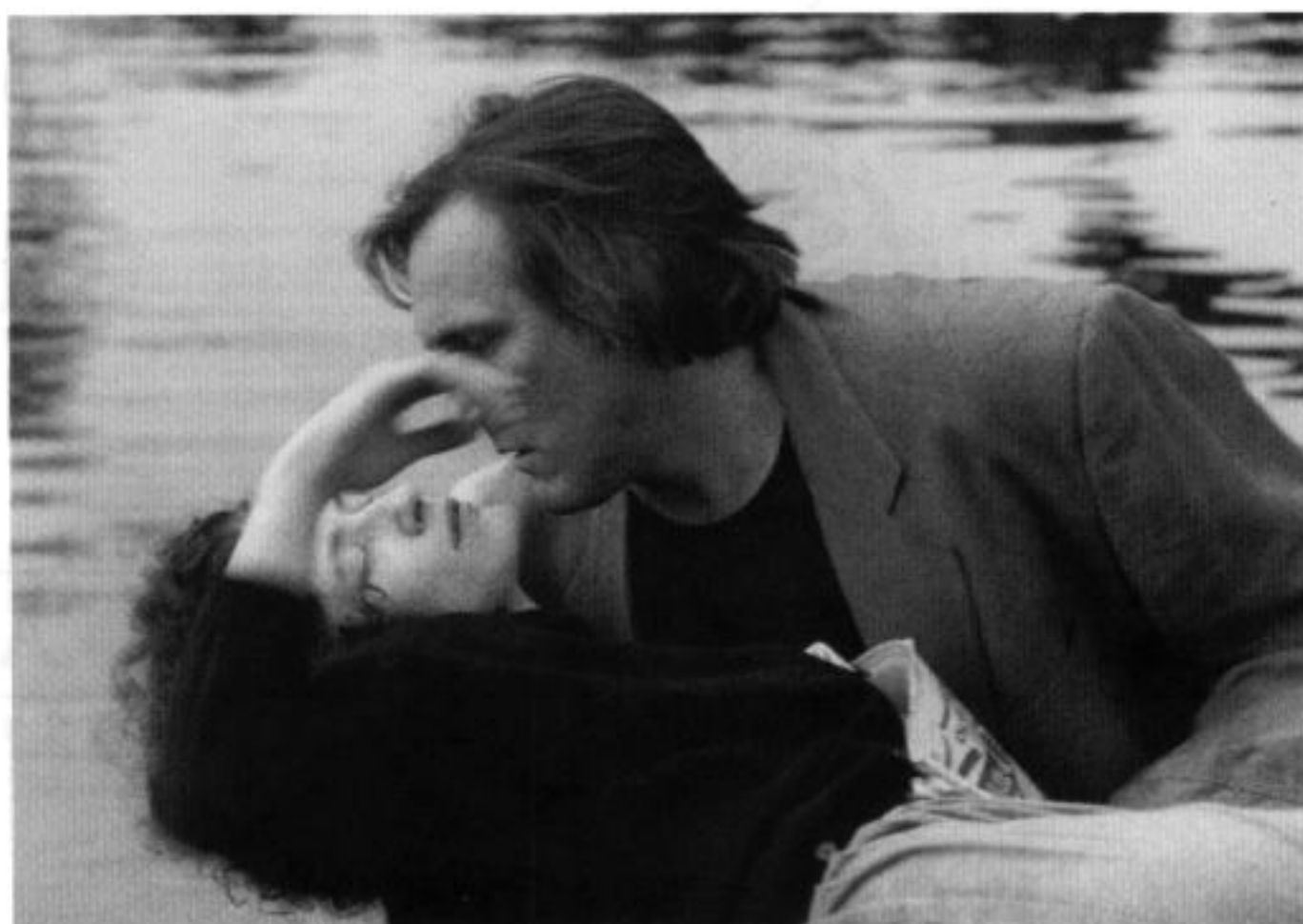


Document Citation

Title	Hélas pour moi
Author(s)	J. Hoberman
Source	<i>Wellington Film Festival</i>
Date	1994
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Hélas pour moi (Oh woe is me), Godard, Jean Luc, 1993



Hélas pour moi

Woe is Me, Switzerland/France, 1993

Director: Jean-Luc Godard
Production co: Vega Film AG
Producer: Ruth Waldburger
Screenplay: Jean-Luc Godard
Photography: Caroline Champetier (colour)
Editor: Jean-Luc Godard
Sound: François Musy, Pierre-Alain Besse

90 minutes/stereo/35mm

Cast

Simon Donnadieu: Gérard Depardieu
Rachel Donnadieu: Laurence Masliah
Abraham Klimt: Bernard Verley
Max Mercure: Jean-Louis Loca
The Pastor: François Germond
The Other Pastor: Jean-Pierre Miquel
The Pastor's Wife: Anny Romand
Teacher: Roland Blanche
Doctor: Marc Detton

Festivals: Venice, Toronto, 1993.

Hélas pour moi – the title can be translated as 'Oy Vey' – is inspired by the Greek myth in which Zeus impregnates Alcmene, taking the form of her husband, Amphitryon, while he is out avenging the murder of her eight brothers. The fruit of this union is Heracles, although Godard's main interest is in "the desire of a God to feel human desire". Which deity is that, I wonder? Even given its classical premise and Godard's own biases, *Hélas pour moi* seems inordinately male supremacist – although not without its humorous aspects. God, whose divine consciousness is represented by the vomit-voiced croak of the computer from *Alphaville*, crassly manifests himself amidst the placid beauty of a perfect Europe. The crisply photographed Swiss landscape is populated by a variety of ripe and tawny young women, self-conscious film characters ('present but not here'), and official star Gérard Depardieu. Appreciating the fidelity of the russet-haired beauty who plays Depardieu's wife, God duplicitously assumes the star's stolid form. Moment to moment, it's a dazzling performance. Although blatantly producing a movie about the ineffable, Godard has no compunction about stopping short to ponder the way (for example) a bicycle falls to earth... Stately and fragmented, given to all manner of sudden emotional outbursts, TV inserts, and F-stop flickers, *Hélas pour moi* is at once fast and slow, beautiful and infuriating, stupid and smart... Who else could create so elegantly layered, rhythmically complex, and wilfully impenetrable a celluloid construction? But where the young Godard made movies seemingly authored by a combination of all previous movies, he now produces obscurantist masterpieces that refer only to themselves. The paradox of Godard is that of an artist who has regressed from post-modern to modern. – J. Hoberman, *Village Voice*, 22/3/94

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