

Chapter 3

French Cinema of the Occupation

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With the beginning of a global conflict that rapidly resulted in the enforced censorship of most commercialized productions in Europe, the makers of French cinema, already debilitated by the industry's own structural organization (or rather from the absence of it), could not possibly detect any optimistic sign for the future. Notwithstanding the importation of hundreds of German productions, the ban on Anglo-American movies unpredictably encouraged French filmmakers. And while the sudden vanishing of foreign competition, in terms of cinematographic productions, coupled with the massive exodus of its most celebrated stars, could have quite realistically reduced the economic impetus and artistic vigor of the French film industry, the actual consequences proved just the opposite. The Nazi Occupation, with its compulsory need for pleasure and inherent escapism, saw an outburst of original works, the rise of first-time young directors, and the creation of a cinematographic school that lasted until the era of the French New Wave in the late 1950s. During the Occupation, more than two hundred films were directed and released in France. Today, many of them belong to what film historians as well as typical moviegoers consider classics; for example, Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du Paradis*, 1945).

FRANCE IN 1940

France and Great Britain reluctantly declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, two days after the invasion of Poland and the annexation of Danzig. On May 10, 1940, after a seven-month hiatus from military combat (what the French called the *drôle de guerre*), came the first wave of Nazi invasions in the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and later France. Following the collapse of the French army, the German Wehrmacht crossed the French border using blitzkrieg tactics and entered an undefended Paris on June 14. Unlike the dramatic events of the preceding year, which occurred during the first hours of World War II on French territory, the year 1940 was an economic loss for the French film industry.¹ From May until October of that year, due to various military interventions and civil evacuations, all movie productions were stopped and existing distribution instantaneously dried up. The German invasion indirectly forced the already weakened French Parliament to find another strategy and leader. Numerous well-known politicians, such as General Charles de Gaulle, Edouard Daladier, and Pierre Mendès-France, had already left for England and North Africa to set up a government in exile. In his famous radio appeal on June 18, 1940, de Gaulle attempted to persuade French partisans to resume combat on the Allied side (although the French army was reduced to 100,000 soldiers and the navy was neutralized in all its ports). While many French citizens gathered to listen to de Gaulle's appeal, however, Marshal Philippe Pétain, hero of World War I and eighty-four years old at the time, had already persuaded a French majority to collaborate with the Germans occupying France in a publicly broadcast appeal. As a result, Pétain remained the principal political figure for France. De Gaulle became the head of the Resistance movement outside France, involving the Free French forces and a French National Committee, to which some colonial territories rallied.

An armistice accord between the German high command of the armed forces and French government representatives took place near Compiègne on June 22, 1940 (in the very same railway car that had been the scene of the French and Allied forces' triumph in 1918). Compelled to immediately cease fire against German troops in France as well as in French colonies and territories, the French government also had to face many difficult stipulations of the armistice; this included the immediate selection of the seat of its future government in unoccupied France. The country was separated into two different zones, which delimited the northern part of France as the "occupied zone," where the German army exerted strict control over the administration, and the southern part as the "free zone," an area that nevertheless

remained under the control of a collaborationist government located in Vichy. Caught by intense panic, the French Parliament met in Vichy on July 10 to desperately organize the remains of the devastated country. The debates were clearly dominated by Pierre Laval, at the time Pétain's prime minister, who genuinely persuaded the rest of the legislative body that France had lost the battle and consequently saw it as his duty to settle the country within the new Nazi guidelines. By dint of Laval's persuasion, the parliament voted full power to the *maréchal*, marking the end of France's prewar government as well as the termination of the Third Republic. Marshal Pétain's close collaborators, with the exception of Laval and a few others, rapidly gathered right-wing conservatives and traditionalists, whereas real pro-Fascist activists, such as Jacques Doriot and Marcel Déat, who aspired to an authentic Fascist regime, left Vichy for Paris, where they used German funding to conspire against Pétain. While Vichy's actual power still included unoccupied France and numerous colonies, Laval's administration was never recognized by the Allies, and instead functioned as a puppet government for Nazi authorities.

Before the coming of pro-Nazi propaganda in 1940, no politicians of the Third Republic wanted to fight for the film medium, which for them was considered no more than a common form of entertainment for merely popular exhibitions. What had characterized the French film industry during the preceding decade was its total lack of structure and regulation as well as its inclination toward amateurism and improvisation. Film historians agree that the German invasion of France occurred at a significant time for the always-struggling French film industry, which had neither technically nor financially improved from the setback inflicted by the American talkies of the early 1930s. The mobilization of French troops put the country in suspense, and the film industry, much like other sectors of society and the economy, was no exception. More than twenty films were interrupted with the outbreak of war.

Although diminished by the exodus of its most notorious talents of the late 1930s (Jean Renoir, René Clair, Julien Duvivier, Max Ophüls, Jean Gabin, Louis Jouvet, and Michèle Morgan, among others), French cinema was in fact on the threshold of one of its greatest periods. The lack of activity and numerous restrictions imposed by the war as well as the difficult living conditions drew large crowds to movie theaters (which were often heated during the wintertime).² With the recognition of the film medium as a new and efficient weapon of propaganda, it was decided by the Nazi administration on September 9, 1940, to prohibit British and American films in occupied Europe, which indirectly facilitated the production of new French films. European spectatorship then had the choice between German, Italian, and French

movies. Not surprisingly, the "captive French public" overwhelmingly preferred French films.

As early as July 1940, the German management for French cinema in France intended to create extremely favorable conditions for the German film market at all levels of productions (distribution, management, technical industries, and actors). Along with the creation of new German movie companies in France, the new regulations enslaved the entire profession to the mercy of the Propaganda Abteilung (propaganda department), and the development of the German film market in France imposed the establishment of new economic structures, such as participations to the capital of preexisting French film companies, the "aryanization" of film companies, the creation of new French film companies with German capital, and the hiring of the best French directors, technicians, actors, and actresses of the moment.

THE EXODUS OF FRENCH CINEMA CELEBRITIES

Numerous young emerging actors and actresses of French cinema, such as Michèle Morgan, Danielle Darrieux, Micheline Presle, and Michel Auclair—often called "Left Bank celebrities"—established themselves at the Grand Hotel in Cannes or in the outskirts of Nice, appearing to have left behind the rising political tension of the summer of 1939. The first Cannes Film Festival, slated to begin on September 1, 1939, the day Poland was stormed, was irrevocably canceled (it officially came into being on September 19, 1946). For those who decided to flee abroad, the road to Hollywood was far from easy. In addition to having a required visa from the French authorities and one from the country of destination, candidates for departure had to cross the Pyrenees and Spain to reach Portugal (a neutral country at the time) because all the Atlantic ports had been closed.

Françoise Rosay, actress and wife of film director Jacques Feyder, fled with her husband to Switzerland. Erich von Stroheim, Marcel Dalio,³ Jean-Pierre Aumont, Julien Duvivier,⁴ and Max Ophüls embarked on transatlantic voyages. Pressured by the German ambassador to set up a play in Germany, Louis Jouvet pretended to be involved in a theatrical tour in Switzerland in order to flee occupied France and go to South America for the next four years. Following in the footsteps of several of his fellow countrymen, Jean Gabin turned down an offer from Continental, a newly created German film company based in France, to avoid the drastic working conditions of the Nazi occupation. He instead expatriated himself to the United States, ultimately signing with Fox Studios. Although already a national celebrity in France and one of the best-known media magnets of the big screen all over the world, Gabin's American film experiences in *Moontide* (*La péniche*

de l'amour, 1942) and *The Impostor* (*L'imposteur*, 1944) did not succeed and did not meet the actor's prior level of prestige (though directed by prominent directors such as Fritz Lang and Archie Mayo, respectively). In 1943, following a brief romance with Marlene Dietrich³ and discontented with his American interlude, Gabin first enrolled in the Free French navy, then in the Free French forces, and ended the war as a tank driver in the Second Division Blindée. It was only in the 1950s that Gabin, away from the French screen for more than ten years, regained his reputation as a top actor in French cinema. Unlike the suburban proletarian or mobster roles of his prewar films, he was now used for experienced, successful middle-aged men of confidence and authority in such films as Marcel Carné's *La Marie du Port* (1949).

In 1940 Gabin's "lover" in *Port of Shadows*, the young Michèle Morgan, also fled to Hollywood, where she married actor William Marshall and signed a contract with RKO. Unfortunately, like most of her compatriots in the United States, her films were mediocre and her luck was often bad. Even in Tim Whelan's *Higher and Higher* (1943), starring the young Frank Sinatra, the femme fatale image imposed on Morgan failed. Chosen by Warner Brothers' Studios for the leading role in *Casablanca*, RKO would not release her for the suggested compensation, so the part went to Ingrid Bergman. Michèle Morgan did, however, appear with Humphrey Bogart in Michael Curtiz's *Passage to Marseilles* (1944), a substandard continuation of *Casablanca*. Her Hollywood feature films included Robert Stevenson's *Joan of Paris* (1942) and Edwin L. Marin's *Two Tickets to London* (1943).

Another French actress who got her ticket to Hollywood was Danielle Darrieux (b. 1917). Her career extended from the beginning of French sound pictures. Starting as one of France's most celebrated artists, she starred with Charles Boyer in Anatole Litvak's *Mayerling* (1936). Danielle Darrieux embarked for her Hollywood sojourn in 1937 and was quickly contracted by Universal Studios. After the release of Henry Koster's *The Rage of Paris* (*Coqueluche de Paris*, 1938), she returned to France unexpectedly (Universal Studios filed a suit for contract violation, but the quarrel fell into oblivion with the outbreak of the war). During the Occupation, she worked for Continental and, in particular, got involved with fellow actors Viviane Romance, Suzy Delair, Junie Astor, and Albert Préjean in a *tournee de galas* organized by studio manager Alfred Greven in Germany (March 18-31, 1942), which brought suspicions of collaboration against her in 1944. In the 1950s, Danielle Darrieux no longer played the French coquette and wild adolescent but rather mature roles such as Emma in Max Ophüls's *La ronde* (*La ronde*, 1950), an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's *Reigen*, and Madame Rosa in *House of Pleasure* (*Le plaisir*, 1951). Her most famous films are the above-mentioned as well as *The Truth of Our*

Marriage (*La vérité sur Bébé Donge*, 1951), *Napoléon* (*Napoléon*, 1954), *The Red and the Black* (*Le rouge et le noir*, 1954), and *Pilgrimage to Rome* (*L'année sainte*, 1976).

