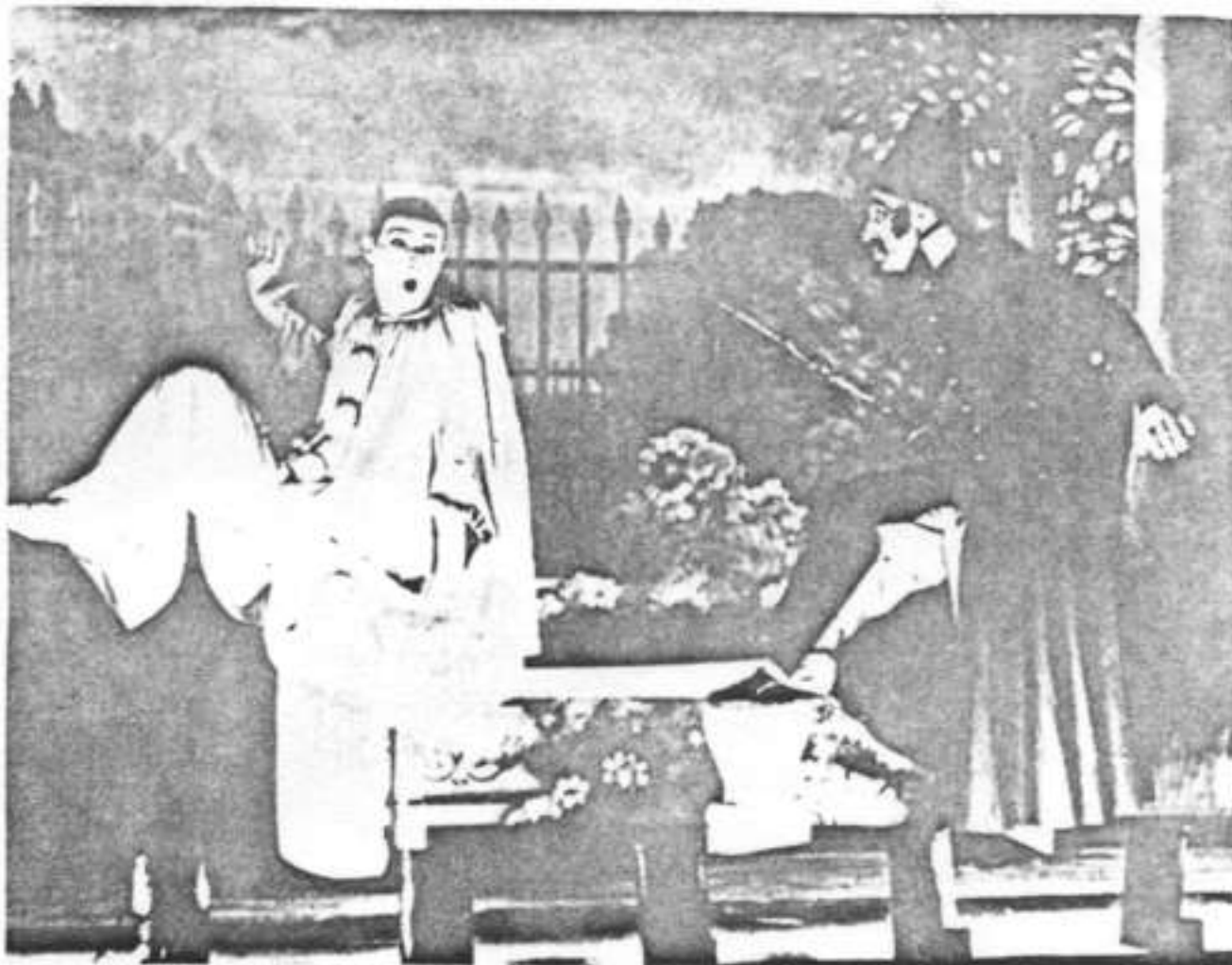


## Document Citation

Title	<b>Marcel Carné -- excerpt. 1943 - 45 : Les enfants du paradis</b>
Author(s)	Jean Quéval
Source	<i>British Film Institute</i>
Date	1950
Type	book excerpt
Language	English
Pagination	18-22
No. of Pages	5
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Les enfants du paradis (Children of paradise), Carné, Marcel, 1945

*Jean-Louis Barrault as Debureau in one of the  
pantomime sequences.*

## Les Enfants du Paradis





impression that space is no hindrance whatsoever. There is a distinctively sober quality in the costumes, designed from the famous illuminated manuscripts, *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry*. The music is alternatively decorative and medieval (the songs, the dance, the table music), and symphonic (the hunt), in which the themes have breadth and eloquence.

The only notable aesthetic failure of the film, perhaps, is the uneasiness one feels in watching exteriors that are sometimes real and sometimes faked. Otherwise, the numerous incidental beauties do much to compensate for the film's lack of narrative and emotional power. Since, however, this was a first attempt by Carné and Prévert at portraying victorious, perennial love, one may wonder if such a grand, fascinating, ornamental piece of film is more, considering its ambitious theme, than a highly distinguished failure. *Les Visiteurs du Soir* never succeeds in touching the heart.

