FRENCH CINEMA IN CLOSE-UP

La Vie d’un acteur pour moi

edited by Michaël Abecassis with Marcelline Block
caricatures by Jenny Batlay and Igor Bratusek
'Can we explain what is magical or mysterious [about director Jean Vigo], without destroying the magic or the mystery?' asks his daughter, Luce Vigo.†

The book's two cover stills are taken from Jean Vigo's silent documentary À propos de Nice (1930). This satirical portrait shows us the wealthy inhabitants of the Côte d'Azur in a new light. The elegant costumes of the uncredited model sitting on a deck chair on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice gradually strip away as the frames briskly succeed, until she is revealed completely nude.

Like an archaeologist unravelling the many bandages of a mummy to lay bare the image of the Pharaoh underneath, Vigo's camera-gaze X-rays the inner self of Nice's bourgeois society, exposing what is hidden under the apparent expensive garment in order to reveal the truth beneath the artificial. Vigo is the entomologist who shows the truest essence of the people examined in close-up under his magnifying glass.

FRENCH CINEMA
IN CLOSE-UP

La Vie d’un acteur pour moi

ILLUSTRATED MINI-DICTIONARY
OF ACTORS AND ACTRESSES
OF THE FRENCH CINEMA

edited by
Michaël Abecassiss
with Marcelline Block

caricatures by
Jenny Batlay and Igor Bratusek

PHÆTON
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Dublin
FOREWORD

Hi-diddle-dee-dee. An actor's life for me!
A high silk hat, and a silver cane.
A watch of gold, with a diamond chain.
Hi-diddle-dee-day. An actor's life is gay!
It's great to be a celebrity.
An actor's life for me!

—from Disney’s Pinocchio (1940)

Many reference works have been dedicated to the actors who have marked the history of French cinema, but most seem to take a biographical approach, focusing on their cinematographic paths and often aiming to be as objective as possible. This collection is presented alphabetically in dictionary form, and calls upon university professors alongside journalists, both francophones and Francophiles, those specialising in cinema and those who do not. Their task: to provide a brief and personal sketch of an artist, bringing out all that emerges from his or her personality, acting, and career.

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A portrait is above all something that is drawn, painted, or photographed. Jenny Batlay and Igor Bratusek give free rein to their imaginations, sketching the featured artists, without having seen the written text; their sketches are the indispensable visual complement to the text. Drawing, like the text itself, provides a still image which contrasts the moving one we see on screen. How then to represent Danielle Darrieux, who has pervaded eight decades of talking pictures? For many film-lovers, she is the young starlet of 1930s cinema, but also the scatty seventy-year-old of François Ozon’s 8 femmes /8 Women (2002). Le Fabuleux Destin d’Amélie Poulain /Amélie (2001) seemed to have crystallised Audrey Tautou in an image from which it will be difficult for her to escape, and yet her appearance and her influence on viewers changed in the years which followed, as she became an international star in major American productions.

The drawn portrait creates an almost dreamlike image. The object is fixed in time and space in its defining features (a look, a smile, an expression often enough to represent an actor), like the petrified lovers in Marcel Carné’s Les Visiteurs du soir /The Devil’s Envoys (1942), and it is left to the viewer to uncover – between the lines, behind the phrase – all the complexity of the artist and his/her experience on screen.

Many international artists have played key parts in French cinema, and thus it is no surprise to find entries dedicated to Marie Gillain, Anna Karina, and Jean Seberg alongside portraits of French cinema icons such as Jean-Louis Barrault, Maurice Chevalier, and Jean Gabin.

This volume is far from exhaustive, but it provides an overview of the main actors who have enriched French cinema since its inception, and who today belong to the collective imaginary of those spectators whose words fill the pages which follow.