Actors were not the only professionals of the French film industry to flee the Nazi invasion. Directors like Jean Renoir also chose the American alternative. Renoir's situation in France, similar to Carné's but more pressing, was precarious because several of his films were fiercely disapproved by the new regime (*The Crime of Monsieur Lange* and *People of France*, both in 1936).⁶ He also had signed several articles with a strong emphasis on his anti-German sentiments. Renoir directed six films during his Hollywood interval. Between 1940 and 1946, his movies received a tepid welcome by American audiences. One of the main objections Renoir had to face in the United States was the strong aversion for his new creations involving French themes presented through a Hollywood perspective and technique. This alleged artistic "duplicity" clearly disoriented the French public, which did not recognize the creator of *Grand Illusion*, the film that brought Renoir international attention and acclaim from American producers.

When the German army invaded France, Renoir, while directing *The Story of Tosca* (*La Tosca*) in Italy, called off the shooting of the film. Later that same year, encouraged by other filmmakers residing in the United States to join the Hollywood experience, he embarked for New York, where he arrived in December. In California, he signed a short-term contract with Twentieth Century-Fox. Darryl Zanuck wanted Renoir to remain within a strictly French background by showing a typical French story in an emblematic French landscape for the American public. But Renoir intended just the opposite: to present American subject matter through a privileged foreign eye. Renoir's legacy included *Swamp Water* (1941) and *This Land Is Mine* (1943), his biggest success. In March 1944, Renoir was asked to shoot a short film entitled *Salute to France* for the American GIs just prior to their landing in Normandy. At the end of 1944, Renoir directed *The Southerner*, the release of which in 1945 dismayed the American public in the South, but won the prize for Best Actor and Best Director at the New York Film Critics Awards, as well as the Golden Lion of Venice that same year. Finally in 1946, Jean Renoir completed *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, followed by *Woman on the Beach* in 1947. With *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, the "Frenchness" of his talent was for the first time fully revealed on screen, as Zanuck had expected from the beginning of Renoir's American sojourn. Renoir's penchant for creativity and original cinematic techniques gave him a new dimension and style once in Hollywood. Greatly captivated with water imagery and symbolism (like his father), Renoir repeatedly used the element as a symbol of eternal life. In 1951, in India, he shot a motion picture entitled *The*

River, an inspired color production (before making his comeback in Italy in 1952 with *The Golden Coach/Carrosse d'or*). Yet, in taking a critical distance from Renoir's overall career, all of his Hollywood movies can be ranked among his least memorable works as a result of the significant obstacles he faced in adapting to the American production structure.

The same certainly could not be said for actor Charles Boyer (1897–1978), whose career blossomed in Paris during the 1920s, and who rapidly became a popular actor on stage as well as on screen. Constantly in search of the latest European rising talents, MGM invited Boyer to Hollywood and shortly offered the ambitious actor a contract. The main ambition of MGM was to make a star out of the young French talent. To charm and persuade American spectators, however, Boyer, although already speaking several foreign languages, had to be fluent in English. He had to learn rapidly in order to survive the fast production pace of Hollywood studios. While Boyer diligently worked on his English, Irving Thalberg, MGM's legendary vice president, took a personal interest in the young actor, offering him roles in French versions of MGM's films for European markets. Boyer costarred with the most famous actresses of the time: Ingrid Bergman, Marlene Dietrich, and Greta Garbo. Following his marriage to British actress Pat Paterson,⁷ Boyer also worked in Europe, most notably with his performance in *Mayerling*. At age thirty-nine, during the first hours of the war, Boyer joined the French army and fought until the defeat of 1940. Nevertheless, he maintained many contacts with the Free French units of the Resistance throughout the Occupation. Boyer's movie career remained successful; he made more than eighty films, including famous American dramas such as *All This and Heaven Too* (1940) with Bette Davis and *Gaslight* (1944) with Ingrid Bergman, as well as remakes of French blockbusters such as *Algiers* (1938), adapted from Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko*; *The Thirteenth Letter* (1951), adapted from Henri-Georges Clouzot's controversial *Le Corbeau* (1942); and his last feature performance in *A Matter of Time* (1976). Boyer's soft and languorous voice completed to perfection the romantic image of "Frenchness" that Hollywood conveyed for decades on the screen.

Another image of the French that Hollywood proudly paraded on screen—though less romantic but with abounding gusto—was the one created by Maurice Chevalier (1888–1972). Parisian by birth, and from the most Parisian of all districts, *Ménilmontant*, Chevalier became an international show business legend over several decades, beginning in the 1920s with his music hall successes, such as "Mimi" and "Valentine," at the Casino de Paris. He signed with Paramount Studios and landed his first role in Hollywood for a musical entitled *Innocents of Paris* (*La chanson de Paris*, 1928), just one year after Alan Crossland's

The Jazz Singer, starring Al Jolson. Chevalier embodied the stereotypical Parisian with his distinctive *gouaille* (verbal stamina), cheerfulness, and, of course, heavy French accent. During the Occupation, his tour through Germany in support of French prisoners of war later attracted suspicion of possible indulgence toward the German régime. He was nominated for Academy Awards for Ernst Lubitsch's *The Love Parade* (*Parade d'amour*, 1929) and Hobart Henley's *The Big Pond* (*La grande mare*, 1930). In 1958, his performance in *Gigi* reactivated his Hollywood career following the McCarthy era, during which he had been explicitly labeled a communist. Maurice Chevalier retired from the theatrical stage in 1968.

Because of the numerous voluntary and involuntary precipitated departures to Hollywood (and other destinations), several assistant directors rose to become directors. Although they started their career under extremely difficult conditions, the new generation of filmmakers already had extensive training in the cinematographic industry, contrary to their predecessors, who had learned from the outside.⁸ Most saw their cinematographic careers soar. These included Jacques Becker, for *It Happened at the Inn* (*Goupi-Mains-Rouges*, 1943); Robert Bresson, for *Angels of the Streets* (*Les anges du péché*, 1943) and *Ladies of the Park* (*Les dames du Bois de Boulogne*, 1945); Clouzot, for *The Murderer Lives at Number 21* (*L'assassin habite au 21*, 1942); Louis Daquin, for *Portrait of Innocence* (*Nous les gosses*, 1941) and *Premier de cordée* (1943); and André Cayatte for *Shop-Girls of Paris* (*Au Bonheur des Dames*, 1943). Along with these new directors came new actors, such as Suzy Delair (b. 1916), Jean Marais (1913-98), Alain Cuny (1908-94), Serge Reggiani (b. 1922), Gérard Philipe (1922-59), Martine Carol (1920-67), Danièle Delorme (b. 1926), Maria Casarès (1922-96), Paul Meurisse (1912-79), Daniel Gelin (b. 1921), Marie Déa (1912-92), Micheline Presle (b. 1922), Odette Joyeux (b. 1914), and Madeleine Sologne (1912-95). Although most entertainment activities were slow during the first months of the war, movie theaters and music halls were almost always sold out because they offered a depressed and discontented population an immediate escape from the reality of the Occupation, hunger, and endless material struggles. During the entire period of the Occupation, the French public enjoyed some of its most celebrated actors: Fernandel (1903-71), Raimu (1883-1946), Saturnin Fabre (1884-1961), Pierre Renoir (1885-1952), Albert Préjean (1894-1979), Robert Le Vigan (1900-1972), Pierre Fresnay (1897-1975), Fernand Ledoux (1897-1993), Jean-Louis Barrault (1910-94), Viviane Romance (1909-91), Arletty (1898-1992), Mireille Balin (1909-68), Edwige Feuillère (1907-98), Harry Baur (1880-1943), Charles Vanel (1892-1989), Michel Simon (1895-1975), Jules Berry (1883-1951), Gaby Morlay (1893-1964), Madeleine Renaud (1900-1994), Ginette

Leclerc (1912-92), and others. Not surprisingly, the most popular movie genres, mainly of the "escapist" variety,⁹ were comedies, costume dramas, romantic comedies, thrillers, historical productions, and legendary tales. According to film historian Jean-Pierre Bertin-Maghit, French movies eagerly dodged the reality of life since audiences equally wanted to escape the reality of war. Among the 220 films produced during the war years, only a handful reflected a contemporary situation dealing with the war and the reality of the Nazi Occupation.¹⁰

FRENCH CINEMA AND VICHY

Although Vichy's spirit constantly strived to invest in French cinema and its industry, it never quite succeeded in maneuvering its works of art during the four years of the Occupation. And as paradoxical as it may appear, much of French filmmaking took shape during this tormented period. The slogan *Travail, Famille, Patrie* (Labor, Family, Homeland) illustrated an entire symbolist paradigm of family values, the joy of labor,¹¹ and craftsmanship that became the content of documentaries. It was also the occasion for the extreme right wing to create a climate of expiation for all the "mistakes" made during the preceding decade (allegedly caused by the Jews and left-wing Republicans with Masonic connections) and to eventually censor the best French productions from the preceding years: *Hôtel du Nord*, *Grand Illusion*, *Port of Shadows*, and *Daybreak*, among them.

A fervent anti-Semitism emerged following decades of politically right extremist activities coupled with the pressure of the occupying forces (Referat Film cinema services as well as the Propaganda Staffel directed at the time by Dr. Dietrich). Marshal Pétain, who never tempered his political position against "too much" Jewish influence in the Third Republic, certainly capitalized on the indistinguishable ill feelings held by many toward political leaders of the Popular Front and its successors, such as former premier Léon Blum and Edouard Daladier (Jewish and non-Jewish, respectively), who were speedily put on trial by the Vichy government for their political ties with the former administration. In this context, Vichy presented the German presence as a just and logical punishment. Subsequently, Jews and communists were the principal guilty icons. Many directors, caught by this hostile momentum, published articles about the negative presence of Hollywood productions on French soil.¹² Marcel L'Herbier himself, a pioneer of French silent films, indulged in a critical discourse that left no doubt about the political climate of the Occupation: it clearly represented French cinema as the victim of American and Jewish economic powers. Indeed, the presence of Jews, much more important on the production side of the cinematographic industry than

on the acting scene, had inherited a bad reputation following the scandalous bankruptcy of the Pathé-Nathan company in 1936 (see chapter 1). The Third Republic's low "cinematographic standards," represented and influenced by the American "enemy," were regularly identified as the source of the disaster and placed in opposition to the moral order.

Subsequent to the creation of a new commission, labeled the *Commissariat général aux questions juives* (Commission for Jewish Affairs), French authorities undertook a legalistic process to authenticate different origins and proof of "Jewishness" or "non-Jewishness." On October 3, 1940, Vichy introduced, on its own volition, the articles of the new racial laws: any individual who had two Jewish grandparents or who was married to a Jew would fall into the category of Jewish. With the immediate implementation of these decrees Jews, or categorized Jews, were no longer allowed to exercise the professions of film directors, administrators, business managers, company and theater owners, cameramen, and journalists.¹³ Prohibiting Jewish participation in any of the film industry's activity began the long and latent "purification" process of the cinematographic profession. But the role of Vichy in the massive arrests and deportation of Jews created dismay and to this day remains controversial. The silent and systematic repression exerted by the French public administration in tracking down the "unwelcome" foreigners throughout the 1930s is an essential component without which an understanding of the actual preestablished process would not be possible. In 1940, the representation of Jews as the enemy of France was already widespread and therefore did not break new ground. One could argue that the version, according to which Nazi pressure railroaded the Vichy government to enact anti-Semitic laws and to establish a process of "aryanization" of Jewish property in France, remains somewhat unverified.

