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Movie #18



CLAUDE CHABROL Interviewed

My first plan was to do the shooting in Eyzies. I remembered it as an amazing place. But it has become a little tourist village and wasn't at all suitable. So we looked round a bit further afield and found Trémolat. I wanted a village that was near some caves. And as I was hoping to use the inhabitants of the village, I didn't want them to live too far from the prehistoric remains. Anyway, I wasn't wrong, as their behaviour is something like the sane behaviour of the past. The mayor told me there were around five hundred inhabitants, but we always saw the same fifty. We took the village as it was, with nothing altered. The butcher's shop really exists. Only one thing was changed round. As quite often happens the *mairie* and the school are in the same building and as I wasn't happy with that, the post office was made into the *mairie* and the school mistress's apartment was moved into the registry office, but it didn't interfere with the holding of weddings—it must have been the first time people got married in the same room with a bed. People even sat on the bed. That was splendid, but it is quite normal for this kind of place, which is pretty funny and happy-go-lucky, anyhow. They aren't people who are stopped by that kind of small detail.

You wanted to show the effects that such a gory news-item as the killing of girls can have on the population of a village, with the idea that in the end it doesn't have the result that is generally expected . . .

I knew very well that I would find villages in Périgord where things happen like that. Contrary to general belief, in the country, events do not generally disturb people's lives too much, except in certain less . . . pleasant regions. Usually, they just go on living normally. It isn't true at all that there are old wives who get together of an evening and prattle . . . If the old women do meet, it is to play cards and eat cheese, not to talk about what the butcher's wife did with the *curé*, and snippets like that. For instance, in Trémolat the *curé* slept with the postman's

wife and the postman heaved him into the Dordogne. Well, that's all there was to it. The *curé* dried his clothes and life went on as before.

What made you choose a school-mistress for the central character and the school surroundings?

I have always been interested in the secular schools and at the time I wanted to make a film about head teachers. Right from the moment when I first thought of the butcher I wanted there to be a school-mistress. I said to myself: I see it all, the school-teacher and the butcher, it'll be *Marty* all over again, just as half-baked as *Marty*, the good butcher smiles at the teacher and she . . . I've hardly ever seen an ugly young teacher. It's not like people think, young school-mistresses are pretty . . .

We're laughing because we're all three married to school-mistresses . . .

Well, it's true. I'm not joking. They aren't plain at all. But it's an old tradition that

school-mistresses are like that. Sure, there are some—thirty years later when they haven't found dashing fellows like you.

*And the Jean Yanne character? He is somewhat different from Mario David in *Les Bonnes Femmes*, but did you want to have another look at this character?*

Yes, there was that. But no one tried for a moment to understand Mario's character in *Les Bonnes Femmes*; that wasn't what it was about. While in *Le Boucher* . . . I don't want the audience to get any preconceived ideas. Now, if there's one thing that scares people in a cinema, it's the sadistic killer, the fearful monster. But I really want them to be so upset by his death that they think: 'Poor man!' And understand completely why the school-teacher kisses him. Whereas logically, if I had let them see a sadistic killer, just

*Stills. Above—Claude Chabrol in *La Route de Corinthe*. Below and right—*Le Boucher*; Stéphane Audran and Jean Yanne.*



like that and said —Now see the good lady over there, she's going to really kiss him, people would have said —Who's this whore? Le Boucher is the opposite of Rider in the Rain.

The opposite. I'd go so far as to say that. Thank goodness.

Is that why you have only shown one aspect of the character? We only ever see his . . . kinder side.

It's not a case of Jekyll and Hyde. And anyhow, when he kills, it must happen very fast and it can't be very pretty to see. Of course, you could always show him [makes horrible faces] eyes bulging, slavering and brandishing a knife, but that isn't what's interesting; it is the fact that he has this secret . . . And then, he doesn't use a butcher's knife, it's an army knife.

And in addition, that treatment would have spoiled the balance of the narrative which centres around the village, while his murders are committed elsewhere.

He does not do any killing in the village and his only victim from the village is the bride. He has very clear reasons for murdering her because it was on her wedding day that he met Mademoiselle Hélène, and you might also wonder if his killing her at the very moment the teacher arrives below with the kids could have something to do with his panic when the bride comes upon him lying in wait like an animal. He is up there when the teacher comes out of the cave with the children—you can hardly see him but he's there.

Lang doesn't show the murders in M either, but we see only the pathological side of his character, whereas Losey is set on making the murderer a lot more pitiable in the remake.

Yes, but I don't think mine is pathetic. He's a lad who hasn't had much luck. There's the fact that he's a butcher and, between ourselves, his father can't have been any laughing matter, either, and then there's spending fifteen years in the army . . . Just think, soldiers eat and when they are stuffing themselves, they forget a little. It's a break, even in wartime they rest while they are eating. Well, with him, as he was eating he was still cutting. It's really not a fluke, it must create an obsession.

In your view, is there a connection from the moment he meets her, between his falling for the school-teacher and the murders? Are the two things related?