Michaël Abecassis, 2015
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Isabelle Adjani (1955–)

Pretty, Pouty, Powerfully So

« Je suis actrice pour donner de l’amour » [‘I am an actress to give love’].¹ This is how Isabelle Yasmine Adjani explains her choice of career. Love. The tormented kind: remember Camille Claudel? The tragic kind: who can forget Adèle H. ending up in an asylum because of a man who would not reciprocate her obsessive love? Adjani’s mesmerizing beauty makes us feel all the sorrows of the tragic characters she portrays. She is indeed the only actress in the history of French cinema to have been awarded five Césars for Best Actress: the first in 1982 for Possession (Andrzej Żuławski, 1981), the second in 1984 for L’Été meurtrier /One Deadly Summer (Jean Becker, 1983), the third for Camille Claudel (Bruno Nuytten, 1988) in 1989, the fourth in 1995 for La Reine Margot /Queen Margot (Patrice Chéreau, 1994) – this film representing the pinnacle of her career – and the fifth in 2010 for La Journée de la jupe /Skirt Day (Jean-Paul Lilienfeld, 2008).

Born in a working-class neighbourhood in June 1955 on the Right Bank of the Seine, she and her younger brother Eric were raised by their Algerian father and German mother in an industrial city located to the northwest of Paris. She never forgot her roots and in 1988 went to Algeria, on the eve of the referendum, to support the birth of Algerian democracy. When very young, she was already noted for her beauty and professionalism. Her precocious successes included being the youngest player ever, at the age of 17, to be granted contract status at France’s premier theatre, the Comédie-Française; and the youngest person ever nominated for a Best Leading Actress Academy Award at the age of 19 (until Keisha Castle-Hughes broke the record in 2004) for her performance in François Truffaut’s 1975 L’Histoire d’Adèle H. /The Story of Adele H.

Indeed, Adjani’s characters often include solitary, obsessive, alienated women. Despite her fragile looks, tenacity and even toughness underlie much of Adjani’s best work, as illustrated by her performance as Camille Claudel. Camille Claudel was a very personal project, since Adjani identified with the brilliant sculptress, destroyed by her affair with the egocentric Rodin and incarcerated in an asylum for the last thirty years of her life (as was Adèle H…). Adjani, as co-producer, was nominated for an Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. Her latest movies include La Journée de la jupe /Skirt Day, 2008; Jacques Weber’s TV film Figaro (2008), and Mamuth (Gustave de Kervern and Benoît Delépine, 2010).

An intelligent and dedicated actress, she chooses her roles with care and works on them with single-minded application. Multilingual, she has also performed in English and German-language films. As pretty as she is pouty, treading the borderline between provocative and provoking, her performances are always full of...
spirited and violent emotion: she can deliver the kind of rage that comes from deep within.

However, acting has never been a priority in her life. As a matter of fact, Adjani has appeared in only 20 or so movies. A generation ago after quitting the Comédie-Française because the revered institution refused to grant her leave of absence to act in a movie, she explained that her work was not her passion. Thus, in the past decade, she has devoted most of her time to her private life, including raising her two children, Barnabé, born in 1979 and fathered by Bruno Nuytten, and Gabriel-Kane, born in 1995 and fathered by Daniel Day-Lewis. Despite being chosen by People magazine as one of the ‘50 Most Beautiful People in the World’ in 1990 and selected as second-most beautiful woman (after Monica Bellucci) by the French public in 2004, she had to break off her engagement to Jean-Michel Jarre in 2002 because he cheated on her.

Adjani has never lacked courage, on the professional nor personal levels, and she was made a Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur in 2010. Indeed, in 2004 she openly supported ‘Reporters without Borders’ in the fight for the freedom of twenty-nine prisoners held in Cuba. Love. The charitable one. The selfless one. Maybe that is how we could explain her choices in her private life.

Fabienne H. Baider
University of Cyprus

Anouk Aimée (1932– )
[Françoise Sorya Dreyfus]

Beloved

Anouk Aimée’s image is summed up in her surname, Aimée, which translates as ‘beloved’. Born Françoise Sorya Dreyfus in 1932, she was renamed Anouk after the character in her debut feature La Maison sous la mer (Henri Calef, 1947) and Aimée after the suggestion of French poet/screenwriter Jacques Prévert. Her adopted surname was indeed a well-chosen one, firmly fixing those qualities she has come to be known for: romanticism and sensuality.

