

Document Citation

Title	Godard orchestrates a search for faith
Author(s)	Caryn James
Source	<i>Oakland Tribune</i>
Date	1994 Jun 17
Type	article
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	Depardieu, Gérard (1948), Chateauroux, Indre, France
Film Subjects	Hélas pour moi (Oh woe is me), Godard, Jean Luc, 1993

Godard orchestrates a search for faith

Depardieu turns in fine performance

By **Caryn James**
NEW YORK TIMES

'HELAS Pour Moi" is about the search for faith, memory, truth and love — the deep human emotions ordinarily masked by the rigorous intellectual form of Jean-Luc Godard's films. But here is Godard in a strangely lyrical and contemplative mood. Its title awkwardly translated on screen is "Woe Is Me." A better alternative would be "Alas for Me," which captures Godard's meditative tone.

Like his 1985 film, "Hail Mary," this new work depicts the possible appearance of the divine in ordinary contemporary lives. But where "Hail Mary" outraged some Christians by reinventing one of their most sacred myths, here Godard plays it safe by reaching back to Greek mythology for his god figure. The story, he has said, is based

REVIEW

- **"Helas Pour Moi"**
- **Starring Gerard Depardieu and Laurence Masliah**
- **Directed by Jean-Luc Godard**
- **In French with English subtitles**
- **At the Red Vic in San Francisco**
- **Unrated**
- **★★½ (Lyrical, provocative)**

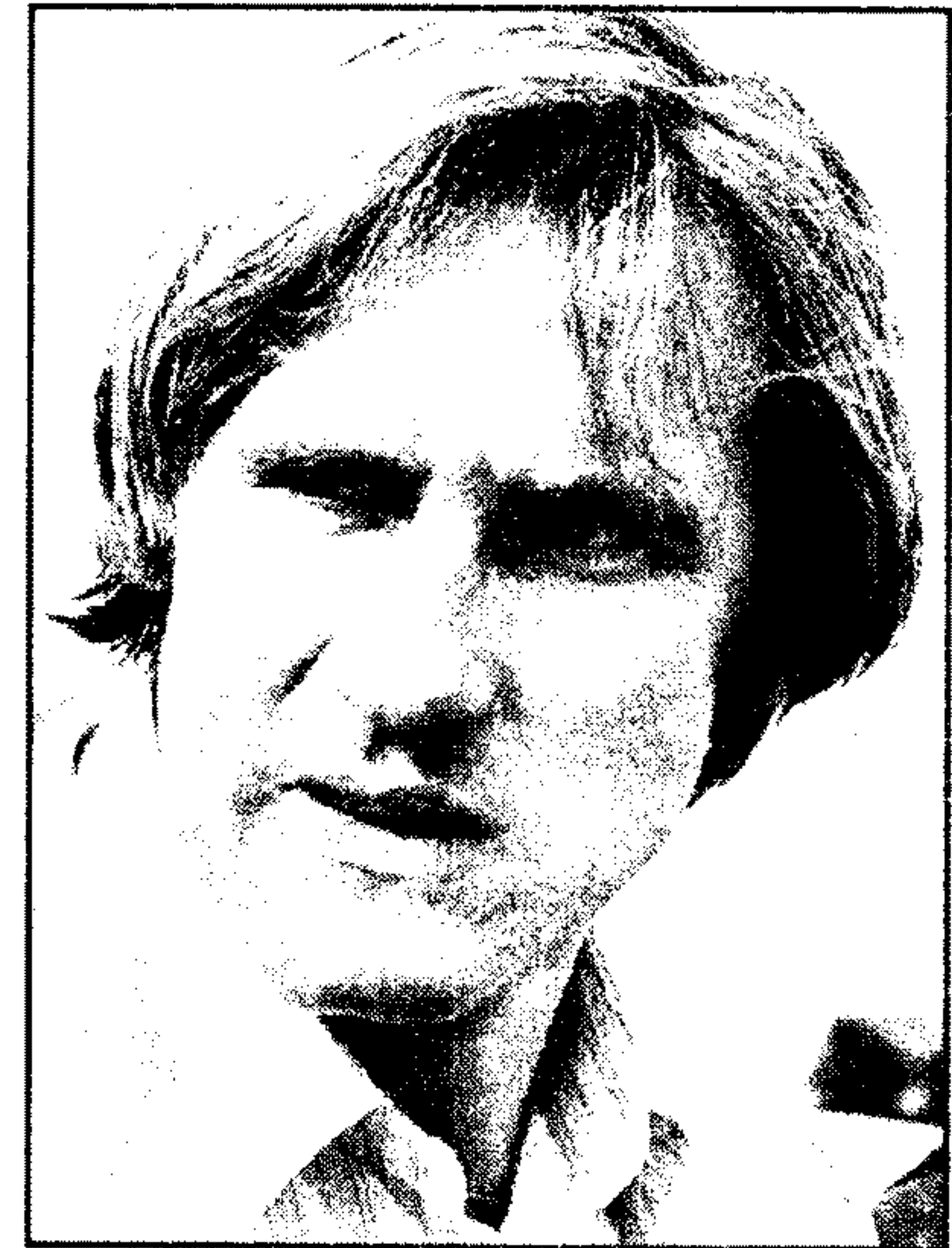
partly on the legend in which Zeus impersonated Amphytrion in order to seduce Amphytrion's wife. In Godard's version, Amphytrion is named Simon Donnadiou (Gerard Depardieu). His wife is Rachel (Laurence Masliah) and the God who borrows Simon's body is a man in a trench coat and slouched hat, with a gravelly voice that holds the rumble of thunder behind it.

Simon and Rachel are compelling, the actors powerfully understated as they reveal the characters'

confusion. Depardieu is not given his usual opportunity to be bombastic, and his intense but restrained performance provides much of the film's human heart.

But the tale is not easy to approach. The film begins when a publisher arrives in the picturesque Swiss town where the Donnadiou live, having heard their strange story. The publisher begins with a voice-over that sets the tone of the film, recalling how his ancestors used to go to the woods to light a fire and pray. Gradually, through the generations, the elements of that ritual were lost: the ability to pray, to light a fire, even to know where the sacred place was. "But we do know how to tell the story," he says.

Godard sometimes makes his storytelling more difficult than it needs to be. The townspeople act like a Greek chorus as they comment on the Donnadiou; they have flippant conversations at the video store; words and chapter headings flash on screen. All these are conscientious elements of Godard's strategy, forcing the viewer to search out the truth. But the devices ultimately detract from the power of



Gerard Depardieu stars in Jean-Luc Godard's "Helas Pour Moi."

Simon and Rachel's struggle with the divine.

Filmed at a Swiss lake, "Helas Pour Moi" looks beautiful. With music by Bach, Beethoven and Tchaikovsky, it sounds exquisite. It will be a surprise to anyone who thinks of Jean-Luc Godard as a cold and cerebral filmmaker.