Certainly there is a relationship. Sure, he has committed earlier crimes, but they were further away. And then he gets this tendency to come nearer. Even so, the first crime we talked about was committed, apparently—it's one of the few dates not made clear—on a Sunday. Logically, as the wedding took place on Saturday and it was the Monday when he brought the leg of lamb, he could consequently have done the killing on Sunday—the day after their meeting, that is. So there is a connection, anyhow. But I wasn't meaning to stress it, because stressing this kind of thing is meaningless. Simenon is very good in these cases and he leaves it uncertain. I've read quite a number of books about killers, ones



who chopped their victims up or village stranglers. They leave vague any direct links there might be between characters and the crimes. The time we are concerned with begins with the wedding and the three murders he commits afterwards, that is to say with the moment they actually meet, because they must have seen each other before that. From the time sequence that has already been established, he must have been back in the village for a week. And the village was very happy to see the butcher's son starting up again in business . . .

Something that plays a very definite rôle in the relationship between the school-teacher and the murders is the lighter. As soon as she gives him the lighter, you say to yourself — Right, it's a rather naïve twist of the plot. He's going to lose it and that's how she'll discover that . . . and so on. Really it's a lot more complicated though; it happens all over again. He loses it once and then again he gets it back. You meant it to work this way, didn't you?

He wanted her to know and he wanted to wipe out what she knew. In his mind, when he took back the lighter there was nothing there any more. Also he's a simple man, he hasn't been to university. He lacks awareness on two levels. On one hand he says to himself —Hell! She's found the lighter, I'll take away the evidence because I don't want her to know. But that's stupid. And then again he says to himself —I'll take back the evidence because I want her to know. It's all mixed up. But I don't think he could help taking it. I think it seems quite reasonable for him to take it. In addition he knows it is his lighter because her attitude has changed . . .

There is the scene when she starts to cry. And again there's the moment when he goes down the steps and says —There is no longer any reason now for it to stop. She understands completely and he stops in the dark . . . Oh yes, I love that! When he says —Why should it stop? It's hopeless. I wanted to film that in darkness. It's dreadful: this

poor little man diving off into his own darkness.

There was a lighter in La Femme Infidèle as well. Is that just a coincidence?

Oh no! It's not a coincidence, but it is very odd. I didn't notice the connection until afterwards. In *La Femme Infidèle* I used the lighter for a particular reason. I thought: I am going to spin a real thread of intrigue out of only one point—smoking, the act of smoking a cigarette. I shall use a fantastic lighter and that can be the clue to the plot. But I didn't go into it at all. And then I realised that the idiot psychoanalytical dictionaries say a lighter fulfils the need for warmth, and this works fine for both films. In the first of them I knew it was very important and that's why I had a huge lighter. When the husband notices that his wife has given it away, he can't bear it. It's warmth and home. And it's exactly the same in *Le Boucher*, where she gives him a lighter so that she can establish ties with him, because on her part, it's no longer simple, and when he loses it she finds it again almost immediately.

It's almost the stove in Landru, when you come down to it. It seems to us that in La Femme Infidèle and Le Boucher, both of which you wrote yourself, there isn't any malice towards the characters . . .

It's very simple. When I want cruelty I go off and look for Gégauff. Paul is very good at gingering things up and he can make anyone appear ridiculous. He says I do it but he's really the one. He can make a character absolutely ridiculous and hateful in two seconds flat. There are things I wouldn't dare try myself—for instance in *Que la bête meure*, I was the one who suggested to him that the Yanne character suffered from diarrhoea and that would bring about what happened, but I wouldn't have dared try it alone. What's more, that was the main addition we made to the book, without that the rest . . .

Jean Yanne said in an interview that during the shooting you tended to stress the man's



pleasanter characteristics . . .

Oh yes, of course. Because if he turned into an absolute stereotype monster people would say —Oh well, he's not real. I've already been accused of making him too much of a caricature. He wasn't at all; he was almost true to life and a long way short of caricature. There are people a lot more frightening than that. There's a guy I found particularly striking; he's called Guéna and is a former Minister of Post and Telecommunications and also the deputy for Périgord. He looks absolutely fabulous, in more or less the same way as Yanne in *Que la bête meure*.

Le Boucher seems a good deal more like *La Femme Infidèle* than *Que la bête meure* . . . My great dream would be to make something like a drop of water, and have everything in that droplet. Like Charles Trénet's song 'La Noix' where it says that in a single nut, you can find everything. When I write a screenplay alone it becomes an obsession with me. I knock things out all the time. On the other hand I work with Paul when I need some other contribution, when I'd rather have something built up. But what I personally look for is the simplest possible plot.

This was very clear earlier, in L'Oeil du malin.

That was the same. *L'Oeil du malin* could have been great, if the loot had been there to make it . . .

Is the great clarity of your direction intended to reinforce your way of showing which characters are acting parts? Because the more

they are hiding, the clearer your structure has to be.

