

OBITER

MYTH AND RITUAL ON THE SCREEN. *The Lost Continent* at the Academy began pedestrianly enough, for all the world like any ordinary travelogue. Asiatics on the march, pyrotechnics ancient and modern in Hong Kong, the trite preliminaries of voyage, all these frankly failed to grip the attention. Then suddenly with the first landfall all was changed. In a twinkling a theme, an idea, captured, held and disciplined the roving camera-lens. And in turn the spectator's mind too was caught at last, absorbed in the spectacle so skilfully placed before us.

That spectacle was one of rare beauty yielding an almost uninterrupted series of delights. Part of this appeal was due, no doubt, to the attractions of the terrain. Yet in this travel film natural beauty played a secondary role. The lost continent, as the unobtrusive commentator summed up, was above all a state of mind. And indeed those who came to the film with only the haziest of ideas about those islands off south-east Asia would gain precious few geographical precisions from what they saw. Nor again were the frequent examples of physical beauty among the people we encountered sufficient of themselves to account for all our pleasure. If one sought a name for the beauty which made the greatest impression and gave the film its unity, one would have, perhaps, to speak of the beauty of holiness, meaning by that the order and form given to human life when it is dedicated to an unseen and superior power.

This dedication was, of course, more explicitly and consciously present in the scenes from Buddhist monasteries, especially in their remarkable climax of the clothing-ceremony of the girl-novice. But it was present too in all the scenes which followed when in turn we were shown significant glimpses of the ways of life of what might best be generically termed the people of the fields, the people of the sea and the people of the river. In contrast with the monks and nuns their lives were 'ordinary'—the way of affirmation rather than the way of negation, set to an oriental key—but they were no less lives lived in the consciousness and service of a higher source. For these peoples their knowledge of the unseen was mediated in myth which in turn, as we so vividly saw, moulded their individual being by means of a ritual rich in aesthetic value and practically co-extensive with their daily life.

Myth and ritual are by no means foreign to our commercial cinema in the West which is indeed the chief provider of these commodities, in a disguised form, to our secular civilization. But just how poor these substitutes are is superbly shown by the superior impact of this intensely religious film where myth and ritual and their power to complete a human life are overt.

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