

# Westerbeck, night light: brassai and weegee essay samples

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In this chapter, the author Colin Westerbeck discusses the photographic prowess of two great Hungarian photographers, Brassai and Weegee.

Although both artists come from completely different backgrounds, Westerbeck observes some common traits that are starkly similar, especially in particular exhibitions such as Brassai's *The Secret Paris* in the 1930's. This series of photographs exposes the horror and brutality of the Paris nightlife that was hidden away in the dark streets of the less fashionable quarters with drunkards, vagrants and prostitutes rampant – all are caught with stark immediacy by Brassai's camera.

Westerbeck analyses this exhibition in considerable detail and focuses on one photograph in particular, that of two lovers sulking. Some details of the photograph were eventually cropped out of the image in subsequent exhibitions of this photograph and it is intriguing to note that Brassai was not even aware of this when interviewed by Westerbeck.

The interviewer also focuses on Paris life in the 1930's where the prominence of artist bars and cafes was important for their very existence. Although Brassai knew his subjects intimately and could relate to their feelings, Weegee did not although growing up on the Upper East Side of New York meant that he encountered poverty at first hand. The shocking immediacy of both photographers work when they depicted the poor is particularly striking with Weegee's '*Naked City*' notable for its shocking beauty and ugliness that contrast in an epic manner. The element of tragic humour is not lost on Weegee either, he seems to find comedy in tragic scenes such as the burning of house and scenes of unimaginable poverty and squalor.