That's right. But the shape of a film can be a reaction. At the moment there is a fashion for gross affectation that turns me up. You can't see a film and understand anything, it's awful. So I said to myself, if you can't understand any of the others, at least you'll understand something of mine. So I tried to make the plot really absolutely clear. At the same time, though, psychological analysis is idiotic, because when a guy is analysing someone, it's always himself he's really looking at, so you always have to make some allowances. But at that point, given a transparent form, you have to prevent the characters from lacking shape and substance by watching that the elements are all clear to the audience, though without any over-emphasis. Well, there's a fairly simple trick with the kinds of camera movement that aren't any use in reframing. As they aren't useful in this way, they have to be in another, providing a greater fluidity and enabling you to be where you have to be at the right moment. It's useful. And it's quite a job, you wouldn't believe, really a knack. It's harder than tripping off with the camera into every corner. The camera in the fireplace . . . that trick really makes me sick! *You know what Wilder said about not putting the camera up the chimney unless he's filming the story of Santa Claus . . .*

You often see films where you ask yourself: why did he use that shot; what is it for? In the end it's not for anything at all. Sure, you can do it for the pleasure, though I don't get

Stills: 'completely empty'—La Route de Corinthe, with Christian Marquand, Jean Seberg and (far right) Antonio Passalia.

my pleasure making shots for the pure joy of it—I like to get pleasure out of what's in the shot. Logic is something that fascinates me, because it disappears and at the moment things start disappearing, I begin to get interested.

We already noticed that, with Que la bête meure. It seemed your regard for Hitchcock had rather given way to admiration for Lang . . .

Oh, quite. It made me laugh before, when people said *La Femme Infidèle* was rather like a Hitchcock movie. It wasn't at all. And even when there is any suspense, as in *Le Boucher*, for instance, it is completely resolved into a really simple shot. There may have been little things before—low-angle shots and the like, but the really frightening shot is fixed, and pretty wide, which is what makes it frightening.

Le Boucher may not have Hitchcock's type of suspense, but one might wonder if it doesn't resemble him rather in theme: the theme of confession and the need to confess?

He has a need to explain when he feels that he's had it. It isn't a need to confess because he kills himself so as not to have to see her again. It's almost a Christian act on the part of the butcher, and is just as you would expect with the old background of Christian teaching that holds good in the little villages and still gives them a feeling of shame, disgust and original sin. It's a bit

less perceptible in Dordogne because nearby there are remains from prehistoric times when the problem of shame did not arise in the fight for survival. And with the butcher, shame is caused by the interference of a civilising Christian influence in a man who is first and foremost a savage, a real prehistoric man. I like prehistoric man better than Christians. I am more for Cro-Magnon man than for—by the way, what's his name?—Paul VI, who seems to me to date from well before Cro-Magnon man.

Something that comes up in all your later films is characters who reach their absolute limit . . . I like to get to the absolute limit of principles. Earlier, in drivel like the Tiger series I really wanted to get the full extent of the drivel. They were drivel, so OK let's get into it up to our necks and even beyond if necessary, but let's not do things by halves. In the spy stories, the silliness was more important than the spying, so they had to fall into the genre of drivel, rather than the spy genre. *La Route de Corinthe*, which was the most foolish, is the most successful of those films, but it is completely empty. Absolute nothingness. But there I wasn't looking for the nothingness, which shows how tomfoolery always ends up by taking you over. That's why you have to get out of it as fast as ever you can. You only play the fool to get suckers to hand over their money so that you can make better films. But to make the suckers hand over their money, you have to fool around and the more you do, the more keen they are to hand it over. But in the end the drivel wins and that's just as bad because then it doesn't work any more. You could even set it out as a mathematical problem: given that, with a silly subject you need 47% drivel so that a film doesn't come a cropper and when the subject isn't silly you need 20% drivel, but given that the surrounding

witlessness of producers and the like is such that people like idiot subjects with attendant idiocy rather than sensible subjects without, what is the right amount of drivel for a very witless film to attract stupid people and not drive them off?

That's not always true, because your 'non-drivel' films are pretty successful, aren't they? Oh yes. But listen, people aren't intrinsically silly, it's silliness which is the problem. You have intelligent producers who say to themselves, 'I'm not doing too well at the moment, I'll have to make some drivel.' They really do reason like that. And they end up fooling around so much that they get to be idiots.

Let's get back to the movies you like. You can't deny that you are very keen on characters who go to extremes . . .

Well, first there's logic. And then I've always wondered why there are things that prevent people from carrying right on to the end . . . Like the rules of war. It's a farce. As soon as madness takes over there aren't any reasons for not going on. And when anyone does, people are surprised. Fancy beginning! Then, so there can be peaceable lunatics, idiots and slobs, they put keepers in charge of them, but when one of them doesn't play the game, aha! They are really mad! Me, I go for the kind of people who say —OK, if we're going to do it, let's go all the way! In *La Femme Infidèle*, for instance, the husband learns that his wife is being unfaithful. He could look the other way, kill his wife, burst into tears, go away, or anything. He has a very simple solution: go and kill the other fellow. But he could just as well go and shake him by the hand . . . *Which would be more acceptable to the laws of society.*

Yes, but I like the Bouquet character as soon as he pitches into the guy.