With large, soulful eyes, a soft, breathy voice, a willowy figure and graceful walk, Aimée incarnates an ethereal kind of femininity. Frequently her characters function as apparitions that haunt her male counterparts. This is the case, for instance, in Le Farceur/The Joker (Philippe de Broca, 1960) and Model Shop (Jacques Demy, 1969), where her heroines induce a spellbinding effect on the men who catch sight of them (played by Jean-Pierre Cassel and Gary Lockwood, respectively). Furthermore, Aimée’s characters tend towards the tragic. Identified by an acting style that is understated and opaque, her heroines are almost invariably characterised

by Emmanuel Mouret (Changement d’adresse /Change of Address, 2006; L’Art d’aimer /The Art of Love, 2011, with Frédérique Bel, François Cluzet, and Dany Brillant) and in a new cinematographic adaption of Marcel Pagnol’s Marseilles Trilogy by Daniel Auteuil (2013), where she appears alongside Auteuil and Darroussin, both deeply connected to auteur cinema and the South of France.  

Stéphane Audran
[Colette Suzanne Dacheville]

A Feast for the Cinematic Senses

Elegant, with sharp, wondrous, glistening eyes, red hair, and refined manners, Stéphane Audran became the epitome of the middle-class woman in French cinema and one of the icons of the French New Wave, as she rose to fame in the 1960s. Stern and pouty in her acting, the incarnation of the glamorous as well as the perverse adulterous, she often played characters named Hélène. Rarely taking breaks in her film and television career, she has acted in more than a hundred films. She is the multi-faceted actress of 24 movies directed by her second husband, influential filmmaker Claude Chabrol.

Born Colette Suzanne Dacheville, she was raised in Versailles, the daughter of a doctor. She made her debut in the drama school of Charles Dullin and Michel Vitol, starting her acting career in the 50s under the name Stéphane Audran in Eric Rohmer’s short film Le Signe du lion /The Sign of Leo (1962). After a supporting role in Chabrol’s Les Cousins (1959) next to Gérard Blain and Jean-Claude Brialy, Chabrol not only launched her career, but also

Daniel Winkler and Katharina Müller
Universität Wien /University of Vienna

took a new turn and she completely changed registers. She can be seen in numerous comedies where she only has secondary parts, such as Claude Zidi’s *Arlette* (1997), Daisy von Scherler Mayer’s *Madeline* (1998), Jean-Marie Poiré’s *Ma femme...s’appelle Maurice /My Wife Maurice* (2002), and Anne Fontaine’s *La Fille de Monaco /The Girl from Monaco* (2008).

Stéphane Audran’s persona is a paradox: popular, often burlesque, she always radiates an elegant Frenchness that makes her one of the most charismatic and seductive actresses of her generation. How can one resist a dinner of *Soupe à la tortue à la Louisianne* and *Cailles en sarcophage* served on the finest china by Babette?

Michaël Abecassis
*The University of Oxford*

**Daniel Auteuil (1950–)**

*Acteur, Auteur, Auteuil*

**Few actors in the world have enjoyed such versatility and popularity as Daniel Auteuil.** His characters range from the romantic hero Lagardère (*Le Bossu /On Guard*, Philippe de Broca, 1997) to poignant and henpecked office plankton (*Le Placard /The Closet*, Francis Veber, 2001), and he performs in psychological dramas as brilliantly as in an action-filled crime movies (Olivier Marchal’s *36 Quai des Orfèvres /36 /36th Precinct*, 2004 and *MR73 /The Last Deadly Mission*, 2008). Since the beginning of his career in 1975, he has appeared in over 70 films, many of which have enjoyed both huge popular success and critical favour.