Following the declaration of war, many foreign Jews who were involved in French cinema were arrested and sent to French camps; others were able to flee abroad, or for a few, to work underground under a different name (for example, Joseph Kosma who worked under the pseudonym of Georges Mouque and Alexandre Trauner, who, unlike many eastern Europeans, had chosen to remain with his prewar crew). The witch hunt had begun. The participation of French police in virtually all anti-Semitic apprehensions, both in the occupied and free zones, facilitated the events of the *Vélodrome d'Hiver* of July 1942, which sent thousands of Jews to deportation and death camps.¹⁴ Vichy's policy seemed to be a vindictive enterprise of the late anti-Dreyfus activists more than an enactment of allegiance to the occupying forces. Actors themselves, though safeguarded by their national fame and deference, could not elude the unremitting allegations of an

anti-Semitic press. Harry Baur, one of the most reputable French actors, who starred in Maurice Tourneur's *Volpone* in 1940, also had one of the most tragic destinies. After his participation in Continental's first production with Christian-Jaque's *The Murder of Santa Claus* (*L'assassinat du Père Noël*, 1941), the actor was suddenly accused of Jewish origins by the collaborationist review *Je suis partout*. While firmly defending himself about his identity, he was forced by the Nazis to play a role in *La symphonie d'une vie* (1942), a German musical comedy. But after shooting the film, the accusations came back to haunt him. Following his return to France, authorities declared him an English agent who had provided help in the escape of several prisoners.¹⁵ Baur was immediately arrested and sent to prison. He died a Nazi prisoner, worn out by the physical, psychological, and moral tortures he underwent in 1943, just a few days after his liberation on April 8.

How well organized was the French film industry before the advent of the war? From the early years of the Lumière brothers' Cinématographe in 1895 until Renoir's *The Rules of the Game* in 1939, its history had been, even for its greatest masterpieces, an endless epic of adventurous enterprises that conjoined financial scandals with artistic feats, and bankruptcy with unprecedented creativity. For the first time, despite all the social upheavals, French cinema was contained within a firm political and economic structure. Consequently, the government was finally able to take command of the industry and of the distribution of motion pictures. The war was also a good occasion for the government, and indirectly the industry, to unconditionally regulate the economic and logistic flaws¹⁶ of the past and ultimately to impose administrative guidelines on a profession that for decades had produced a certain customary negligence. The film industry was now attached to a ministry called the General Secretary of Information, and Cinema Services became the central organ of its management. The government was concomitantly in charge of censorship commissions, propaganda initiatives, production assessments, negotiations with the Propaganda Abteilung and the decisions of a new structure, the COIC, or Comité d'organisation des industries cinématographiques (Organizational Committee for Cinematographic Industry). Created on October 26, 1940, the COIC was directed by Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour and Raoul Ploquin.

The new COIC put up countless obstacles to French filmmakers. One of the first resolutions of the committee was to impose the use of the famous *carte professionnelle* (CIP, or professional card) without which no actor, director, cameraman, or set assistant could possibly work. To be able to begin the shooting of a movie, producers had to obtain a triple license for all stages of production. A production visa (mandatory

until 1942), a management visa (*visa d'exploitation*), and finally, if necessary, an exportation visa were attributed by the Referat Film and distributed by the newly created COIC. Needless to say, only non-Jewish and experienced directors were the recipients. In addition to that obstacle, directors had to deal with the shortage of film stock, which consequently reduced the number of allocated licenses by half (not including the numerous power cuts that choked production until 1944). German control and power over French filmmaking rapidly increased. On October 17, 1940, the Nazi military command intercepted all existing negatives of films made after January 1, 1939, and later on May 21, 1941, it confiscated all films whose initial screening was prior to October 1, 1937, as well as films that "ostentatiously" exalted French patriotism.¹⁷ (Once the films were destroyed, the recovered nitrates were reused to make blank-film stock.) After the disappearance of all Anglo-American movies on European soil, German productions started to invade the French market in 1941, growing from twenty percent of the market to saturate the screens completely.

Another restrictive outcome was the abolition of double programming in theaters. Before the advent of the COIC, French audiences used to enjoy for the price of a ticket the so-called double programming which included two movies back to back, one of which usually corresponded to a B-picture feature film, plus newsreels, a documentary, and several live attractions. But with the limitation of film and power, and the introduction of curfews, the new commission imposed the *programme unique*, which now included one feature film, one documentary, and a single newsreel. It was during the projections of the *Wochenschau* (weekly show) that most of the mockery came from spectators who were outraged by the level and content of the Nazi propaganda. As expected, when appearing on screen, the Germans were immediately booed, whereas the English and Americans were acclaimed. Nevertheless, not all new measures emanating from the COIC were to be considered restrictive and punitive. Several new measures benefited the film industry to such a degree that some are still active today. These include the establishment of a censorship system to protect viewers under the age of sixteen, the normalization and uniformity of ticket prices (which finally regulated box office statistics and compelled theater managers to be accountable for their profits), the establishment of advances to anticipated productions starting in May 1941 and financial assistance to short film productions¹⁸ (because of the prohibition against double bills, which indirectly benefited the shorts), and the creation in January 1944 of the prestigious Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC/French Institute of Advanced Film Studies, which has since become known as FEMIS), presided over by Marcel L'Herbier.¹⁹

PROPAGANDA AND CENSORSHIP: THE CASE OF HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT

In October 1940, a German regulation banned Anglo-American productions and a large number of French films. At the time, there were an estimated 75 million francophone spectators in 5,000 theaters in the world compared to the anglophone market, which counted 225 million spectators in 30,000 theaters. According to the CNC, among 572 films projected throughout France in 1933, 230 were American. Under the German occupation, censorship authorities silenced cinematographic creation. The interrelationship between the Vichy government, German authorities, French Republic institutions, and religious authorities was a complicated one. The COIC, acting on behalf of the Vichy government, fervently controlled the production of cinematographic subject matter. It prohibited films from conveying themes such as the traditional representation of the working class, unequivocal allusions to contemporary events, and distinctive features of the German Occupation. To them as well as to extreme-right followers, French cinema of the 1930s was guilty of constantly representing its main protagonists as evil social characters. In addition, the plot almost always evolved in a decadent background such as crime, murder, and places of ill repute. As a result, most films of poetic realism as well as other masterpieces of the 1930s were rigorously banned by the COIC. These included Renoir's *The Human Beast*, *Grand Illusion*, and *The Rules of the Game* plus Marcel Carné's *Hôtel du Nord*, *Port of Shadows*, and *Daybreak*. In no instance could any authority figure be ridiculed or demasculated. The recurrent backgrounds evolving in the lower depths of society (with characters like prostitutes, pimps, callous crooks, and demimondaines, adulterous relations, and the mafia) were no longer to be depicted. In addition, all vulgarity and slang were banned.²⁰ As Pierre Darmon described it, the Vichy regime was deeply involved in a *pudique* campaign: "Kisses on the big screen being shortened, the ones inside the movie theater were to be forbidden."²¹

The exportation of French films was declared illegal after 1942. Cinematographic and media censorship were directed by the Referat Film, which also indirectly controlled the COIC, the production and attribution of films, and the process of manufacturing. The Occupation authorities had three main goals: the avoidance of any intellectual reflection on current conditions of the Occupation, the "purification" of existing motion pictures, and the liquidation of the French cinematographic patrimony, which concomitantly eased German competition on the European market. However, the real collaboration sought by the Germans, the only efficient one known at the time, was based on the establishment (created by the French themselves) of sound eco-

conomic structures made solely for the purpose of facilitating their control toward a more lucrative exploitation. Several films such as Clouzot's *The Raven* and Albert Valentin's 1944 *La vie de plaisir*²² which would have been banned from screening during the 1930s by the administration of the Third Republic were surprisingly granted a distribution visa, despite compelling criticisms by French society and the wide freedom in their study of local customs that pervaded those films.

Unlike what one would expect, French cinema of the Occupation (with the exception of rare "vindictive" and isolated projects produced by the Propaganda Staffel, such as *Les corrupteurs* in 1942 and Paul Riche's *Forces occultes* in 1943)²³ did not indulge in explicit or exuberant figurations of the multiple "enemy" (Jews, communists, the Anglo-American menace, or Freemasons). This absence of fascist imagery, however, disappeared with Vichy's emerging political doctrine and its racial laws. Between 1940 and 1944, the impact of political propaganda on the French public was nonexistent. It is safe to conclude that the cultural colonization enterprise undertaken by the Nazi authorities as well as the Vichy government was eventually an utter failure because all nationalist productions, except for a few productions highly endorsed by Josef Goebbels, such as Veit Harlan's *The Jew Süß*²⁴ (*Le juif Süß*, 1941) and Joseph von Baky's *Münchhausen* (*Les aventures du Baron de Münchhausen*, 1943), were almost completely severely rejected by the public.

Also disregarded by French audiences were the world newsreels of the Deutsche Wochenschau projected in the occupied zone. During the years of the Occupation, a major focus of attention by the German authorities was the vigorous implementation and maintenance of the newsreels between projections in theaters. Needless to say, because of its content as well as its mandatory screening, the Deutsche Wochenschau became so immediately unpopular that French police officers had to be present during screenings to monitor aggravated movie audiences. Before June 1940, companies such as Pathé, Gaumont, and Eclair edited newsreels in France. After the arrival of the Germans in Paris, screening of a single broadcast of German news in the occupied zone was imposed with the Wochenschau, also distributed throughout thirty-five countries. To edit world news in French, the Occupation forces created a film-press company during the first summer of the war known as the Alliance cinématographique européenne (ACE), the main task of which was the distribution of German films in France. Later in 1942, the Nazis negotiated with the Vichy government for the production of a single news program, which would replace both the world news in occupied France and the single news program that Pathé and Gaumont had produced for Free France since October 1940. Though predisposed by the Vichy collaborationist endeavors, led by the royalist

review *L'Action française*, as well as Nazi propaganda, news relating to France was gradually incorporated. The program, *France Actualités* (France News), stopped showing in August 1944 with the Allied troop movements in Europe.