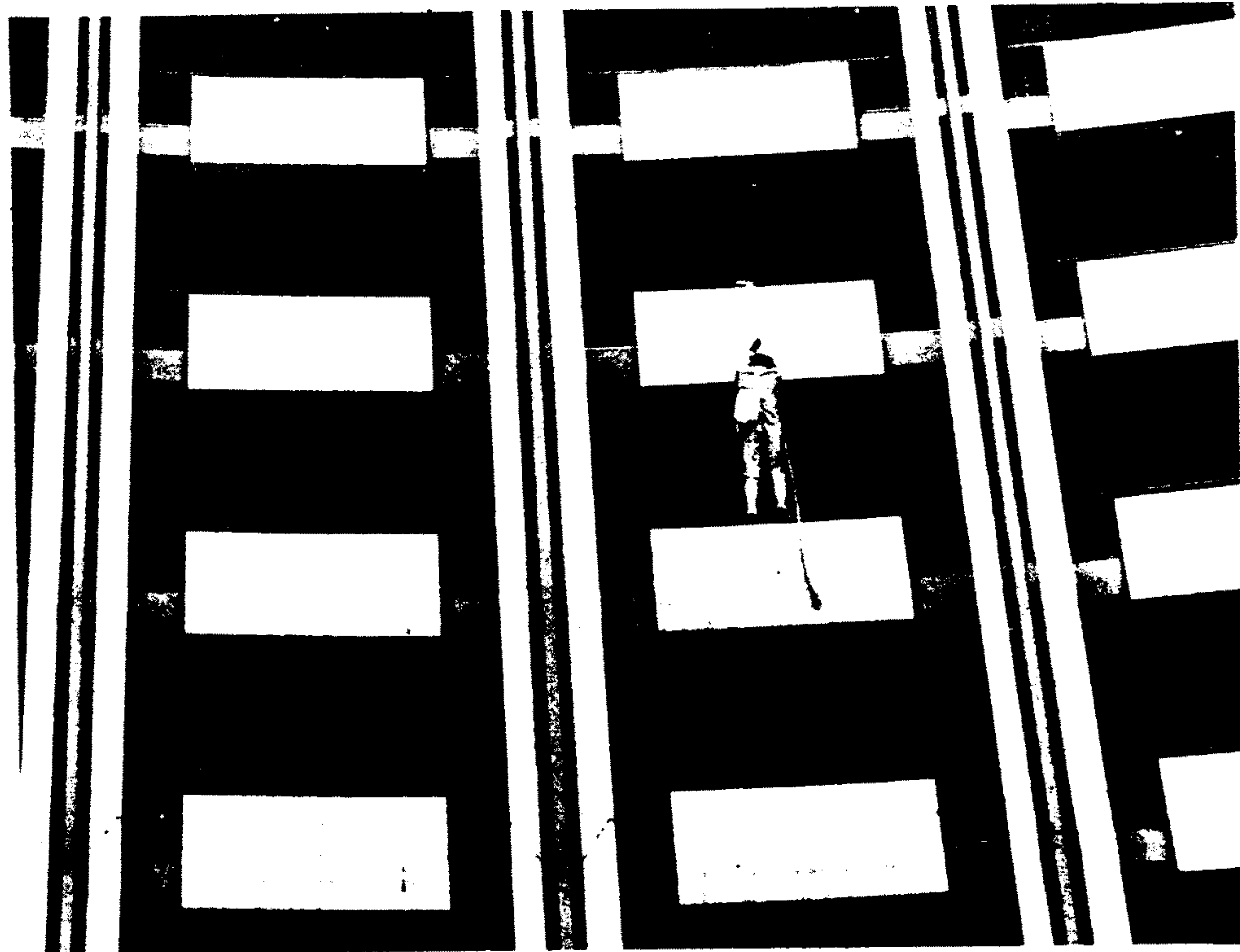
You could say the same for Yanne in Que la bête meure. He's a slob, but he isn't a hypocrite. If the stew is revolting, he says it's revolting.

Oh no, he has only to get a new cook. He's a character who is completely hemmed in by society. When I asked him why he liked the guy, Jean Yanne had a good argument in his defence. He said —Listen, this bloke gives his family a living. He has a wife who does damn all and doesn't seem quite normal, his old mother to keep, and a kid who is dim at school. So he maybe has the right to some distraction with his sister-in-law, who incidentally is a little scrubber. And when a boy throws himself at his car, he isn't going to jeopardise his family by giving himself up. It's a perfect defence, but based on an expedient view of society.

You seem on the one hand to hate the family, which you express particularly through your child characters, like those in Que la bête meure or La Muette and on the other to defend marriage, as you do in La Femme Infidèle.

There's no relationship between the two ideas. I am not against the family unit, but I think it's made to look completely ridiculous. The best proof is fellows who spend their time sleeping around with poor wretched scrubbers. That's awful! I am very monogamous by temperament. But it's very difficult being monogamous. You have to find a woman who suits you perfectly, makes you feel good and isn't tired when you come home in the evening. And like that, you get on very well. It's something that has been totally distorted. I simply think a man, a woman and kids is fine!

That's what is meant by the last shot of La Femme Infidèle, where you have an outward tracking shot which draws nearer instead of retreating.



The actual tracking shot comes out, but at the same time there is a zoom in.

Do you think there has been a new departure for you after the Tiger series, starting maybe at Les Biches or Le Scandale?

