair

Lucienne Garnier is a stenographer. Unbeknownst to André, her jealous fiancé, she sends her photo to a beauty contest and wins the prize. She then decides to enter the Miss Europe contest. André gives her an ultimatum and, out of love, she renounces the luxurious world that was promised to her. But very soon, her boring, miserable life with an ever-more jealous André begins to weigh on her...

Restored in 1999 by the Cineteca di Bologna, La Cinémathèque française and the Fondazione Cineteca Italiana Milano.

Shot during the months of transition from silent to sound in Europe, only the sound version of the film was known but, in truth, Beauty Prize was conceived and shot as a silent picture. However, during the shooting, it was decided to turn it into a sound film, adding parts thought up explicitly for the new technology (for example, the finale scene).

The discovery at the Cineteca di Milano in 1998 of a positive print of the silent version allowed for recovering the film's photographic quality, the proper propositions of the mask, and the silent rhythm of the frames.

Gian Luca Farinelli and Nicola Mazzanti, *Restaurer Miss Brooks, in Louise Brooks l'européenne*, Ed. Transeuropa, 1999