Paradoxical as it may appear, French productions, unlike German and Italian national cinemas, never openly reflected any major theme of Vichy propaganda that was usually broadcast by Radio-Paris or by the Parisian press. Although dealing with a constant assault of German and Vichy propaganda, concluding that the French population had been truly swayed by its seditious rhetoric and content still remains arguable. During the first months of the Occupation, the Vichy administration owned the editorial management of the popular *France Actualité* newsreel that accompanied every film screened in French theaters. But with the organization of the French Resistance movement, and especially the transmission of radio broadcasts from England, the occupying authorities, fearing loss of command over French popular audiences, began to assemble and edit their own current affairs footage with a rigorously German partiality leading to believe that "the war was over" (then later "far from being over"). In fact, French audiences were in large part ignoring the effort for misinformation (also found in the press, current affairs footage, and radio broadcasts); and due to their individual concerns with the struggle of their everyday life, most French civilians actually never came close to enrolling in the Resistance movement or to participating in collaboration operations. As a matter of fact, the French people were known for their legendary, and self-imposed, *attentisme*, a "wait and see" state of mind.

Before the war, German films made up twenty percent of the films shown in French theaters. During the first years of the Occupation, seventy-five percent of projected films in France were of German origin. To position Germany as the only promoter of European cinema as well as to replace Anglo-American productions, German authorities had to establish a powerful and efficient film company on French soil. The first steps were to ascertain what was taking place in the French film industry, ensure control, and, if required, supervise all aspects of production. Shortly after German authorities intervened, they efficiently implemented a new organizational structure. On October 3, 1940, Continental Studios was established, with ostentatious headquarters on the Champs-Élysées. Created out of two German companies (UFA and Tobis), Continental Studios' exclusive mission was to produce French films. Needless to say, for both German distributors, the eradication of French cinema was a good idea, since by now two-thirds of Parisian theaters showed only German productions.

Alfred Greven, who already had extensive experience with the German film industry, managed the new studios. His previous position

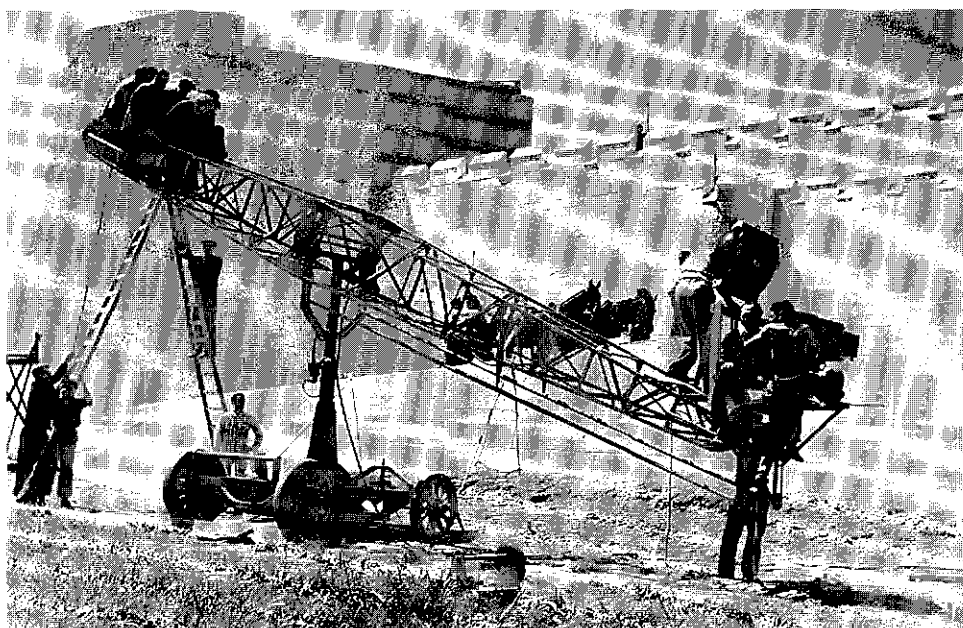
as producer for UFA had enabled him to work with French directors in Berlin studios who had come to produce multilanguage film versions. For instance, Henri-Georges Clouzot, Jacques Feyder, and Henri Chomette all worked in Germany between 1931 and 1938. When Greven arrived in France, he understood immediately that the small, fragile size of the existing French production companies, aside from Gaumont and Pathé, did not correspond to the scale of other European film studios. He soon developed a vertical concentration of cinematographic companies. Just one month after the establishment of Continental, Greven created SOGEC (*Société de gestion et d'exploitation du cinéma*), a distribution company whose main goal was to purchase and control new theaters. Although Continental Studios did grant a certain margin of artistic freedom to the film directors, actors, and technical crew it hired,²⁵ the company mostly did not attract distinguished French actors or directors, with the notable exceptions of Pierre Fresnay, Raimu, Maurice Tourneur, Marcel Carné (who never directed any film for Continental), Christian-Jaque, and Georges Lacombe.

As a direct representative of the German authorities in France, Alfred Greven's offers for roles or participation in productions had to be understood as resolute commands. Consequently, many artists, such as Louis Jouvet and Françoise Rosay, who were opposed to the Vichy regime, insinuated fake motives such as prior engagements, poor health, or retirement to make themselves unavailable for any acting role with Continental. Despite the sudden exodus of French actors abroad and into the Resistance, Continental remained the major film company of the Occupation, with a total of thirty films among the two hundred twenty films produced by French and German companies in France (among which fourteen for Pathé-Cinéma and ten for Gaumont).²⁶ Despite the highly criticized reception of these films, in 1943 Continental produced one of the most famous and controversial motion pictures of the Occupation period, a suspense/psychological thriller entitled *The Raven* (*Le corbeau*). The motion picture, directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot,²⁷ possesses a solid, almost "mechanical," plot, around which is based an enthralling study of French provincial customs. The screenplay was adapted from a script by Louis Chavance, a master of the hard-boiled novel.

The story line, inspired by a true story (the anonymous letters of the city of Tulle), was judged defamatory by producers during the 1930s, since French provincial life was mainly represented in a gloomy manner. The facts went back to 1917 when in Tulle, a small provincial town, Angèle Laval overwhelmed the town with poisonous, anonymous letters to seek revenge following a romantic disenchantment. Once the vindictive rage was unleashed, the outcome of the frantic storm resulted



Micheline Francey (Laura) and Pierre Fresnay (Dr. Germain) in Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1942 *Le Corbeau* (Courtesy of BIFI).



The Victorine Studios in Nice and the gigantic set designed by Georges Wakhevitch and Alexandre Trauner for Marcel Carné's *The Devil's Envoys* (*Les visiteurs du soir*, 1942), (Courtesy of BIFI).

in three suicides. At the time of the Third Republic, the Censorship Commission, fearing a scandal from this tense thriller, never deemed the script tolerable. In a reversal, the project ended up five years later in the hands of Alfred Greven, and Continental endorsed the project. The story opens with *Une petite ville, ici ou ailleurs* (A small town, here or elsewhere), anticipating a portentous conclusion. Somewhere in France, a small, peaceful town is swiftly overwhelmed by a campaign of anonymous letters. The unknown author, who signs his missives *Le corbeau*, initially accuses the new doctor in town, Dr. Rémy Germain (Pierre Fresnay), of adultery, and abortion, and soon broadens the range of his victims, sparing no one. Humiliated with their most intimate secrets and betrayed by outrageous allegations, the citizens begin to doubt one another, and the fragile social harmony seems to be irrevocably plagued. With the presence of the unknown (the reason for all the turmoil), the anguished citizens start to liberate their true feelings about their enemies as each day brings new letters and new denunciations. Long-term personal hatreds, family feuds, adulterous relations, suspicions, and jealousies are all revealed behind the mask of hypocrisy. Dr. Germain is accused of engaging in an adulterous relation with Laura (Micheline Francey), the attractive young wife of Dr. Vorzet (Pierre Larquey). Given his old age, Dr. Vorzet appears to be a father figure within the community, but he is also clever and eventually gives signs that he is slowly identifying the author of the letters, the crime, and exactly how it was committed. Meanwhile at the hospital, a young cancer patient is mysteriously informed (through another anonymous letter) of the terminal nature of his illness and commits suicide the next day. Marie Corbin (Hélène Manson), a nurse working there, is immediately accused of the homicide, and the entire town hopes desperately that she is the source of all their torment. But during a service at church, another anonymous letter flies down the vault. Its contents clear Marie of any role in the death or the letters. Dr. Germain and the township officials, exasperated by the gloomy plot and the intangible nature of the crime, decide to gather all the suspects in a classroom and force them to write for hours in order to discover the authentic handwriting of the mysterious author. This is to no avail, since the author of the letters is still free. One day Dr. Germain discovers Laura, emotionally unstable, with a stain of ink on her thumb, and realizes that she has been writing the letters all along. After Laura is sent by her husband to a mental institution, Dr. Germain relates his discovery to his colleague, and comes to understand that Dr. Vorzet is the real *corbeau*. When Germain enters Vorzet's office, it is too late. He finds Vorzet dead, his throat cut by the same razor that killed the young cancer patient. While all the elements fall into place and put an end to the satanic puzzle, someone steps out of

the home. The murderer, the mother of the young cancer patient, walks slowly away under the powerless gaze of Rémy Germain.

To deconstruct the story would be to miss the cinematographic nuances that make *Le Corbeau* tantalizing. Standing back from the film and what it expected audiences to assume, one can see that Dr. Germain is not engaged in unethical behavior or scandal, but in a quest for truth. *Le Corbeau* has one of the most familiar film noir themes: the hero is not a criminal, but an isolated character who, despite being tempted, betrayed, and humiliated, finally succeeds. In this "double" relation (Rémy/Denise and Rémy/Laura), women and men tempt one another; neither would have acted alone. Both are attracted not so much by the crime as by the thrill of committing it with the other person (Rémy, Laura, and Denise, played by Ginette Leclerc, are pulp characters with little psychological depth, and that is the way Clouzot wanted it). In the world of *Le Corbeau*, heroes and villains constantly struggle to survive, as Dr. Vorzet's philosophical discourses to the townspeople convey a peculiar tone of guilt.

DR. VORZET: Since this whirlwind of hate and calumny started, all moral values have suffered; yours like others. You too will fall. I don't say you'll strangle your mistress, but you'd go through my papers, if I forgot them on the table, and sleep with Rolande if she wanted to. There is no choice.

DR. GERMAIN: I can see you're used to mad people.

DR. VORZET: At your service . . . [He exits the classroom] and good night.

The explanation given by Dr. Vorzet illustrates a mechanism Clouzot often used in his films, and his inclination for a persuasive Manichean *mise-en-scène* rather than academic technique. The internal convulsions of the city and the epidemic nature of the letters are all perfectly represented in its finest symbolic contrasts. The photography by Nicolas Hayer helps to develop the film noir style of sharp-edged shadows and shots, strange angles, and lonely settings. Imagery is the movie's other great strength, more immediately apparent to viewers than the subtle remodeling. As a director, Clouzot was not an artist who framed his shots eccentrically or cut for shock effect. Instead, *chiaroscuro*, shadow projections, and shafts of bright light entering the frame were among Clouzot's favorite devices.