Not *Le Scandale*, even if I did manage to get out of it a bit by playing the producer along. You know, *Le Scandale* began as a crime in a nudist camp. When they put it to me, I badly needed the cash and I said — Great idea, we'll hide the murder weapon . . . Well, *Les Biches*, then?

Yes. We still had to be careful, but yes, *Les Biches* . . .

The thing that's rather irritating about Les Biches is that the Trintignant character isn't gone into deeply enough.

It isn't gone into at all, but I did want it to be blurred. He's an *homme-objet*. The script of *Les Biches* is constructed on exactly the same lines as *Les Cousins*. One of the scenes is exactly the same—the one when Stéphane and Trintignant come back and tell the waiting girl that she can go on waiting for a long time because they're going to stay together. Gégauff and I split the work on the script. I concentrated on Stéphane's character and he worked on the girl. And he really wanted her to be mad. He said that those girls are quite mad, and he was right. It's true, they are completely unhinged.

Madness was already a preoccupation in your earlier films. Is it there to counterbalance stupidity?

I'm in favour of balance, but it isn't balance as most people think of it. Their conception of it is just another form of imbalance. It's like a guy who says, I'm going to spend three weeks on getting things fixed up. I'd like to see my friends, but I won't as I've my fixing to do. That's completely unbalanced. In my opinion, balance is absolute freedom, which doesn't interfere with that of other people. Granted you have to be in the centre, politically. But the centre isn't at all where you'd think. Where people imagine it to be now is really unbearably far out on the extreme right. The true centre

could possibly be some kind of twentieth century Marxism.

Yes, but that isn't the centre—it isn't what people think of when you talk about the centre . . .

People look for a balance, but their centre of gravity is completely misplaced. You can see this from the way they all say they are of the centre, but they all have different ideas. The centre is the least easily distinguished of all political stands.

But what is your idea of the real centre?

I'd really like to see a very balanced system starting with a sensible redistribution of wealth. And I think it would be better if everyone had his own little house rather than his own HLM. [*Habitation à Loyer Modéré*—i.e. low rent apartment]. No one believes it possible because they don't consider the extravagant wealth possessed by a small minority of individuals. It's a great mystery and total madness . . .

You seem to look back nostalgically on village life . . .

Of course, because there are hardly any really rich people in a village. Things are fairly divided. Everybody lives OK, they all have a car of some kind, which gets better in stages. They started off with a *deux-chevaux* and now they all have a 404. In a while, with the Common Market, it'll be a Mercedes.

That was the best thing in La Ligne de démarcation, the village and the scene when Roquevert sings the Marseillaise.

That was splendid and my contribution was to add the Internationale. I said to Colonel Rémy —You have to have both. You can't have just the Marseillaise. The Popular Front were there as well, you know. He said —That's right, so they were! Colonel Rémy is one of the most appalling characters I know. The only effort I had to make was to stop the film turning into German propaganda. Because the good colonel, who is a man of the right, had a pet theory, that the heavies were the Gestapo, while the Wehrmacht was very fair. And the actor

who played the German officer was all the time trying to clear himself. He spent all his time telling us —I was ill, during the war, you know . . . And then he wanted to add bits at the ends of speeches, like —I must leave you now, Baroness, Herr Hitler is calling me . . . I said to him —No it's alright as it is . . . He and Rémy had written a scene where the Gestapo guy has a go at the Wehrmacht guy for not being tough enough on the people; he tells the Gestapo guy —No, they have always behaved properly towards me and I want to do the same towards them . . . That was roughly it. I didn't want to shoot this scene at all, but they had made me so mad that, at the end of the film, I wanted to give them a bit of pleasure. Only I didn't have any film in the camera. To make it a bit more of a joke, I said to the sound engineer —Look, we're going to start out pretty loud and at the end of the take, you say it won't do, because it's too quiet. The cinematographer tripped round with his lightmeter, we made with the clapboard and it began. —I won't risk my honour, said the German. —The National Socialist party has a different idea of honour! —But the count has always behaved well towards me . . . In short, total drivel. We got to the end of the take and Chichignoud, the sound engineer, said —I'd like you to go through that again because one of the actors is on the right level, but the other is a little weak. So we did it again. And one of them was braying like a donkey, while the other was louder, too. Then Chichignoud came back, saying —It's the other way round now, one's fine, but the other is slightly below level. It finished with them yelling and yelling and giving out stupendous roars while we all rolled around laughing till we cried. And Colonel Rémy sat in the corner with his eyes closed, listening to his dialogue and beating out the time on the floor with his stick.

The première was a real spectacle. Rémy managed to get Rhin-et-Danube to sponsor it. There was an interview on Europe 1, and Rémy turned up with two Resistance guides spouting their nonsense. Then I was told I had to be at the Elysée-Club at six with Monique Berger. Rémy, who misses nothing and is greedier than anyone I know, said to himself —Hey! There might be something to drink. And I was in the Elysée-Club at six o'clock with my back to the door when I suddenly saw Monique Berger's eyes popping out. Rémy was arriving with his guides in attendance, all covered in medals like Russian field-m Marshals. —Where are the drinks? asked Rémy. —There aren't any drinks. —Oh, right. We must have been mistaken . . . And off they went, medals clanking. The same evening, when I arrived at the Moulin Rouge for the première, there were thirty of them each side, like so, with flags, berets and medals from here to there. It was utterly stupefying. And Colonel Rémy went to introduce the film in a hundred and fifty different places. Afterwards he sold signed copies of the book of 'La Ligne de démarcation'.