Auteuil’s parents were opera and operetta singers, and he spent his childhood behind the scenes in the theatres of Avignon. At 17, he decided to pursue a career in theatre, and attended the Cours Florent in Paris. He made several attempts to enter the CNSAD (Conservatoire National Supérieur de l’Art Dramatique), attended by Isabelle Huppert and Carole Bouquet among others, but was never accepted. His theatre debut came in 1970, at the Théâtre national populaire (*Early Morning*), and he was engaged with the American musical...
Maurice Chevalier (1888–1972)

From
Belleville
to
Hollywood

Although his renown as a singer of popular chanson — especially ‘Thank Heaven for Little Girls,’ ‘Louise,’ ‘Valentine,’ and Ma Pomme — eclipses his prolific acting career, Maurice Chevalier (September 12, 1888 – January 1, 1972) played many important roles in films made in France and the United States. In the U.S., Maurice Chevalier’s French accent (which he purposefully exaggerated onstage and onscreen), his protruding lower lip (the famous lèvre en lippe), and his grumpy mood offset by a bon vivant attitude — in other words, his idiosyncratic Gallic persona and mannerisms — endeared him to the American public. His spoken English was in fact rather good offstage.

Chevalier was born and raised in picturesque Belleville, the lower middle class faubourg in Northern Paris that had cradled celebrities such as singer/actress Édith Piaf and actor Jean Gabin, who, like Chevalier, came from impoverished families. Philanthropist and friend of the arts, Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet — creator of the Publicis Drugstore on the Champs-Elysées in Paris (and who also posed for me for an oil portrait in 1968) — writes in his memoirs, entitled La Traversée du siècle (1994, ed. Robert Laffont) that he grew up in the destitute yet legendary Belleville, where Parisians refused to capitulate to the invading Prussian army in 1871, stocking cannons in order to defend their country during the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871).

Son of a housepainter and a mother of Belgian origin nicknamed ‘La Louque,’ Maurice Chevalier left school early to sing and dance onstage, and as a teenager he held several petits boulots. It is ironic that although Maurice never completed his education, several schools throughout France are now named after him, along with streets, avenues, and boulevards such as Avenue Maurice Chevalier in Cannes and Avenue Maurice Chevalier in Marnes-la-Coquette. Marnes-la-Coquette, near Paris, is one of the smallest but wealthiest villages in France, and it is where, in 1952, Chevalier acquired a fine property he named ‘La Louque,’ where he is buried. Marnes-la-Coquette is famous because Eugénie de Montijo — who became Empress Eugénie after her marriage to Napoléon III — had consecrated this area where a church is named after her. Coincidently, Chevalier thought that my name, ‘Jenny,’ was short for ‘Eugénie’ and he always called me ‘Eugénie’ (as did some of my teachers in Montpellier, where I was born and spent my earliest years, and where the first name ‘Jenny’ was not well known at the time).

After being injured in combat, captured, and held prisoner in Germany during World War I, Chevalier was released early from the POW camp thanks to Alfonso XIII,
Pity furthermore features several of Chevalier’s songs, in particular, his diegetic performance of *Ça fait d’excellents français* during the film’s opening credits and ‘Sweepin’ the Clouds Away’ – one of his most popular songs – playing over the film’s final scene and closing credits. Both of these upbeat songs are used ironically, given the rumours about Chevalier’s possible collaboration. Moreover, they are juxtaposed with the solemn and tragic mood of this documentary, an exposé casting a critical eye upon France’s collaborationist activities during the Occupation.

Although Chevalier’s name was cleared of such charges, his worldwide reputation remained somewhat tainted. During the McCarthy Era, he was denied entry to perform in the US. This decision was, however, reversed, and he was allowed to go into the US in 1954. After two decades away from Hollywood, he starred with Audrey Hepburn and Gary Cooper in *Love in the Afternoon* (Billy Wilder, 1957); with Leslie Caron in the aforementioned *Gigi* (1958), and with Shirley MacLaine and Frank Sinatra in *Can-Can* (Walter Lang, 1960).

Along with his honorary Oscar for contributions to film, Chevalier received the George Eastman Award (1957). Furthermore, he has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and his handprints are visible in cement in front of the TCL Chinese Theatre. He was given the Cecil B. DeMille Award (honorary Golden Globe) in 1959. Chevalier’s complex journey from Belleville to worldwide reputation is a remarkable rags-to-riches story in itself, on the background of two World Wars, two continents, two languages, and two careers: acting and singing.