As his second film, *Le Corbeau* represented a first full-scale orchestration. The visual element of the film expresses its literary style. It is no more realistic than its dialogue, but it is not quite expressionistic either: stylistically, the film extends imagistic conventions of contemporary American movies by further inflating stylization. Few other directors have made so many taut, savvy, cynical, and, in many differ-

ent ways and tones, witty films. As a film director, Clouzot was rarely patient with long takes and slow-paced action; instead, he emphasized psychological tensions with deliberate and well-timed cuts. The audience is involuntarily engaged by the subtleties of character, the psychological tensions that evolved through complex relationships, the ambiguities of human behavior, and the interpersonal relationships.

With its constant gloomy atmosphere, *Le Corbeau* offered a perfect blend of form and content. The desperation and hopelessness of the townspeople were reflected in the visual style, which saturated the screen with shadows and only occasional bursts of sunlight. Enthralling but occasionally acerbic and cynical, *Le Corbeau* portrayed for the French audiences of the Occupation a series of anxious characters (Laura and Dr. Germain) trying to elude some mysterious past that continued to haunt them. They are hunted down with a fatalism that taunted and teased before delivering the final, definitive *coup de théâtre*. The decor was the right fit for the hard, urban context and dialogue created by Louis Chavance, who elevated chiaroscuro in motion pictures to a metaphorical representation of both truth and dishonesty. Following a tiresome oral dictation inflicted on the town's suspects in order to identify the handwriting of the *corbeau*, Dr. Vorzet reminds Dr. Germain of the impossibility of his quest: "You think that people are all good or all bad. You think that good means light and bad means night? [He swings a ceiling light between him and Dr. Germain.] But where does night end and light begin? Where is the borderline? Do you even know which side you belong on?"

Fate will not permit the protagonist to escape his past. After losing his wife and newborn baby at birth, Dr. Germain decides to be at the service of pregnant women; he inhabits a world that constantly pulls people back into the chaos of existence and eventually suffocates them.

At the time of its release in 1943, a large number of viewers were reluctant to praise the film, some because they had trouble categorizing it, while others were morally offended by it. *Le Corbeau* was indeed besieged from both sides of the political scene. The anti-Nazi activists and members of the Resistance considered *Le Corbeau* pro-Nazi propaganda and fiercely fought (in the clandestine press) against the screening of the film. To them, it exemplified a collaboration with and submission to the German authorities by portraying a gloomy image and the malicious character of French people. The choice of the small provincial town was comprehensible since it accentuated the dramatic background of the plot. Isolated from the rest of the country, the tragedy occurs step by step without any exterior pressure, as the destructive presence of madness slowly pervades the screen. For the Resistance, the final message, despite revealing a tormented epoch, is often underestimated: anyone can become a *corbeau* in order to free

oneself from any agonizing obsession. The right wing and Vichy supporters also demanded the film be banned for its immoral values. For them, it stood as the antithesis of the National Revolution and violated the ethics of a fundamental morality (as it indirectly reminded audiences of the epidemic scourge of anonymous letters that was widespread in those days in occupied France).

The years during and after the liberation of France, the Comité de libération du cinéma français (CLCF), a newly created committee that supervised the reorganization of the French cinema industry from 1944 until 1946,²⁸ left no ambiguity about *Le Corbeau*. Clouzot, the director, and Chavance, the screenwriter, had made an anti-French movie, directly commissioned by Josef Goebbels. This accusation would be one of the main grievances retained against the filmmaker. Louis Chavance, however, was able to disprove the accusation by justifying the date of the project (*L'oeil du serpent*, 1937), well before the German presence in France. After the Liberation, the case of *Le Corbeau* vehemently impassioned public opinion. On October 17, 1944, as Clouzot stood in front of the Comité de Libération du Cinéma, formed to judge film directors and their productions during the Occupation, the main accusation was related to the intended message of *The Raven*. According to *Les lettres françaises* and its violent article entitled "*Le corbeau est déplumé*" ("The Crow Is Unfeathered"), the film had most likely been shown in Germany under the title *Province française* (*French province*). But, according to Clouzot, because the film was not dubbed, it was shown only in Belgium and Switzerland, never in Germany. During the hearings, Clouzot took advantage of the climate of denunciation to remind his judges of the poisonous atmosphere of anonymous letters, which overwhelmed France at the Liberation.²⁹ Behind Clouzot and Chavance's hearings was a political agenda to sanction Alfred Greven's closest collaborators. On May 7, 1945, Clouzot was condemned to a lifetime professional suspension. One year later, however, the sentence was reduced to two years even though *Le Corbeau* was still considered in part an anti-French movie. The committee never expressed a clear verdict on the film, leaving the impression that the main accusations were leveled toward the director and his close working relationship with Greven.

If it is true that *Le Corbeau*³⁰ exposed a darker side of small-town chronicles in France, balancing the optimism of Hollywood melodramas by focusing on squalid criminals and doomed atmospheres, the question of whether or not the film is fundamentally anti-French or anti-Occupation remains arguable. Whereas Hollywood strove to maintain high public morale during the war years, film noir gave viewers a peek into the alleys and backrooms of a world filled with corruption. *Le Corbeau* undoubtedly made Clouzot a leading authority

of French film noir during the postwar era. The French public, which eventually forgave Clouzot's entanglement with Continental, appreciated his later darkly pessimistic psychological thrillers, such as *Wages of Fear* (*Le salaire de la peur*, 1953) and *Diabolique* (*Les diaboliques*, 1955), which are discussed in the following chapter.

WORKING CONDITIONS UNDER THE OCCUPATION: MARCEL CARNÉ

The four years of German occupation resulted in a time of extensive rationing all over France. (Shortages actually began with the first hours of the War in May 1940 and lasted until the late 1940s and the first fruitful results of the Marshall Plan.) While food appeared to be the most important article in demand (75 percent of French household revenue was spent on food), many other resources were in short supply such as gasoline and diesel for vehicles, coal, spare parts, paper, wood, and fuel for domestic heating. Because fuel and vehicles were regularly requisitioned by the German forces, a large percentage of the population was suddenly compelled to use other means of transportation such as bicycle or *gazogène*, a vehicle with a mechanical gas converter affixed to the rear. In addition, the scarcity of vacant apartments, caused directly by the destruction of the war and later aggravated by the Allied bombing raids, deteriorated the situation of populations in all major European cities. The outbreak of the war and the rapid globalization of the conflict distressed all French economic activity, with more than two million men forcefully sent to Germany. Following the appalling consequences of the war in the Soviet Union, the German Wehrmacht was short of manpower for its own war factories. Consequently, under intense pressure, Vichy incited the mobilization and recruitment of the male population between the ages of eighteen and fifty to work in Germany, and at the same time liberated prisoners of war. The service was known as STO (Service du travail obligatoire/ Forced Labor Program). During certain weekdays (nonholidays), German authorities started to take into custody idle young men whom they found attending movie theaters and sent them to Germany for the STO. Needless to say, this new development immediately created a desertion of movie theaters among the young adult population of France. For all these reasons, and as a direct result of the STO, after 1942, film companies, laboratories, and shooting studios had to face a drastic shortage of personnel.

In addition, the French cinematographic industry had to surmount an eight-month interruption during the Nazi invasion followed by a difficult restart period after the Occupation. But even after restarting, the disquieting context and a series of innumerable regulations re-

sulted in much improvisation. Dealing with the new occupying forces as well as the new Vichy government was no easy task. Once financing issues were resolved, censorship avoided, authorizations granted, and the Nazi authorities' suspicions assuaged, the road to the final completion of the film was far from easy. The next serious obstacle was the scarcity of materials. The German authorities imposed extensive film stock restrictions, and Kodak factories present in France, at the time the primary manufacturer of film, were forced to direct seventy percent of its production to Germany, leaving French producers in an abrupt state of panic. In addition, German authorities confiscated twenty of the eighty contact printers³¹ running in France. Raw material shortages caused by the war made cinematographic projects a precarious business for producers as well as for crews. Intermittent power cuts, air alerts and raids, and strenuous night shifts that exhausted actors affected most of the artists' performances and memories. Toward the end of the war, over one hundred theaters in Paris alone were destroyed by Allied bombing raids, more than four hundred throughout France. Consequently, actors and directors were compelled to perform perfectly in the first shoot in order to save supplies. From film stock to lights, from nails for sets to fabrics for costumes, from food for hungry crews to the number of extras on the set, nothing could be wasted. According to Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, the Pathé Film Company had to appoint a special employee to collect, straighten, and recycle every possible nail from used sets.³²

Interestingly, the difficulties often instigated ingenuity in order to maneuver within guidelines and restrictions. For example, the poor quality of film stock during those years of frequent requisitions compelled directors and cinematographers to discover and utilize new lighting techniques. In his autobiography, Marcel Carné also remembers shooting *The Devil's Envoys* (*Les visiteurs du soir*, 1942) and the cruel dilemma of displaying a bountiful amount of food for the banquet scene in front of starving actors who had to pretend to be enjoying a *gargantuesque* feast.³³ Although set assistants relentlessly reminded the extras not to eat the food displayed on the extravagant silver platters, one by one fruits of all sorts were disappearing by the minute. Carné himself had to redo a shot since a particular loaf of bread was in the camera field. As he removed it, he was surprised by the very light weight of the loaf. Much to his surprise, a hole had been secretly dug out by some hungry actor, who meticulously emptied the center, leaving the crust intact. Someone from the technical crew finally came up with the idea to inject phenol in all the pears and apples to avoid temptation. After warning the crowd of extras, the scene was at last completed. But food was not the only center of preoccupation for directors; fabrics for costumes and decoration, such

as silk or velvet, were significantly in short supply in those years, especially when designed to represent medieval court splendor. Once again, artistic and technical ingenuity prevailed over the adversity of the war, and costume designers were compelled to dress extras with rougher fabric, requiring cinematographers to use long shots. In his overview of French cinema during the Occupation, Pierre Darmon recalls how the fear of wasting film stock turned into an authentic nightmare. While shooting the scene of the prenuptial festivities in *The Devil's Envoy*s, Carné had all actors standing "frozen in time" when inadvertently a greyhound (also starving) ran across the set, ruining the cut and forcing a retake.³⁴ Due to the shortage of electricity, and therefore any heating system on the sets, many directors accelerated the shooting process in order to finish projects before winter. For most well-known actors used to traveling in style, with comfortable cars, their first challenge was reaching the shooting location or studios, whether by public transportation, bicycle or even foot.