To get back to your later films, the story is always told through a witness. In *La Femme Infidèle*, for instance, it's the husband, and in *Le Boucher* we see everything from the school-teacher's point of view.

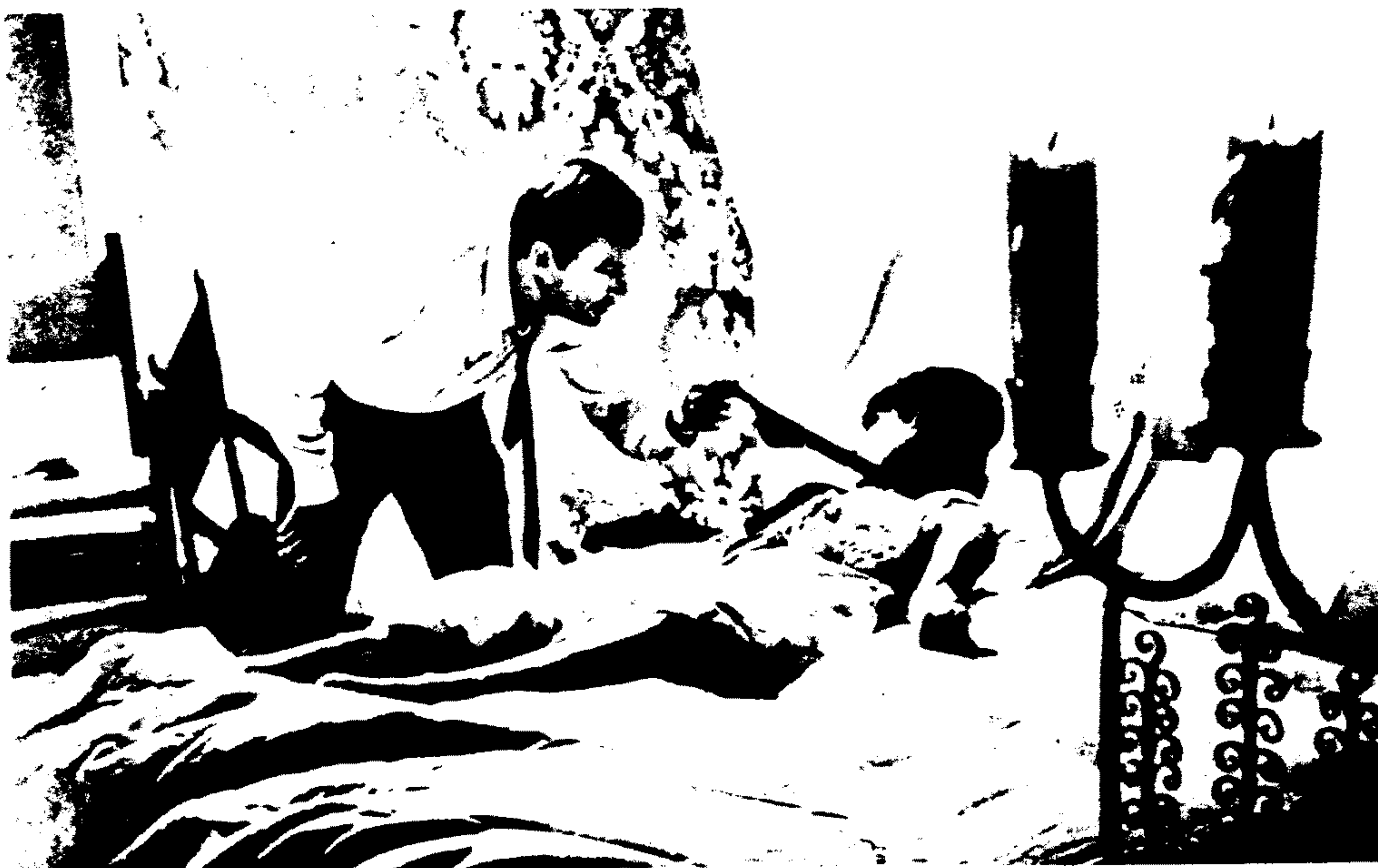
It's better to look at things from someone's point of view and I'm not sure that it would be that much more interesting to see them through mine. You can be more objective, seeing things through somebody else's eyes than through your own. I have a deep distrust of all the autobiographical things. There are autobiographical elements in all films, things you have seen or heard—somehow perceived, that is, and given a personal form. But if you don't want to cheat, this form must emerge through someone else, acting as a sort of supplementary mirror. Because the same event can be interpreted differently. A thing may seem unspeakable to me but not be, and I may think something is amusing which is maybe unspeakable. It's not a new idea to have your hero act also as a witness of events, you know; it happens in a good number of novels.

Henry James took it to extremes, but it's implicit in all nineteenth-century novels . . .

