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## REDISCOVERING FRENCH FILM

### Part I

November 5, 1981 - January 2, 1982

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LES JEUX SONT FAITS. (THE CHIPS ARE DOWN). 1947. Director: Jean Delannoy. Production: Films Gibé. Executive Producer: Louis Wipf. Script and dialogue: Jean-Paul Sartre. Adaptation: Jean Delannoy and Pierre Bost. Photography: Christian Matras. Editor: Henri Taverna. Music: Georges Auric. Set Designer: Serge Piménoff. Sound: Pierre Calvert. Editor: Henri Taverna. In French; English subtitles.\*

With: Micheline Presle (Eva Charlier), Marcel Pagliero (Pierre Dumaine), Marguerite Moreno (Woman from the Beyond), Fernand Fabre (André Charlier), Colette Ripert (Lucette), Charles Dullin (the Marquis), Danièle Delorme (Drowned Woman), Marcel Mouloudji (Lucien Derjeu), Ariane Mureaux (Mistress of Aguerre), Jean Daurand (Paulo), Andrée Ducret (Mme. Astin), Jim Gérald (Renaudel), Marfa Dhervilly (Dead Woman), Guy Decomble (Poulain), Renée Bouzy, Jacques Erwin (Jean Aguerre), Howard Vernon (Military Chef), Renaud Mary (Military Man), Edmond Beauchamp (Dixonne), Jean Berton (a Lackey), Pierre Roussel and Maurice Marceau (Two Workmen), Andre Carnège (Minister of Justice), Robert Dalban (Georges), Frédéric Mariotti and Paul Demange (Two Dead Men), Robert Le Béal (Eve's Friend), Jean Reynolds, Daniel Fillion, Léon Daubrel, Alain Clairford, Dumont, Jacques Lambrun, Frédéric Moriss, Jean Gosselin, Pierre Salas, Maurice Derville.

(\*105 minutes)

Although Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy influenced many of the purely dramatic and often very down-beat French films of the post-World War Two period, it was a transitional (and fashionable) influence and exerted nowhere near as profound or intense an influence as that of Zola on the pre-war French cinema. Moreover, filming of his specific works was delayed until the later 40s. LES JEUX SONT FAITS (a gambling term meaning in effect that the die is cast, that the wheel is already spinning and that there is no way of influencing or changing the outcome) was his first foray into writing directly for the screen. It was not well liked in Europe, where critics resented the fact that Sartre's ideas were mystical yet at the same time atheistic and/or anti-religious. It was not released in the U.S. until 1949, where a basic unfamiliarity with Sartre was a handicap. The film got tepid reviews, and soon disappeared. Time has made it neither a better or worse film; perhaps one of its greatest aspects of interest is that it is quite literally a time-capsule preserving on film contemporary French attitudes towards the recent occupation. So soon after the war, the French were not yet ready to take on the problems of explaining, examining, justifying (or condemning) French life and behavior under an occupying power, and in fact it would be another thirty years before they would be prepared to do so. But they did acknowledge that they were thinking about the problem by dealing with it obliquely, retreating into historical fiction to find



a parallel situation (de Maupassant's BOULE DE SUIF, which coincidentally also starred Micheline Presle) and, as here, into allegoric fantasy. Since LES JEUX SONT FAITS has a contemporary milieu and deals with an unnamed but decidedly Gallic country enduring a Fascist dictatorship, it would have been an easy matter to have made a direct reference to the Occupation. But Sartre's theme of the futility of resistance and the inevitability of passive acceptance might have seemed to be a condoning of wartime collaboration--philosophically if not politically--so moving the film into a kind of Never-Never Land was understandable.

Less understandable was the overall defeatism that permeated so much post-war French cinema, and which is sustained here, well after the end of the war. One can adjust to a similar spirit in British cinema. The British, after years of sacrifice and austerity, found that all war's end brought about was an end to death and danger. The austerity and the hardships remained (and would do so for years), bringing about a disillusionment which was certainly reflected in British cinema, many of which (like IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY) drew their thematic and visual inspiration from pre-war French cinema. But the French, despite facing obvious problems of readjustment, were free; one would have thought that their cinema would be bursting with vitality and optimism, instead of which it almost matched Germany's emphasis on gloom and self-pity.