Many employees of the film industry had to work clandestinely within the studios because of their affiliation with the Resistance. In Nice, the Victorine Studios³⁵ became a center for clandestine workers, usually confined and protected by those who worked legally. Georges Wakhevitch agreed to direct the set of *The Devil's Envoy*s under the control of Alexandre Trauner. At the same time, Maurice Thiriet (1906-72) composed the film's orchestral score and agreed to accept credit for the three ballads written by Alexandre Kosma. For the epic production *Children of Paradise*, a gigantic set was built at the same studios in Nice that represented a feat of almost unparalleled skill at the time of the Occupation: 3,000 square yards, 150 yards long, over 50 building fronts, 12 to 18 yards high, and 2,000 extras for the opening and closing scenes, many of whom, engaged in the French Resistance, were using their employment as a daytime cover. But it was during those hard times of deprivation and day-to-day struggle toward the end of the Occupation that the most spectacular productions were completed. Marcel Carné's *The Devil's Envoy*s and *Children of Paradise* manifested on a grand scale the difficult move many directors of poetic realism made in order to dodge Vichy's disapproval for the movement by transferring the plot into a world of dreams or into a past historic mode, temporarily relinquishing the contemporary themes and settings of their earlier movies. This new "poetic" genre not only deceived censorship but also enabled Carné and Jacques Prévert to blossom in the darkness of the Occupation as they painted a masterly portrait of romance.

*The Devil's Envoy*s, produced by André Paulvé, was released in December 1942 and received a warm welcome. Because of its medieval background, Carné was somehow able to dodge censorship, as Jean-Pierre

Jeancolas recalls: "The 'realists' of 1939, as embodied by Carné and Prévert, were the architects and builders of a fictional universe which they synchronized with the times, with real life. But they were better equipped than others to transpose their work into a temporal 'elsewhere,' when the constraints of the Occupation required them to do so."³⁶

The year is 1485, and the Devil (Jules Berry) sends two envoys, Dominique (Arletty) and Gilles (Alain Cuny), to earth under the guise of serene troubadours with the mission to sow anarchy, corruption, and despair among the human race. They go from castle to castle propagating a romantic psychosis, which incites anxiety for their victims. As they arrive at the castle of Baron Hugue (Fernand Ledoux), they find a citadel celebrating the future wedding of the lord's daughter, Anne (Marie Déa). The unexpected visitors are invited to attend the pre-nuptial festivities along with the court, acrobats, tumblers, minstrels, and other musicians. Satan's plans are quickly disrupted as one of his messengers, Gilles, falls in love with his intended future prey, Anne. Meanwhile, Dominique beguiles both baron and fiancé, the egotistic knight Renaud (Marcel Herrand), instigating a feudal rivalry between them. Since the two envoys have lost sight of their mission, Satan arrives in person in diabolical fashion to put an end to his envoys' unexpected romantic escapades. He is announced as a lost traveler caught by a storm and is welcomed into the castle. When asked to declare his identity, he replies that he is "forgotten from his homeland, unknown elsewhere; this is the destiny of the traveler."³⁷ In the main room, while Baron Hugues and Renaud play chess, the devil approaches the fireplace, and, as he caresses the fire, says with a demonic grin: "Look at how those flames like me . . . They lick my fingers just like a puppy would do."³⁸ Gilles is finally discovered by the lord of the castle with the bride-to-be, Anne, and ends up hastily thrown in the castle dungeon, awaiting sentence. Meanwhile, the baron and his prospective son-in-law, madly in love with Dominique, decide to settle their quarrel in combat, which results in Renaud's death. Now comes the turn of the devil himself, who is seduced by the pure and chaste Anne. To her, he offers a pact: though deprived of his memory, Gilles will go free if she agrees to come with him and to love him (and therefore never see Gilles again). Much to the devil's dismay, she lies to him when she accepts. But after several unsuccessful attempts to dissuade her, the devil changes the two lovers, Anne and Gilles, into eternal stone as he comes across them holding each other by the fountain. As he nears the immobile couple, he realizes too late that their hearts are still beating inside their petrified bodies. Satan's compelling power has failed in the face of true love, and his triumph is shown to be relative and limited. Good and evil constantly fight, but love ultimately conquers all.

Audiences at the time witnessed a modern society, distanced in time by the medieval background, completely inclined toward entertainment and legitimately unaware of the impending danger surrounding the feast. This flamboyant feudal society appears without any contradiction, and only the stranger, the unknown, the unusual, can trigger woe. Behind the selected choices appears occupied France. Indirectly, the film related the prewar situation, and the story unfolds to show the incapacity of Baron Hugues to resist the process of destabilization generated by the satanic envoys. He even challenges his future son-in-law and wins the duel with the help of one of them. In this allegorical tale of eternal love, many critics envisaged a metaphorical fiction relating the presence of the Germans in France to satan (much to Carné's dismay). The last scene in the movie, depicting satan's recognition of the power of love, may be viewed as a depiction of contemporary events in France; it reveals the state of mind of this tormented *époque*, since the devil, the symbol of oppression, is unable to terminate the ardent passion between the young couple.

Although many critics immediately believed Carné's film to be a masterpiece, many others, far from being persuaded by the experience, underscored the atypical slowness of the film. For them, the tale predicted another solution: moral resistance, as Gilles and Anne surpass the contradiction of the "occupying force." Through a series of "cryptic messages,"³⁹ the characters of the castle could be viewed as the French people during the Occupation, watching their life blossom while the fantastic element dispelled the oppressive confusion experienced by the whole country. "*The Devil's Envoys*," Edward Baron Turk observes, "is a story about freedom of choice in selecting one's partner. It openly disparages the institutions of family and marriage. It tampers with conventional distinctions between masculinity and femininity. Such themes ran counter to Vichy's ideology. But the prejudices that made these themes offensive to the Vichy establishment have outlived Vichy."⁴⁰ The Occupation authorities were so focused on present difficulties that they could not comprehend that the remote medieval past could imply the present. French film cameras never captured true life more confidently than the characters of *The Devil's Envoys*, who represent good and evil simultaneously. Alain Cuny's marble facial expression also accentuates the impenetrable features of mystery in this deeply allegorical tale.

Following the triumph of *The Devil's Envoys*, the team of Carné and Prévert renewed their success with *Children of Paradise*, which is considered by many film historians the greatest French motion picture ever made—and also considered Carné's last great picture. This film endured trying times following the suspension of the production, most notably with the invasion of the Allied forces in Sicily and the damage



Jules Berry (the Devil) in Marcel Carné's *The Devil's Envoys* (*Les visiteurs du soir*, 1942), (Courtesy of BIFI).



Arletty (Dominique) and Alain Cuny (Gilles) in Marcel Carné's *The Devil's Envoys* (*Les visiteurs du soir*, 1942), (Courtesy of BIFI).

caused to the gigantic set of the boulevard du Crime⁴¹ (erected at the same location where, a year earlier, stood the white castle of *The Devil's Envoys*) by winter weather. The repair of the set was more difficult than expected after the authorities prohibited night shifts. Special authorization was required for a wartime film of such dimension (its two parts totaling over three hours), and production was stalled several times, sometimes by Marcel Carné himself, who was determined to premiere it months later for the Liberation. Due to its unusual length and cost for the time (originally more than four hours and reduced substantially to three hours and fifteen minutes), the film was presented in two separate parts: *Le boulevard du Crime* and *L'homme blanc*. The premiere of *Children of Paradise*, deliberately intended as an ostentatious international display of French savoir faire at its height, took place at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris on March 9, 1945, in an almost totally liberated France. With this visual and cinematographic feast, Marcel Carné clearly presented to the world—Germany and, indirectly, Hollywood—what France was able to achieve under even the most difficult conditions. Parker Tyler describes it as a will to survive: "Beyond the cameras stood monitors, sleepy-eyed with self-importance and the thrill of victory: the Germans who had humbled Paris itself, who controlled a city and a nation in all ways but the essential, the governance and proliferation of spirit."⁴² The film paid homage to the theater with its title *Paradise*, which makes reference to the theater's worst seats (an ironical French epithet), farthest from the stage, where the audience responded honestly and boisterously to the actors below. The inspiration for this ostentatious depiction of the life and background of Jean-Baptiste Debureau, one of France's greatest mimes, came from actor Jean-Louis Barrault, who met with Carné and Prévert in Nice during the summer of 1943. Prompted by the box office success of *The Devil's Envoys*, the team was eager to embark on an ambitious new project, recognizing the cinematographic profitability and scope of their subject matter.⁴³

Set in 1840s Paris and centered on the Théâtre des Funambules on the boulevard du Crime, home of Parisian popular operettas at the time—where mimes and burglars rubbed shoulders with aristocrats and assassins—the narrative relates the vicissitudes of four men whose existences are intertwined through their irresistible passion for the same woman, the attractive yet free-spirited actress Garance (Arletty). Garance truthfully loves only one of them, Baptiste (Jean-Louis Barrault), but their plans are relentlessly thwarted by an unsympathetic fate. Baptiste has loved Garance since the day she threw a rose at him while performing on stage; Frédérick (Pierre Brasseur) flirts with her as much as his ego and wit allow him; the count of Montray (Louis Salou) seeks in her a glamorous mistress; and finally Lacenaire (Marcel



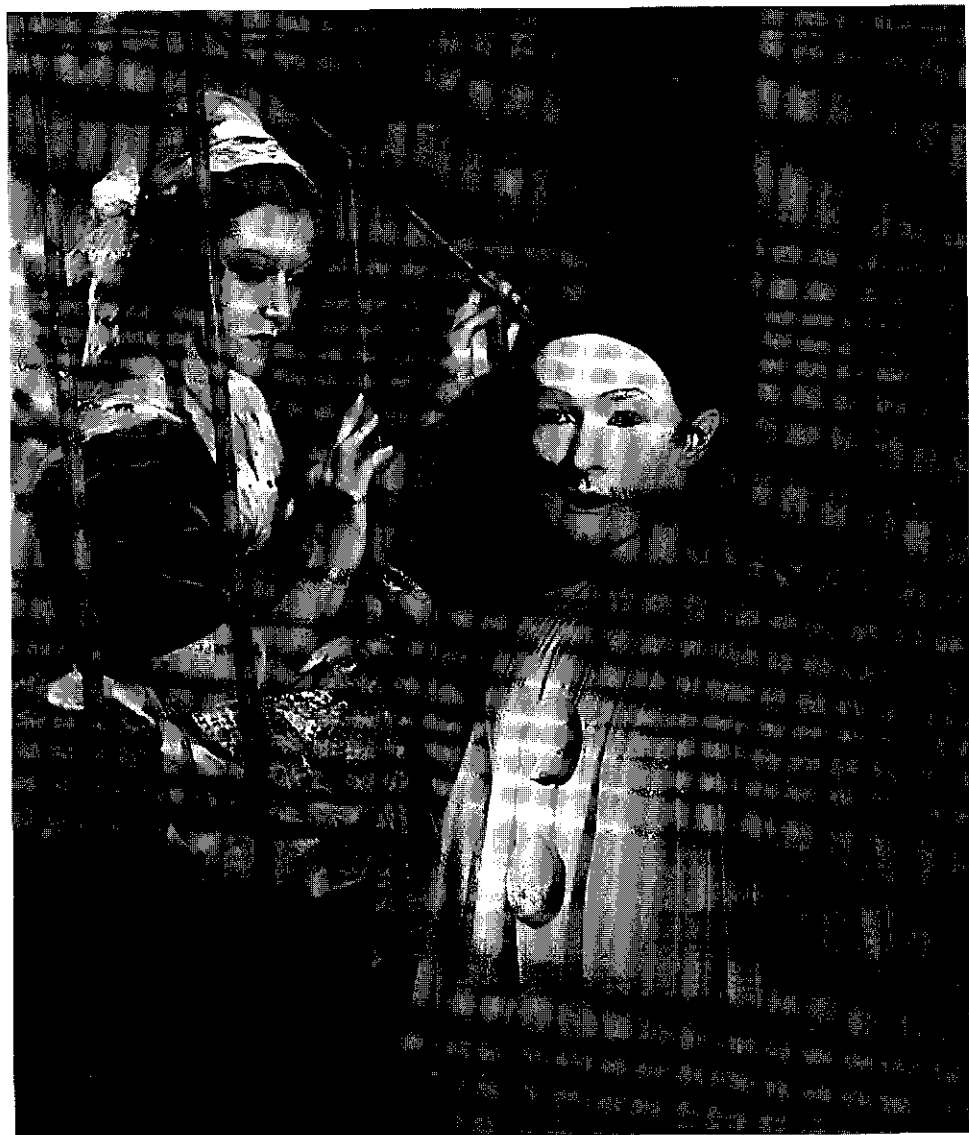
The boulevard du Crime in Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du Paradis*, 1945), (Courtesy of BIFI).