It's very good for the cinema. I think writing scripts is, in principle, very like the nineteenth-century novel, in any case, a lot more so than the *nouveau-roman* or even modern narrative.

That raises the whole problem of the cinema of today. Some art critics think, for instance, that when there has been a breakthrough in painting, it is no longer possible to paint in the same way. People have tried to apply this to the cinema and say that one cannot any longer make films in the same way. Now, you are showing the opposite to be true, and you're not alone in this. That isn't true because the cinema hasn't even found a form yet. So it's pretty funny for anyone to try breaking it up. There are

Stills. Opposite page—La Ligne de démarcation. This page—Le Scandale: Anthony Perkins, Yvonne Furneaux, Maurice Ronet, Stéphane Audran.





people who claim to be searching for new forms but they haven't discovered the originals yet. Let them find something and then we'll see.

There's a whole theory claiming that the cinema found its form with Eisenstein. Then came the whole American cinema in a sort of parenthesis and when that parenthesis is finished, we can start off again in the right direction, and so on.

That is wrong, because the young Russian directors, for example, loathe Eisenstein. They call him a formalist idiot, although they aren't really right there, and hold up against him friend Dovzhenko. I am rather of their opinion. I think I read it in *Positif* [in an interview with Tarkovsky]. But what is serious is that the young directors, who grind forms to a pulp before they even exist, would Eisenstein and Dovzhenko discard both. For them it's all rubbish, they must find new forms although none exist anyway, and nothing is definite. Other arts have been going for hundreds of years. Sure, their forms have been defined, developed, over-developed and solidified, possibly even . . . But with the cinema, it's a joke. Look at the films shot in 1956—only five per cent were shot correctly. And then film critics try to construct a critical filmology. While I read *Positif*, I also read *Cinéthique*, *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinéma 63*, no. 70. And I have seen an absolutely splendid issue of *Cinéthique*, devoted to an analysis of the possible relationship between Cahiers's idea of the cinema of the future and the idea they have themselves, on *Cinéthique*. I'm not

kidding . . . You would have died laughing. *They made a kind of conglomeration of form and system . . .*

That's it. The form belongs to the system. But by definition, all form attempts to be comprehensible. So they then have to change the form of writing. They themselves need—they are more and more successful in that way—to express themselves in the kind of jargon that no one who hasn't actually arisen out of the system can understand. In any case, they are compelled to express themselves one way or another and so they are in the system themselves. I have even seen some of them use mathematical formulae, ancient ones, to express themselves, and that surprised me a lot.

Which recent films have you liked?

L'Enfance Nue. It had some things which were absolutely new. And Boorman's *Point Blank*, because in using the Hollywood system, he attempted to give it a bit of sparkle.

Crime is something that seems to fascinate you, and the way you go about it is associated with a very precise brand of writing, that extends from Charlotte Armstrong to Nicholas Blake, and includes early Ellery Queen. One could call it a literature of 'criminal behaviour'.

They are writers, real writers. They are interested in the behaviour of people who kill others. This isn't so in the case of *Série Noire* novels, where the authors are content merely with telling the story of a murder. But when I am interested in killing someone, I want to know what happens when someone is killed. The good

thing about the novels you spoke of is the great simplicity of all the plots. And I've also noticed that the authors of the crime novels I like best are nearly all of the same physical type (I don't mean they are like me . . .). When I see films adapted from these peoples' books, I'm sure they are not as good as I could have made them. I'm thinking of two really feeble films from books by Charlotte Armstrong, *The Unsuspected* by Michael Curtiz and *Don't Bother to Knock* by Roy Baker. They were two divine plots, all the same. She also wrote an extraordinary book, 'The Case of the Weird Sisters', about three disabled sisters. One had no arms, another was blind, the third was deaf . . . And they had to find which of the three was the killer, only through her disability. It was fabulous. I like John Dickson Carr a lot too, although more is done by inference. You know I was going to make *La Chambre Ardente*? And Duvivier shot it; I was incensed. . .

Since we're talking about problems of detection, we have argued a lot about the end of Que la bête meure. What's your version?

Well, in the restaurant scene, when the girl announces on television 'We have some very sad news', Duchaussoy lifts his hand for Caroline to listen. Anyway, Fritz Lang never doubted for a second that it was he.

In that case, his diary was a sham . . .

Obviously, it's the key to everything. He fixed the diary so as not to be caught. Clearly you might think that he was giving himself up for the sake of the boy, just as the kid might be sacrificing himself for him, but it is the fact of his arrest which drives the

kid to confess, in the same way as he confesses because the kid has been arrested, and in any case, the connection is established.

Still on the subject of Que la bête meure, don't you think that the casting of Yanne, with all he represents to the public, might create a certain ambiguity for the audience? On one hand the part as you envisaged it, very unsympathetic, as against a possible complicity with the public that attaches to Yanne's own character?

This complicity does exist, certainly . . . One would expect the public to be fairly close to the Yanne character . . .

Yes, but might this not depend on public sympathy Yanne has obtained through radio and television? In other words, did he manage to separate the character from his image?