Arletty brought a static poise and nobility to the part of Dominique ; Alain Cuny had obviously put his heart into his rôle, and his intonation and foreign demeanour struck a note of telling strangeness ; Jules Berry's theatrical appearance as an ingratiating, determined devil, is hard to forget. Of the others, Marie Déa was the least convincing. The film owed much to its consistent and balanced acting, and one felt this time the director's firm singleness of purpose in handling his characters.

"This is exactly the opposite of former films by Carné. The Provence sun has replaced the Northern mist and the poisoned air of popular suburbs. Youth and love, in which all the images are bathed, finally triumph over the Devil, whereas the Devil had the last word when Jean Gabin led the game." (René Barjavel.)

In 1942, a competition was arranged in the Vichy zone of France about the film. Roger-Marc Thérond, later a reviewer for *l'Ecran Français*, won the prize. In his article he remarked : "Some people have said that cinematic rhythm is lacking in *Les Visiteurs du Soir*. On the contrary, it is voluntarily slow, like a swan on a lake."

## 1943 - 45 : Les Enfants du Paradis

*Production* : Pathé-Cinema. *Producteur* : Fred Orain. *Administrateur* : Raymond Borderie. *Director* : Marcel Carné. *Script and Dialogue* : Jacques Prévert. *Photography* : Roger Hubert. *Sets* : A. Barsacq, R. Gabutti, A. Trauner. *Costumes* : Mayo. *Editing* : Henri Rust. *Music* : Maurice Thiriet, Joseph Kosma, G. Mouqué (*Pantomimes*) played under the direction of Charles Munch. *Distribution* : Pathé-Cinema. *Première* : Madeleine and Colisée, May 22, 1945. 195 minutes.

### Cast :

Arletty (*Garance*), Jean-Louis Barrault (*Baptiste Debureau*), Pierre Brassuer (*Frederick Lemaitre*), Maria Casares (*Nathalie*), Marcel Herrand (*Lacenaire*), Louis Salou (*Comte Edouard de Montray*), Pierre Renoir (*Jéricho*), Jane Marken (*Mme. Hermine*), Fabian Toris (*Avril*), Etienne Decroux (*Anselme Debureau*), Marcel Pérès (*Director of Funambules*), Gaston Modot (*Blind Man*), Pierre Palau (*Manager of Funambules*), Jacques Castelot (*Georges*), Robert Dhéry

(*Celéstin*), Florencie (*Gendarme*), Paul Frankeur (*Inspector*), Rognoni (*Director of Grand Theatre*), F. Favieres (*Collector*), Albert Remy (*Scarpia Barigni*), Auguste Boverio (*First Author*), Paul Démange (*Second Author*), Diener (*Third Author*). Also Jean Tanier, Leo Larive, Habib-Benglia, Melrac, Marcelle Monthil, Raphael Patorni, G. Quéro, Leon Walter.

*Story* : The Boulevard du Crime, nowadays the Boulevard du Temple, Paris, the first part in 1840, the second part in 1847.

Most of the Paris theatres are concentrated on the Boulevard du Crime, at a time when melodrama and the pantomime are popular. There are six main characters, three of them from historical sources : Baptiste Debureau, a famous mime of the Funambules theatre ; Lacenaire, a murderer known as the *dandy du crime* ; Frederick Lemaitre, a great actor who played mostly at the Grand Theatre. The other three are fictitious : the beautiful Garance, an actress ; Nathalie, another actress ; the wealthy Comte de Montray. The story itself is centred on Garance, with whom the four men already mentioned fall in love simultaneously or successively. The action takes place in the theatres, outside them in daytime among the booths, the tumblers, the jugglers.

First part : Garance has had enough of Lacenaire, and becomes fond of Baptiste, who is loved by Nathalie. But Frederick, ambitious, egotistical and without scruples, becomes Garance's lover. The Count also falls in love with Garance when he sees her in a mime with Baptiste, already famous, at the Funambules. Garance is not interested in the Count, who tells her he will always come to her help if she asks it. Later he does so, after she and Lacenaire have been in trouble with the police.

Second part : Baptiste is more famous still, married to Nathalie, who has borne him a son. Frederick has become the most popular actor of the time. Garance is away, travelling with the Count. On her return to Paris she realises, however, that she has loved only one man : Baptiste. Frederick becomes jealous, but soon gives up hope. Baptiste and Garance finally run away together, despite Nathalie's supplications. Meanwhile, the embittered Lacenaire murders the Count. Nathalie finds the lovers ; she is accompanied by her little boy. Garance decides she cannot be happy with Baptiste, and she runs out to the boulevard, among the masks of a carnival day. Baptiste runs after her, calling her name, and becomes lost in the crowd.