Herrand) envisions her as a malicious but providential muse. All four men are mesmerized by Garance's indolent glamour (Arletty was forty-four years old at the time of the film), who seduces them, and eventually gains the protection of her most powerful, suitor, the count. The opening scene occurs in medias res among the spectators when Garance, surrounded by the carnival crowd, is accused of having stolen a spectator's watch. Baptiste, a young artist longing to love, who at this very instant is performing on stage, seizes the opportunity to prove Garance's innocence in an entertaining and astute "reconstitutive" mime, at the end of which the police, clueless, in their perplexity, let her go. Baptiste instantly falls in love and finds Garance a job at the Théâtre des Funambules. Their idyllic romance is shortened following the arrival of a new and promising actor, Frédéric, who quickly seduces her. Garance resigns herself to the dazzling virility of the new upcoming actor. One night Frédéric, Garance, and Baptiste are involved in a pantomime performance on stage as, respectively, Harlequin, Colombine, and Pierrot. They repeat the events that occurred between them the night before. Pierrot fails to charm Colombine, and, disappointed, he slowly falls asleep next to her while the audacious

Harlequin, who comes by unexpectedly, seduces her by his gallantry and together they flee in the night (offstage). As a result, Baptiste/Pierrot attempts to hang himself, but he is saved *in extremis* by Nathalie (Maria Casarès), who realizes at this moment in the performance that the play is becoming a real charade about what had probably happened to Baptiste. Because of her love for him, Nathalie breaks the sacred rules of mime and calls his name on stage, generating a misunderstanding of the silent and theatrical genres: the play within the play. Later in the film, Garance seeks the protection of the count of Montray following another murder accusation committed by her forlorn friend Lacenaire, a Parisian dandy but also a malicious criminal. As a result, she leaves Paris for several years. By creating a social barrier between herself and her old accomplice Lacenaire, she unwillingly revives and rekindles the blaze of his final project. Consequently, Lacenaire, pictured as a "living embodiment of the connection between art and crime,"⁴⁴ promptly prepares the count's murder in his elaborate stage management. Meanwhile, Frédérick has become a talented and famous actor, and Baptiste marries Nathalie: she had loved him before he even met Garance. At the end of the film, Garance and Baptiste meet by chance, and immediately the old flame is revived. Forced to accept the impossibility of their happiness, the enigmatic Garance ultimately flies away in a carriage through a crowd, while Baptiste, desperate and alone, inconsolably—and ironically, since he works in silence—calls her name.

The characters Baptiste Debureau as the mime, Pierre-François Lacenaire as the cynical dandy, and the actor Frédérick Lemaître were based on historical personages, but the story and the fourth character, the disdainful count Montray, who anticipates an undivided protection of Garance, remains fictional. Through Jacques Prévert's screenplay, which is rich in its sharpness, eloquence, and wittiness, Garance best symbolizes an uninhibited and sophisticated woman, mercilessly disposing those who attempt to possess her. Garance's mysterious charisma makes her an oversized character corresponding to the classic femme fatale of film noir. Her accomplice, Lacenaire, plays a parallel role, a character who seems to come directly from the Paris of Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*, with its mysterious streets and perilous alleys. In a discussion about his tormented childhood, Lacenaire eloquently discloses his future plans (through the screenplay authored by Jacques Prévert and Pierre Laroche):

Even when I was a child I was more intelligent, more logical than the rest of them. They never forgave me for it. They wanted me to be like them, to think like them. . . . A fine childhood I had: my mother, my worthy mother, who preferred my idiot of a brother, and my confessor, who repeated to me without ceasing "You are too proud, Pierre-



Maria Casarès (Nathalie) and Jean-Louis Barrault (Baptiste) in Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du Paradis*, 1945), (Courtesy of BIFI).

François, you must take a serious look at yourself." So I took a serious look at myself, and I've never wanted to look at anyone else! Fools! They left me alone with myself, and yet they tried to keep me away from bad companions! What idiocy! But what a prodigious destiny . . . to love no one . . . to be alone . . . to be loved by no one . . . to be free.

The reciprocal rapport between reality and representation of reality on stage, real and fictional characters, tragedy and pantomime, and silence and the word are the recurrent themes of the movie. *Children of Paradise* is Prévert's richest script, where the words, along with eloquent lyrics and mime, beautifully merge and fuse with visual opulence. Never had a "period piece" been so impeccably accomplished, and with a cast without equal, *Children of Paradise* remains one of the greatest French motion pictures ever made (which interestingly enough never ostentatiously materialized into a costume nor historical picture). Was Carné's success as a filmmaker mostly due to the steady teamwork of Prévert, Trauner, and Kosma? If Carné stood at the forefront of French creativity during the period of poetic realism, his methods of work and organization were now comparable to the Hollywood studio system. One of the biggest assets of the film is the use of the silent era's lessons as reproduced through the mime of Baptiste—and, indeed, illustrated by the choice of a mime as the main protagonist, whose sensitivity produced the emotional key of the film. In her study of *Children of Paradise* for the British Film Institute, Jill Forbes summarizes the preponderance of the choice of pantomime by Carné and the ironic recognition of the social significance of performance: "Although *Les enfants du Paradis* is not a conventional narrative film, it nevertheless makes magnificent use of the facility of sound. But it equally celebrates all the lessons of the silent cinema in placing a mime performer at its center and making him the key sensibility in the film, underlining the cinema's reliance on appearance, gesture and expressivity of the body."⁴⁵ The multilayered contemplation of the different natures of theatrical performances—mime, comedy, vaudeville, romance, melodrama, and tragedy, extending from a glowing image of conflicting dramatic modes and a reflection of the interchangeability of theater and life—was at the heart of the project. The film is a colossal tribute to the theater. The photographic performance, directed by Roger Hubert, achieves rare lucidity thanks to its seamless scale, and succeeds in representing an unparalleled eloquence of facial expressions. André Bazin said of Marcel Carné's legacy that "to the memory of these films are linked the most moving images of the only two real stars of French talking cinema: Jean Gabin and Michèle Morgan."⁴⁶ Along with Renoir, Carné remains one of France's very greatest film directors.



Jean-Louis Barrault (Baptiste) in Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du Paradis*, 1945), (Courtesy of BIFI).



Arletty (Garance) and Pierre Brasseur (Frédéric) in Marcel Carné's *Children of Paradise* (*Les enfants du Paradis*, 1945), (Photo by Roger Forster. Courtesy of the Archives Marcel Carné).

RESISTANCE AND LIBERATION

During the first year of the war a kind of quiescent dismay prevailed in France, and filmmakers frequently debated between going back to Paris to fight or not. For the Left, the discouragement was even more dramatic with the recent failure of the Popular Front, the bitter defeat of the Republicans in Spain, the treason of Munich, and the German-Soviet nonaggression treaty. Toward the end of the war, however, Vichy's slow erosion was challenged by the upsurge of the French Resistance (also known as the Maquis). After 1940, small groups of French citizens, little by little, organized all over the territory against the occupants and the Vichy regime. Their activities concentrated on sabotaging German installations, assembling strategic information for transmission to London, prearranging getaways for British Air Force pilots who had been shot down, and coordinating disruption operations of railways. The French Resistance was strengthened by Vichy's agreement to send French workers to Germany. As a result, countless numbers of recruited men entered the underground units, winning the

support of an ever-larger part of the population. But the peak of the underground fight came with national unity in May 1943, when General Charles de Gaulle's most prestigious delegate in occupied France, Jean Moulin, was parachuted over France and succeeded in uniting the main Resistance organizations into the National Resistance Council (CNR), finally connecting all the most important isolated units into one federation. At the same time de Gaulle, now headquartered in Algiers, set up a temporary command of the French Republic from the alliance of the CNR. The Resistance also actively existed in the cinematographic profession. Many professionals of the film industry delayed material deliveries, slowed down the frequency of productions, limited the quantity of apparatus for German companies, and finally, falsified their production costs and sabotaged equipment. Even though they demonstrated what they believed to be acts of the Resistance, a few years later the *épuration* commission (cleansing committee) stated that the only real and heroic act of resistance would have been never to work with the Nazis.⁴⁷

In November 1942, all of Vichy's remaining sovereignty, authority, and declining prestige were shattered, as the direct consequence of the Anglo-American landings in North Africa, which compelled Hitler to send German troops into occupied France. The year 1943 was the turning point of the war. The repeated defeats of the Wehrmacht triggered the reawakening of hope and a vision of future liberation. Men and women joined the French Resistance, many factions of which united for the long overdue final insurrection. The CLCF (*Comité de libération du cinéma français*) was created and included citizens from many political and professional backgrounds: from the followers of the National Front to the communist activists, from the patriotic militia to the major trade union representatives. Meanwhile, the Resistance had significantly expanded all over French territory. At the time of the Normandy landing on June 6 and the landing in Provence in August 15, 1944, the armed forces and Free French units participated in the liberation of Paris, which organized its own successful insurrection led by General Jacques Philippe Leclerc on August 25, 1944. French Resistance also had an important enough role to play in the battles by targeting retreating German forces and sabotaging bridges and railroad networks. Members of the Vichy government, arrested or in retreat, were instantly replaced without procedure. The Resistance's responsibility in the victory was acknowledged by the Allied forces and earned France a seat at the signing of Germany's capitulation on May 8, 1945, as well as a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council. Now officially accepted by the United States, British, and Soviet governments, de Gaulle's interim government took advantage of its uncontested influence in liberated France. But for four years, the Nazis

had emptied France of crucial raw materials and food; the road networks were relentlessly interrupted by air offensives and sabotage; over two million French prisoners of war, STO workers, and deportees were still in German camps; and the responsibility of eradicating Vichy's legacy endangered the nation with critical internal controversies. In the summer of 1944, summary executions by Resistance groups appeared to have exceeded 10,000 during the unceremonious and impulsive cleansing of Vichy officials. In addition, to expedite justice, special courts were set up to try citizens charged with collaborating with the enemy. The courts dealt with over 125,000 cases during the following months. Among the accused, 50,000 wrongdoers were sentenced to "national degradation" (suspension of civic rights), some 40,000 received jail terms, and less than one percent were condemned to death.