That's the problem. I asked myself—If I use Yanne, who plays the fool on radio, aren't people going to start laughing? Then I tried to prevent this first by showing him in the accident even before he could be recognised. This made the audience begin by going through the accident. And then I defused it further by making them laugh before Yanne's appearance, so that the laughter would stop when he came on the scene, and start again when the audience heard what he said. I thought this would succeed in making them almost forget Yanne. A lot had to be gone through for that. It's possible that it didn't work, maybe the Yanne mythology swept it away, but I don't think so. Look, it's hard to say, because there are lots of people whose mental processes are so influenced by all the things that bombard their minds throughout the day that you can't trust anything they say. They say they laughed but it isn't true. There's a fine example in *Rider in the Rain*: they come out saying it's tremendous whereas it has really had them squirming for two hours. It's an extraordinary instance of collective idiocy. What's more I have every intention of making use of it. It's only sense. I'm going to bludgeon them by saying—You go and see how splendid it is, and all that. You can read the short extract from *Le Figaro*: *Le Boucher* is the best film made in France since the liberation. It's a bit much! Well, it's a start in bludgeoning them.

You're not missing any chances, either. You said you gave Que la bête meure three stars in 'V.O.' just to give the film a bit of a boost, but it's only a small magazine with a circulation of twelve hundred . . .

Yes, but those twelve hundred include critics, film society officials who think when they see the stars—Look at this film, he thinks it's great. We'll have to watch out for it. There are some guys, too, who like *Le Boucher* a lot because they've heard *La Femme Infidèle* is packing them in in America, and was highly thought of among American film-makers. It's a strange and thrilling reaction!

So Positif is no longer completely without importance . . .

Positif has treated me as a fascist for ten years! [*Uproar, noises off, protests.*] Yes it has! There was a piece in Positif about me in which a guy called, I think Marcel Oms

wrote something to the effect that Chabrol is talking about ugliness and, from the look of him, it's plain that he knows what he's talking about. . . OK, so I'm no Adonis. I didn't know this fellow, until one day I saw his mug . . . It's not the greatest! I should say, moreover, that my politics are strangely enough nearer to Positif than to . . . And Kyrrou was a great friend of mine.

Can we say something about colour. What does it mean to you?

First of all it's marvellous with producers. They love to see rushes in colour:—Ooh, look! I've never seen such blue sky. It's lovely! I've never seen such a red dress! In fact drivel . . . It's very useful in shooting because they leave you alone. Having said that, I think it would be very interesting to do absolutely marvellous black and white, but there isn't time or money and film has got so fast that it is difficult to play around with it or try anything that's the slightest bit subtle (it was great when film could stand it). Black and white is associated through and through with the idea of economy and speed, so that if you say you want to make a film in black and white that will cost more than colour, no one can understand it. So we work in colour. But if you're going to make colour films, don't do them in black and white. It annoys me if guys say they have made a colour film, when it looks as if it were in black and white. I don't want to be unkind but I went to see Melville's *L'Armée des ombres* when our very own Herman, stout fellow, was busy explaining that he had dealt with it in black and white. Phooey! There wasn't any black and white, there was everything you could want in there except black and white. It's not bad . . . well, the film is very austere. But it's not a film at which you feel like saying 'Hats off!' [Note: Melville habitually wears gangster-movie hats.]

How do you work with actors?

Actors are a miracle to me. I don't find I need to say anything to them. From the moment they've read and understood the script, provided they don't have impossible movements and actions to make, that's all there is to it. You have to show them where to go, so that they feel your support, but there's hardly ever any need to give them any instructions about tonality—that would be pointless.

You have said that you wrote a kind of biography for the character of the butcher. Do you often do that?

I really like to know their background. For instance, I have always thought that Bouquet's wife in *La Femme Infidèle* had probably been his secretary. She must have been slightly his inferior socially . . .

In Le Boucher there's a quote from Balzac . . . Yes, it's from 'La Femme de Trente Ans'. The heroine of the novel is called Hélène, which fits very well and there is this reference to the marquis, which I could use for the masked ball sequence.

And the teacher's short commentary to her pupils, on Balzac's ambition to reshape a society . . .

Wasn't mine, it was a help-up for the critics.

All the same you are open to comparison, if not with Balzac, at least Wilder. You show France in a way that isn't unlike Wilder's picture of America.

I am extremely attracted to anything realistic. It is for that reason that I am a great fan of Wilder.

And how did you get on with the village people?

Fabulous! It's a very unusual place, you know. Quite different from the villages of Beaune or Brittany, where people are not that happy, or have problems. Here, they haven't any problems at all. They came to watch the shooting and were delighted. One night I yelled—Shut up for God's sake, we can't work! And there was dead silence, marvellous. There are very few professionals in the small parts. The old lady laughing in the bakery is the blacksmith's widow. Apart from the teacher, the father-in-law, the school kid and the cop, I used only people from the village.

Why is there a reprise of the song 'Capri, petite île' after the last shot?

Commercial reasons. The end is a bit heavy and sad, and people would otherwise have come out saying—It's a bit too sad, though it's good, but it's a bit too sad. But now they hear Tra palam pam pam and they say—Pretty good, eh?

Michel Ciment Gérard Legrand Jean-Paul Török

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Stills: Que la bête meure.