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1. For further discussion of Pagnol’s *Marseilles Trilogy* and Logan’s *Fanny*, see Marcelline Block, ed., *World Film Locations: Marseilles* (Intellect, 2013).—Ed.


of three of his clients provides one of the funniest moments of the film. This film was an interesting mixture of cruelty and innocence: the cruelty of killing but also the compassion of the victim for his murderers.

Jean-Pierre Mocky, a director well-known for his subversive style, asked Darry Cowl to act in Les Saisons du plaisir (1988). Even though he had never stopped acting, working in Mocky's film was seen as a comeback for Darry Cowl, maybe because one has to watch this director's films with second-degree interpretation.

Many people in France are unaware that Darry Cowl composed the music of a few films between 1967 and 1977, including that of Ces messieurs de la gâchette (Raoul André, 1970), Le Concierge (Jean Girault, 1973), and Arrête ton char...bidasse ! (Michel Gérard, 1977), because what remains of Darry Cowl in people’s minds is an image of a simple, sincere and honest person; and this image of the actor – of the person – finds its sources in the characters he played and stuck to him perfectly.

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**Marcel Dalio** (1899–1983)
[Marcel Benoît Blauschild]

*Dalliance with ‘L’immortel’*  
*Dalio*

‘M* arcel de Blancheville or Marc de Beauchili? I was fifteen years old, and on the eve of leaving for the first time on tour with a company of actors I had to choose a name for myself. Something properly French, also a bit grandiloquent, and naturally aristocratic. Because there was no question of appearing on the poster under my real name: Israël Mosche Blauschild! It was enough to make the brave Swiss for whom we were to perform flee!

‘Blancheville or Beauchili? My decision was made: neither one nor the other...I had my idea. I was still dazzled by the memory of the handsome prince Danilo in _The Merry Widow_ and a name formed itself in my head: Dalino...Daloo...DALIO !!! I was baptized.’

It is not, perhaps, too much of an exaggeration to say that the destiny of Marcel Dalio, and that of twentieth century Europe, intersected with one another to the extent that the former could almost be considered to be the personification of the latter. As the above anecdote reveals, even Dalio’s stage name resonated with broader historical significance; by
Fernandel was much more than an actor; he was « une gueule » – a face; he was pretty much visual, very expressive, not only in movies, but also in shows or simply when singing. This characteristic was a combination of a heritage of his comique-troupier period (at the Alcazar in Marseilles) – a certain tradition of visual acting in silent films, even though he started in talking ones – and probably a very strong and typical characteristic of his home town.

He was born in 1903 in Marseilles, a place where people are known to be natural-born actors (in the way they talk, in trying to convince you, and also in exaggerating...). Fernand Joseph Désiré Contandin – nicknamed at the age of 8 « Fernand d’elle » ['Fernand of hers'] by his mother since he was always playing around with a girl who was later to become his wife – seemed to carry genes of drama added to this local particularity: his father was already in the Music-Hall and his ancestors were immigrants from the country of the Comedia dell’arte.

Before starting to play in movies, Fernandel had already acted on stage in his home town at the Alcazar. At that time cinema, even though quite popular, was not really an institution, and being an actor was not as glamorous as today. Thus, actors rarely started a career directly in cinema, and film budgets were tighter than nowadays: actors were mostly sought in cabarets or theatres where they had proven to be already professionally trained. Shows and music-halls on the one hand and cinema on the other were close in the 1930s, so that Fernandel naturally came to act quickly in films. When his film career started in earnest with Le Rosier de Madame Husson (dir. Dominique Bernard-Deschamps) in 1932, he had already shot 15 movies. His career was uninterrupted for 40 years and he acted in 148 films. However, among them quite a number were popular if not third-rate films (i.e. Les Gueux au paradis /Hoboes in Paradise, René le Hénaff, 1946); for such movies, his main interest was to make ‘easy money,’ to ensure a certain level of well-being for him and his family. At the same time he maintained his popularity and fame, and could not be easily forgotten.