All employees of the movie industry were called to respond before the CLCF. Because of the great number of cases, many sentences were decided within a few minutes after a brief interrogation, at the end of which, if considered innocent of any participation or collaboration with the enemy, the individual received a certificate of good standing (*certificat de "bonne conduite"*). This document consequently authorized the individual to regain the professional card indispensable for work in the film industry. In contrast, if the defendant was judged guilty of collaboration (the charge of collaboration could be evoked simply if the suspect was alleged to have been at the German embassy, or had had personal relations with any German), the files from the case were sent to another committee (Commission des Onze), which could order suspension from work. On October 4, 1944, the CLCF published a list of film technicians, among whom were filmmakers who had worked for Continental, including Henri-Georges Clouzot and Marcel Carné. Over one thousand files were examined, and professionals were cross-examined at all levels of the film industry: directors such as Marc Allégret, Claude Autant-Lara, Carné, Louis Daquin, and Marcel L'Herbier; screenwriters such as Jean Cocteau, Jean Anouilh, and Jean Aurenche; and producers, technicians, and even anonymous theater ushers were all scrutinized. Among the artists and technicians alleged to have collaborated with the enemy, two categories of crimes were recurrent: antipatriotism and pro-Nazi activity.

Among all the artists connected to activity with the occupying force, actor-author Sacha Guitry triggered the most heated debate, having been charged with supplying intelligence to the Nazis. At the time of the Liberation, more than half the French population approved of his arrest.⁴⁸ Guitry's encounter with Hermann Goering, Hitler's right-hand man, remains the most regrettable episode of his career.⁴⁹ The case of Arletty seems simpler. It was a known fact that the French actress was for a while the mistress of German Luftwaffe officer Jürgen

Soehring from 1941 to 1943. When facing charges of collaboration with the enemy after the Liberation, Arletty, along with Sacha Guitry, reminded accusers of their patriotic efforts. The two were released, along with fellow actor Tristan Bernard. Pierre Fresnay also received numerous accusations from the CLCF for his intellectual closeness to Marshal Pétain as well as his generally right-wing inclination. Among all French actors who performed during those difficult years, however, the case of Robert Le Vigan remains one of the most tragic and regrettable.⁵⁰ Despite many brilliant performances throughout the 1930s, which included work with the directors Jean Renoir (*The Lower Depths*) and Marcel Carné (*Port of Shadows*), Le Vigan's career terminated with the end of the Vichy regime. Due to his repeated and open expression of fascist ideologies, he was compelled to flee to Germany at the end of the war. Eventually, the French courts sentenced Le Vigan to a ten-year sentence of hard labor, resulting in his permanent exile in Argentina.

The philosophy of the so-called *épuration* involuntarily established some paradoxical and contradictory criteria against the accused persons. Often, convicted artists were sanctioned more for sharing political ideas with the German authorities than those who actually participated directly in German productions. The Court of Justice in Paris condemned twelve persons to heavy sentences; this group included scenarist Jean Marquès-Rivière, condemned by proxies to the death penalty, and director Paul Riche (*Forces occultes*, 1943), who eventually was brought before a firing squad and executed on March 29, 1949. Also executed was film critic and historian Robert Brasillach (author of *The History of Motion Pictures*, 1935), who vigorously corroborated anti-Semitic and fascist decisions in the collaborationist reviews *L'Action française* and *Je suis partout*, often describing the Vichy regime as guilty of moderation.

Meanwhile French cinema was finally nationalized, and with the help of the state was heading for a safe and sound future. At the Liberation, many intellectuals and employees in the film industry understood that the war offered the opportunity to change radically the face of cinema in France and to elaborate a new program for true social progress, eliminating bourgeois influences and capitalistic practices. One of the results of this initiative resulted in productions like René Clément's *Battle of the Rails* (*La bataille du rail*, 1945). The CLCF became the CNC (Centre national de la Cinématographie) in July 1946, as the United States and French governments struck a deal and negotiated the importation of Hollywood films in France without the presence of French film industry representatives. With this feeling of betrayal, French cinema did not actively pursue the reforms as planned. For the newly formed CNC, the goals were quite clear: to eliminate

the system of control established under the Vichy regime, to assist French productions and distribution abroad, and finally to limit the power of censorship in the arenas of morality and public order. Unfortunately, French cinema of the postwar era did not turn out to be what was hoped during the first hours of the Liberation. Economic activity was now in the hands of the government within a plan of national economy. The postwar era therefore assured the impossibility of a return to the 1930s, when small businesses and amateurism reigned.

French filmmakers and actors of the early 1940s gave cinema a unique artistic identity and commercial scope. One must bear in mind that from a political or academic point of view, historical documentation of the facts can only be fully understood and mastered several decades after the events. Film historian Roy Armes argues that any hasty judgment about a particular director or career can lead to serious misconceptions.⁵¹

To a considerable degree, it is inadequate or unfair to base judgments on extrapolated plot synopses or the details from carefully selected moments of a film. To be understood, films need to be seen in terms of their makers' overall philosophy, as expressed in a wide range of pictures. Without such a perspective, Jean Delannoy, the patriot, speaking out boldly for the Resistance in *Pontcarral* in 1942, inexplicably becomes Jean Delannoy, the Aryan apologist, of *The Eternal Return* (*L'éternel retour*, 1943) the very next year. But if we consider the director's whole career as a skilled but routine filmmaker without a deeply felt range of subject matter, this shift becomes more easily understood, and the superficiality of both approaches can be appreciated. Along with Marcel L'Herbier's *The Fantastic Night* and Marcel Carné's *The Devil's Envoys*, *The Eternal Return* was one of the greatest commercial successes of the Occupation period. Premiered in Vichy in October 1943, *The Eternal Return*, an idealistic mythology adapted to the circumstances of modern times by Jean Cocteau, transformed Jean Marais and Madeleine Sologne into heroes of a generation. Director Jean Delannoy, one of the forerunners of the future *cinéma de qualité*, assigned the set to Georges Wakhevitch and the photography to Roger Hubert, who intriguingly was able to keep the predominant themes of the legend without affecting its enthralling atmosphere. Besides the presence of the protagonists' unexpected blond hair and a certain amount of ambiguity in the young leading performers, the film offered a lucid version of Greek mythology while allowing audiences to escape daily concerns. A modern version of the famous Tristan and Iseult myth, the story transfers the love between Patrice (Jean Marais) and Nathalie (Madeleine Sologne) to the eternal dimension. The account begins with the friendship and affectionate relation between Patrice



Jean Marais (Patrice) and Madeleine Sologne (Nathalie) in Jean Delannoy's *The Eternal Return* (*L'éternel retour*, 1943), (Courtesy of BIFI).

and his uncle Marc (Jean Murat), who owns the castle in which they both live. With time, both men have developed a mutual and sound friendship. Although being his protégé, Patrice becomes enamored with Marc's wife, Nathalie, but cannot communicate his love for her due to his loyalty toward Marc and the profound faith Marc has in him. Likewise, Nathalie loves Patrice, but she is afraid to display her affection explicitly. To make matters worse, a malicious dwarf named Achille (Patrice's cousin, played by Pierre Péral) who also resides in the castle, wanders around the dwelling, thwarting all possible future plans of the couple, stealing their little remaining privacy, and consequently preventing any chance for intimacy. One night, the young couple is caught in Nathalie's bedroom. Patrice is immediately expatriated to a small town, where an old friend of his (Roland Toutain) works as a mechanic. Once again, passions take control of his destiny, but this time he is loved by his friend's young sister, also named Nathalie (Junie Astor). Patrice can no longer express love for anyone, however, since his heart belongs to his true love. Slowly, he begins to

lose faith in life and with a broken heart lets himself exist aimlessly. Alarmed by the depth of Patrice's despair, the sister calls upon Nathalie to come to Patrice. Before dying, Patrice at last confesses to his beloved Nathalie the immense love he always has had for her. Too late, death takes Patrice away, as Nathalie admits her reciprocal love.

The oneiric panache of *The Eternal Return* is due more to the participation of screenwriter Jean Cocteau than director Jean Delannoy, and can unquestionably be interpreted as a precursor to Cocteau's next film, *Beauty and the Beast*. Celebrating for several decades the great myths of humanity, Jean Cocteau was certainly one of the most prolific French auteurs of the century. With contributions in a variety of fields, such as poetry (he wrote a first volume of poems, *Aladdin's Lamp* (*La lampe d'Aladin*, at eighteen), theater, cinema, essays (a friend of Raymond Radiguet and Guillaume Apollinaire), and painting (he worked with Pablo Picasso and Amadeo Modigliani), Cocteau displayed a rather sophisticated artistic taste and most importantly an extraordinary scope for creative talents. His first full-length film, entitled *The Blood of a Poet* (*Le sang d'un poète*, 1930), an interpretation on his own personal mythology, promoted him to one of the most prominent figures within the growingly popular Surrealist field. Deeply attached in the reworking of Greek mythologies and other popular "fantastic" tales by sponsoring an ethic of straightforwardness and of orthodox imagery, he wrote the script for *The Eternal Return*, then directed *Beauty and the Beast*. But it was in 1949 that Cocteau truly achieved his greatest movie with the adaptation of the myth of *Orpheus* (*Orphée*), a play he had first performed in 1926, and for which he cast his favorite actor (and life companion) Jean Marais, followed a few years later by *The Testament of Orpheus* (*Le testament d'Orphée*, 1960), a deepened exploration of the nature of the poet.

Proclaiming French cinema of the Occupation as profoundly predisposed toward the Vichy government and propaganda—the way Italian cinema was in fact with Benito Mussolini's control over the media—can be misleading, since it is now clear, more than half a century later, that the vast mainstream of French productions indeed escaped censorship, thanks to the depth and fullness of their very creativity. Eventually, by 1944, in an effective consensus, the French public and filmmakers defeated the propaganda of Vichy's ideology. Although most directors represented on the screen the ubiquitous *attentiste* attitude characteristic of the French themselves during the Occupation (underscoring the avoidance of strong ideologies and often refusing to recognize the depth of the atrocities committed), neither Vichy nor the Nazi administration was able to eradicate the creative resilience of French cinema.