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Le Bled (1929)
(*Le Bled* 1929)

LAPHY •

DIRECTOR: Jean Renoir

SCREENPLAY: Henry Dupuy-Mazel and André Jaeger-Schmidt

ADAPTATION: Jean Renoir

TITLES: André Rigaud

ASSISTANT DIRECTORS: André Cerf and René Arcy-Hennery

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: J.-L. Mundwiller

SETS: William Aguet

DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Marcel Lucien and Morizet

CAMERAMEN: Boissey and André Bac

EDITOR: Marguerite Renoir

SHOOTING: February-March 1929 at the Joinville studios and on location in Algeria

PRODUCTION: Société des Films Historiques

DISTRIBUTOR: Mappemonde-Film

LENGTH: 2,400 meters

FIRST SHOWING: May 11, 1929, at the Marivaux

ACTORS: Jackie Monnier (Claudie Duvernet); Diana Hart (Diane Duvernet, Claudie's cousin); Enrique Rivero (Pierre Hoffer, the nephew); Alexandre Arquillère (Christian Hoffer); Manuel Raabi (Manuel Duvernet); Berardi Aïssa (the Algerian, Zoubir, friend of Pierre); Jacques Becker (laborer); Hadj Ben Yasmina (the chauffeur); M. Martin (Ahmed, the falconer); Mme. Rozier (Marie Jeanne)

The film opens with a series of documentary shots of Algeria as a prologue.

A young man (Pierre Hoffer) and a girl (Claudie Duvernet) meet on the boat to Algeria. He is broke and has come to try to wheedle some money from his uncle, Christian Hoffer. The girl is going to Algeria for the reading of her uncle's will. At the dock the young man meets an Arab, a comrade from his army days. The girl is met by her cousins, who are also vying for the inheritance.

The opening of the will, at the notary's office. Claudie is the sole heiress. Manuel Duvernet and his sister, Diane, leave.

Pierre Hoffer arrives at the house of his uncle, whom he thinks a peasant. That evening he comes down to dinner in a tuxedo, to the great amusement of the rest of those present, who are all wearing country clothes. Among those around the table: Jacques Becker.

The following day the uncle takes his nephew around to see the property. They walk on ground that his ancestors re-

claimed from the marshes. The uncle, who has immediately realized the purpose of Pierre's visit, asks him outright how much he wants. Pierre suggests 100,000 francs. The uncle does not say no, but takes Pierre to the edge of the sea. It was here that the French troops landed in 1830. The event materializes in their imagination, and the two men, inspired by the memory of this historic event, march at the head of the landing troops. Then the tractors arrive (one thinks of Eisenstein's *General Line*). Finally the uncle announces that he will give Pierre the money on one condition: that he work at the farm for six months to learn the value of money.

A few days later Claudie, out horseback riding, asks directions from a laborer. It is Pierre. A storm comes up. They run for shelter. Declaration of love among the sheep and the shepherds. Pierre hurries to tell the good news to his uncle, who is not at all pleased. "You will go back to Paris as soon as she has sold her property," he predicts. The Arab friend appears, to tell Pierre that he is leaving for the south. His destination is near the place where Claudie has to go to inspect the land she has inherited. Pierre convinces his uncle to let him go with his friend, on the pretext that he is going to buy sheep from him.

Everyone is together again in the south. The Algerian friend organizes a gazelle hunt, to which he is going to invite Claudie and her cousins. Diane Duvernet decides that she would like to get rid of Claudie so that she can have the inheritance after all. She convinces her brother to set up an ambush. The chauffeur will help out in the scheme. While they are chasing a herd of gazelles, the chauffeur draws Claudie away from the rest of the group to pursue a single animal, which they end up killing. Claudie cries, upset by the cruelty of the hunt. The chauffeur suggests that they go rest at the oasis. It is there that Manuel, the murderous cousin, is waiting for them, having come directly in his car. He explains the situation to Claudie without beating around the bush: she must marry him or die. Claudie refuses; he takes her off in the car.

Meanwhile Manuel's sister has taken a fall from her horse. She is seriously injured. Feeling the need to unburden her conscience, she reveals her brother's plans to Pierre. Pierre and several other riders take off after Manuel.

Manuel's car has broken down at a ford, but he has continued into the desert on camelback with his hostage. It will be difficult for the horses to follow them in the sand. Pierre orders the falconers to send their birds after the camel. The falcons attack the beast and blind it. Manuel is obliged to give himself up. Pierre Hoffer brings back the girl.

An epilogue shows the engagement dinner at the farm. This time everyone is in evening clothes, and Pierre shows up dressed for work!

ANDRÉ BAZIN

Here is another commissioned work, taken in the same light spirit as *Le Tournoi*. Since the simplicity of the script gave him a good deal of latitude, Renoir took the opportunity to make an adventure film in the style of the American pictures he had enjoyed so much in his youth. *Le Bled*, following the healthy tradition of Douglas Fairbanks in his Triangle days, starts out as comedy, comes to a climax of high adventure, and turns toward the sentimental at the end. Pierre (Enrique Rivero) himself, the inexperienced and awkward fellow inspired at the last minute by a threat to his loved one, is reminiscent of Fairbanks. It is all carried off with verve, the more serious scenes being slipped in without breaking the rhythm: the traditional love scene (this time in the rain, among the shepherds) glistens already with a few droplets from *Le Fleuve*; and the punishment of the villain, blinded by the falcons, allows Renoir to let another, more pungent liquid flow: "this precious blood" which still obsesses him.

JACQUES RIVETTE

Félix Oudard in *Tire au Flanc*Félix Oudard and Georges Pomiès in *Tire au Flanc*

not only in *Nana*, *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes*, and *Tire au Flanc*, but even in the films reputed to be thoroughly commercial, such as *Le Bled*. It was on these films that Renoir served his technical apprenticeship. The importance he accorded to photographic style and, above all, to the choice of lenses is apparent in *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes*, and perhaps even more so in *Le Bled*. This latter film is a technical absurdity from beginning to end: although many of the scenes were conceived with important elements in the background, Renoir insisted on using fast lenses, which gave a very soft image and virtually no background clarity. These results led him later to take the opposite tack, requiring his cameramen to take all their shots with one deep-focus lens. Renoir only barely emerged from this period of technical groping with *Boudu Saved from Drowning* in 1932.

The early films also give the impression that in the silent period Renoir had not yet found reliable guidelines for his editing; the shots follow one another with no logical or dramatic coherence. He was still preoccupied with his performers and not yet able to subordinate acting to the demands of storytelling on film. I do not believe that there is a single pan shot in either *Nana* or *Le Bled*, although this device would become crucial to all his sound films. On the other hand, he developed in these early films a considerable prowess for lengthy deep dolly shots, which is scarcely apparent at all in *The Rules of the Game*. In his subsequent work Renoir's fundamental preoccupation became the widening of the screen—already deepened by the lenses—through lateral reframing. To this end panning and lateral dollying became his two main camera techniques.

The themes which Renoir developed in his sound works were also present in rough and sketchy form in the silent films. There is, for example, the theme of mechanical toys in *La Petite Marchande d'Allumettes* or the hunt in *Le Bled*, which we find so brilliantly handled in *The Rules of the Game*.

In considering Jean Renoir's work in the years preceding 1930, then, we must fight the critical prejudice that would have us believe that with the exception of *Nana* and possibly *La Pe-*