Fortunately for French cinema he was also approached by great authors (Jean Giono, Crésus /Crouses, 1960) and could develop his dramatic acting talent more fully: one of them was his fellow Marseilles native Marcel Pagnol. Sharing the same French southern culture, their collaboration was successful and proved to be a real fusion (Angèle, 1934; Le Schpountz, 1938; La Fille du puisatier, 1940; Naïs, 1945; Tôpaze, 1951). In 1947, he accepted to shoot
Bernadette LAFONT (1938–2013)

La Fiancée de la Nouvelle Vague

Since making her screen debut at age 19 in François Truffaut’s short film Les Mistons /The Mischief Makers (1957) – opposite her then-husband Gérard Blain, as her lover – filmed in her hometown of Nîmes in southern France, Bernadette Lafont had roles in over 120 films. She is associated with the auteurs and cinematic production of the French New Wave. ¹ Lafont’s impertinent spirit was noted by many directors, including Truffaut: ‘The New Wave style was an impulsive one, of youthful insolence tinged with self-conscious theatricality, and Lafont had a natural gift for both, as seen in the treasure trove of movies that she sparked in the sixties and seventies.’ ² Michèle Marie lists Lafont first in his discussion of New Wave actresses, stating that with her ‘natural sensuality, her stunning smile, and her liveliness,’ Lafont was ‘the closest to a Renoir-inspired actress that the New Wave could generate’ and ‘the first real model of a New Wave woman.’ ³ According to Ginette Vincendeau, Lafont ‘occupied a specific niche in the New Wave female galaxy, against Jeanne Moreau and Emmanuelle Riva’s cerebral heroines on the one hand and Jean Seberg and Anna Karina’s Godardian gamines on the other.’ ⁴

Lafont was cast in a leading role in what is often considered the first New Wave film, Claude Chabrol’s directorial debut, Le Beau Serge /Handsome Serge (1958). Here, Lafont incarnates Marie, bent on seducing François (Jean-Claude Brialy), who has just returned to his home village and is devastated by his best friend Serge’s (Blain) downward spiral into alcoholism. In Chabrol’s 1960 Les Bonnes Femmes /The Good-Time Girls, Lafont is Jane, a Parisian shopgirl who enjoys singlehood: staying out all night with male strangers, yet seeing another man during the day. In this brutal single-girl-in-the-city narrative, Lafont embodies the ‘good time girl’ as alluded to by the film’s title in its English translation, whereas her co-worker, the soulful Jacqueline (Clotilde Joano) succumbs to her bad luck at the hands of a motorcyclist drifter who preys upon gullible women. Along with Le Beau Serge and Les Bonnes Femmes, Lafont collaborated with Chabrol on several films, including his first thriller, À double tour /Leda (1959), as a maid named Julie who flaunts her half-naked body in front of an open window in the initial scene (in Jacques Doniol-Valcroze’s 1960 L’Eau à la bouche /A Game for Six Lovers, Lafont was again cast as a maid); in the 1961 revenge tale Les Godelureaux /Wise Guys, she is Ambroisine who is sent by Roger (Brialy) to seduce a man who had publicly humiliated him; in Violette Nozière (1978), she is the prison cellmate of Violette (Isabelle Huppert in her César-nominated turn), and she is two-time widow Hélène Mons in L’Inspecteur Lavardin (1986), the second Chabrol film to feature Jean Poiret as the titular investigator, one year after his first appearance in Poulet au vinaigre /Chicken with Vinegar (1985).

More than ten years after Les Mistons,
special presentation screening at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2013.

Marcelline Block  
Princeton University and SAG-AFTRA

1. The phrase « La Fiancée de la nouvelle vague » is from André Labarthe’s 2007 documentary film, Bernadette Lafont, exactement (shown on France 3 television), http://www.vodeo.tv/documentaire/bernadette-lafont-exactement.


Christophe Lambert (1957– )

From Tarzan to Tartan

Christophe LAMBERT was born on Long Island, New York in 1957, but grew up in Geneva, where his family moved in 1959. Having headed to Paris at sixteen to pursue a career in film, he was persuaded by his parents into brief sojourns in the French military and the London Stock Exchange, but soon returned to acting.