Apart from its "time capsule" qualities however, LES JEUX SONT FAITS is a most interesting and worthwhile film in many ways, with interestingly stylized sets, a beautifully controlled performance from Micheline Presle, a surprisingly good one from the Gabin-like Marcel Pagliero (whose dialogue had to be dubbed, since the Italian actor from OPEN CITY spoke no French) and a hauntingly melancholic score from Georges Auric at his Wagnerian best.

Despite the philosophic content of Sartre's dialogue, it is a surprisingly straightforward film, and one made doubly easy to follow since it is full of visual symbols: the repeated motif of a hand clutching at hair or fabric, signifying a desperate attempt to cling to life; the little dead-end street between life and death, dead trees on one side, living ones on the other, emphasizing the dividing line between the two worlds and the absence of half-measures; the gestures of the dictator as he practices a speech before a mirror, trying to decide whether expressions of dominance or supplication will most win over the populace. Thanks to the playing, and to Auric's score, the film is far more persuasive emotionally than it is intellectually, which is probably not what Mr. Sartre had in mind. It's a pessimistic film, but like a Keaton movie, not a depressing one since the pessimism is so taken for granted. And there are moments of particularly joyful comedy, some from the delightful playing of Charles Dullin (as the shade of an executed French Revolution aristocrat) but primarily from the magnificent Marguerite Moreno as the efficiently fussy secretary of the ante-room to Sartre's particular heaven or hell, flustered only when her orders are countermanded by dissenting disembodied voice from Monsieur Le Directeur!

But in the long run, thanks primarily to the sensitivity of Micheline Presle's playing, it winds up as a love story, something that usually cannot be said of life-and-death other-world fantasies. Whether they be whimsical like HERE COMES MR. JORDAN or serious social/political essays as in the British THEY CAME TO A CITY, plot and novelty command most of our attention. LES JEUX SONT FAITS and Michael Powell's A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH (STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN) are two exceptions in that we don't really care too much about the philosophies involved, but we do care about, and hope for, a happy ending for the protagonists. Quite incidentally, LES JEUX SONT FAITS was made shortly after the Powell film and has many similarities; Sartre may well have been influenced by it, while reversing its



optimism and, for reasons of cost, reducing its use of trick effects to the barest minimum.

The major love scene in LES JEUX SONT FAITS has rather strange undertones in that it comes somewhat too early in the association of Eve and Pierre for it to be entirely natural. While their emotion is genuine, there is a feeling of pressure; they not only have to prove themselves to each other, but also to the higher court which will determine if they are to remain alive. They are in a sense on display, and this gives a vaguely voyeuristic quality to the scene. However, even the standard cinematic tactics of those less explicit days--the camera panning around walls and ceiling, or catching a quick reaction shot of eyes or a hand--doesn't lessen its emotional impact. (The sequence also revives that beloved cliché of pre-war French cinema indicating that a sexual liaison has taken place by showing the hero putting on his tie!)

Micheline Presle, one of the finest of the newer French actresses at that time, was as expert then as at playing women much older than she was in reality, as she was--in her years of maturity--at playing women much younger. Although such films as BOULE DE SUIF and LE DIABLE AU CORPS probably tested--and proved--her versatility rather more, her performance in LES JEUX SONT FAITS remains one of her best and most moving. Quite incidentally, one of the points raised at the Symposium early in the series was of the apparent dominance of the man-destroying Femme Fatale of French cinema. Viviane Romance was certainly a good argument for the presence of this image, destroying most of the major male French stars (on-screen!) in pre-war French cinema, highlighting her Occupation deprivations with perhaps the definitive evocation of CARMEN, and continuing with equal if not renewed vigour into such post-war film noirs as PANIQUE, where poor Michel Simon didn't stand a chance against her. But the screen persona of Micheline Presle offers exactly the opposite image: a long and prolific stream of independent, supportive and constructive women, ranging from the intrepid Durbin-like ingenue of YOUNG GIRLS IN DISTRESS to the fashion-model of FALBALAS and the self-sacrificing doctor of L'AMOUR D'UNE FEMME. In fact she had to go to a British film (BLIND DATE) made by an American director (Joseph Losey) to play her one definitive femme-fatale! Certainly her role in LES JEUX SONT FAITS is very typical of an image of Woman that the French cinema depicted far more frequently than the engaging parade of harlots and home-wreckers in this series might lead one to expect.

--William K. Everson (Adapted from an essay  
in Love in the Film, published by Citadel Press

Film credits compiled by Rachel Gallagher

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