Lambert played roles in a handful of French productions in the late 1970s and early 1980s (his debut was in Sergio Gobbi’s Ciao, les mecs /Ciao, You Guys (1979), playing an unnamed hooligan), but he has his ‘introductory’ credit on a British film: Hugh Hudson’s reverent Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes (1984). Cast as Tarzan – although the character is never named as such outside of film’s title – Lambert’s accent is explained, in a detail consistent with Edgar Rice Burroughs’ 1912 novel, as due to having learned English from a French naval officer. The film was nominated for several writing and technical awards, with Lambert’s highly physical performance as a lithe and sinuous ape-man, in stark contrast to the musclemen of previous incarnations, also drawing positive critical attention. Ironically, the ‘intense gaze’ so admired by casting director Patsy Pollock was attributable to the actor’s acute myopia. His subsequent
Simone Simon (1910–2005)

Simone Simon committed herself to a series of roles that prevented us from thinking of her outside of purely sexual terms. Yet when we review her films, we are struck by the radiant purity of her features rather than by any illicit connotations implied by her roles. No one exploited this dichotomy to greater effect than Jean Renoir who, in one of his many masterstrokes of truly great casting, chose Simon for the role of Séverine in his classic adaptation of Émile Zola’s La Bête humaine (1938). During Séverine’s entrance, we are instantly struck by exactly how the danger behind Simone’s erotic appeal functioned: when Roubaud (Fernand Ledoux) returns home to Séverine, he pauses at the open door of his apartment as a grin slowly illuminates his face. Breathtakingly, he utters his wife’s name. And there she is, smiling sweetly and innocently, as lush and intelligent as the cat she fondly strokes. All because of her simple smile and relaxed familiarity, we are immediately aware that she is the heartbreaker, the troublemaker, the femme fatale.

Although we can ascribe a large part of her magnificent performance to Renoir’s world-renowned capabilities as a director of actors, it remains nonetheless remarkable that Simon’s image had so little impact on the French public despite acting in his films for five years. Simon entered the French film scene in 1931, initially working with minor directors such as Serge de Poligny and Carmine Gallone. Following completion of Les Beaux Jours /Happy Days (1935), her fourth collaboration with Marc Allégret, Simon opted for Hollywood.

Simon signed with 20th Century Fox but her unique aura of childishness tinged with eroticism bore little impact on the American screen. Some of her native French critics viewed her American work as utter nonsense, which was a reflection of both the unchanging nature of her mediocre acting style and the contrived material assigned to Simon during her contract with Darryl F. Zanuck. Girls’ Dormitory (1936, Irving Cummings) placed her opposite Ruth Chatterton, whose impeccably pronounced words only served to highlight Simon’s intrusively thick French accent. Of them all, her casting in Ladies in Love (1936) reveals the otherness of her beauty within its American context and grants insight into the reasons for her surprising lack of enduring success during this phase of her career: compared with the tame eyes of Loretta Young and the classy coolness of Constance Bennett, Simon is nothing short of redundant and seems years ahead of her time. That Bennett’s career, at its peak during the early 1930s, subsequently went into sharp decline and Simon’s rose higher than ever before is indicative of the changing tastes in American society and the emerging demand for a new, smart, fatalistic beauty that would
after this and following *The Extra Day* (1956, William Fairchild), she accepted no roles until 1973, when she appeared one last time, still lovely, in *La Femme en bleu /The Woman in Blue* (1973, Michel Deville).

Although Simon was surely as great an object of desire in life as in art, she never married, and died in Paris at the age of 94.

**Barry Nevin**

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2. Ibid., 261.

**Jacques Tati** (1907–1982)

[Jacques Tatischeff]

*Belo**ved** French director and actor Jacques Tati, born Jacques Tatischeff in 1907, was French with Russian, Dutch, and Italian origins. After a successful music hall and theatre career in the 1930s, Tati played minor parts after the war in two of Claude Autant-Lara’s films, *Sylvie et le fantôme /Sylvia and the Ghost* (1946) and *Le Diable au corps /Devil in the Flesh* (1947). In 1947, Tati wrote, directed, and starred in a short entitled *L’École des facteurs /The School for Postmen*, which pays tribute to Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, silent American actors of the 1920s. With the success of this short film, he wrote the all-time classic *Jour de fête* (1949), for which he shot two versions: one in black and white and another in colour. It proved to be a huge success. His second full-length feature film, *Les Vacances de M. Hulot /Monsieur Hulot’s Holiday* (1953) gave Tati international fame. *Mon oncle* (1958), continuing Hulot’s saga, was, according to François Truffaut, a masterpiece. Tati’s *Playtime* (1967) portrays the robotic and dehumanized technology of modern society. Not only was this film the most expensive film ever made at the time – to the
Dubbed the ‘sexiest actor alive’, Lambert Wilson has also expressed, through the distinctive warm timbre of his voice, the many facets of his talent and commitment, including repeated forays into ecological, social, political, and spiritual causes. Actor, director, singer, model, but also activist, Lambert Wilson is an Officier des Arts et Lettres and holds the highest French honour, the Légion d’Honneur. This multilingual and proteiform chameleon has now made this established versatility his trademark.

Born in 1958, Lambert Wilson is the son of Georges Wilson, a prominent actor who directed the Théâtre National Populaire. Hard-working and eager to prove his own theatrical abilities, Lambert Wilson graduated from the prolific Drama Centre in London in 1977 and soon played a leading role in Fred Zinneman’s Five Days One Summer (1982), appeared in Peter Greenaway’s The Belly of an Architect (1987), and a number of French television drama and feature films, among which his father’s successful La Vouivre (1989). His sensitive portrayal of l’Abbé Pierre, a prominent French figure of generosity, and his work with famous directors such as Claude Chabrol (Le Sang des autres /The Blood of Others, 1984), Andrzej Wajda (Les Possédés /The Possessed, 1988), and Carlos Saura (El Dorado, 1988), brought him international fame. The many facets of the characters he plays, Wilson claims, correspond to 7 to 9 characters he bears within himself which allow him to impersonate a pompous dandy just as well as a Trappist monk or Céline Dion.

Throughout the 1990s, Wilson also became well-known for his memorable and high-profile theatrical acting alongside confirmed stars such as Judi Dench (A Little Night Music), and his father (Eurydice). A director himself, Lambert Wilson successfully directed Alfred de Musset’s Les Caprices de Marianne, Marivaux’s La Fausse Suivante and Racine’s Bérénice. But aside from this high-brow profile, Lambert Wilson does not deny himself the pleasure of popular culture. Indeed, his more intellectual experiences seem to feed off his crowd-pleasing roles and vice-versa – and that is precisely where his English and French experiences fully blend. While giving ‘commercial works’ the lightness of his talent, he also elegantly fills them with the serious work he puts in everything he touches: songs, comedies (Alain Resnais’s On connaît la chanson /Same Old Song, 1997; Fabien Onteniente’s Jet Set, 2000; Valérie Lemercier’s Palais royal!, 2005; Victor Levin’s 2014 romantic comedy 5 to 7); sci-fi (Merovingian in the Wachowskis’s The Matrix films; the 2014 short film The Nostalgist by Giacomo Cimini); cartoons (Ernest et Célestine, Stéphane Aubier, Vincent Patar, Benjamin
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Artists

Jenny Batlay (PhD Columbia University) had her first painting exhibition at age 12 in Montpellier, France, and her second at age 14 in Paris at the Galérie Marcel Bernheim. A portrait painter, she has painted violinists David Oistrakh and Yehudi Menuhin (in the collection of the late Queen Elisabeth of the Belgians), Pablo Casals, Henri Mondor, and many actors in Hollywood and France. She now lives in New York. Her article ‘L’art du portrait dans Gil Blas: Effet d’esthétique à travers le mouvement’ in *Studies on Voltaire* (1974) is in the *Bibliographie des Études sur Gil Blas et Lesage*, Journées d’agrégation (Paris: 2002).

Igor Bratusek was born in France and graduated at Paris Sorbonne, where he is now employed. His passion for cinema, drawing, and photography has motivated him to illustrate this book on French actors. He particularly likes to draw portrait caricatures and drawings with an emphasis on word plays.
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Twelve of the 175 drawings for this book by artists Jenny Batlay and Igor Bratusek