*Comment* : Carné began shooting this film on August 17, 1943, and continued it over nearly two years at the Victorine studios in Nice and the Pathé-Francourt studios in Paris. It seems that the work done by Trauner and Kosma on the sets and music respectively had to be in clandestine collaboration with the other artists, presumably because they were of Jewish descent. Kosma has paid tribute to Carné's friendship at a time when he had to go "underground." After seeking refuge in the company of Jacques Prévert, at a little mountain inn in the neighbourhood of Grasse, he was asked by Carné to write the music for *Les Enfants du Paradis*. It was necessary for Carné to take considerable precautions in so doing, and in joining both his friends to listen to the music played on a bad piano as it was composed.

*Les Enfants du Paradis* is a film lasting more than three hours, an ambitious



period piece ; it has a great deal of dialogue studded with epigrams ; a rather rambling plot ; ostentatiously grand sets ; armies of extras. Superficially, these pitfalls were overcome by the brilliance and conviction displayed by the leading actors, enhanced by Barrault's miming ; by the exacting detail and vitality imposed on the extras ; by infallibly sure montage, probably because the shooting script left little for the editor to improve upon ; by the dramatic tempo of the camerawork ; the taste and charm of the sets ; music relevant to period and atmosphere, attractive and dramatically discreet. But the key to the whole success lies in more subtle, deeply rooted causes.

The first problem was to contrive an atmosphere of everyday reality consistent to a period piece. We are not told that this, in effect, is how these people actually lived. Instead, the historical reconstruction is frankly stylised, after the Nineteenth Century popular French novels and engravings ; sometimes it borders on caricature, as in the playing of *l'Auberge des Adrets*. It is a case of artistic truth in the second degree. If we are enticed into this world, it may well have much to do with the fact that it is a world inhabited by artists who lived a marginal life. The same applies to Prévert's dialogue ; its literary exuberance and subtleties are acceptable when spoken by these characters, while in the past, in films with a contemporary setting, it may have seemed incongruous.

The line of drama itself is a very long, very thin, very crooked line, with ups and downs ; there is no attempt at a story with classical shape. This, we are told, is a world which the authors find fascinating, and they hope we share in their delight. As to what happens to the principal characters, it does not greatly matter, except that the situations allow each one ample, if rather incidental, chances for self-revelation. Whatever climaxes there are, are mostly in the way of "atmosphere" and picturesqueness. Nevertheless, as the action develops, at least one character develops also : Garance, Arletty's best rôle, in which passion and vitality combine with a fundamental melancholy. This central portrayal is enough to keep the story moving and the spectator interested, in spite of the rather cold and unsatisfactory climax. Filled thus with *morceaux de bravoure*, intense plastic beauty, bustling liveliness, dry, poetic aphorisms on life and the arts, the film proceeds with glorious casualness. That immense cuts were made in it, that even only the first of the two parts were sometimes shown, encouraged legitimate if half-hearted protests. One suspects they were half-hearted not only on commercial grounds. For *Les Enfants du Paradis* is a film of which any part can be appreciated by almost any audience, but which does not suffer, unlike most first-class films, by not being shown in its entirety. Probably nothing can quite compensate for the lack of construction and dramatic climax, and for a certain over-polished coldness.

The romantic breadth and picturesqueness of the film made such an impact that a few incidental but significant points may have been overlooked. Fate is portrayed once again, indirectly and not too well, by Pierre Renoir in the rôle of Jéricho. Much of the story is based on incidental, improbable coincidences. Some images have a symbolic character, notably the first one of the film, when the tight-rope dancer goes his perilous way. Another symbol, Lacenaire, the intellectual murderer, is given much sympathy in the writing by Prévert. Garance, a laundress' daughter, is provided with wittier repartees than the

Count. The bourgeoisie is ridiculed. And, on a different level, the reconstruction of the Boulevard du Crime necessitated a set of over 200 yards long, 60,000 hours' work in the building, and costing over 5,000,000 francs at the time.

"Carné and Prévert are incontestably—with René Clair and Jean Renoir—the most remarkable personalities in the French cinema. People have reproached them for being aesthetes out of touch with the great public, and it is certain that if they created a school the cinema would be in danger of being cut off from its popular roots. But at the moment this is a stupid fear, and one can defend *Les Visiteurs du Soir* and *Les Enfants du Paradis* even if one does not entirely approve of this slightly ornate, slightly *fin de siècle* art. . . . The parts of Jacques Prévert and Marcel Carné can be quite easily distinguished in *Les Enfants du Paradis*, and while acknowledging the very real pleasure given by this remarkably skilful and intelligent film, one may also comment on the difficulties involved in the fusion of its separate creative impulses. The script, though highly original, is conceived without any thought for characterisation. Towards the end, certainly, some emotion is conveyed, thanks to Maria Casarès, but these brief scenes are insufficient to create the necessary dramatic progression. This, and the lack of unity, are the major defects of an exciting film. . . . The dryness is very noticeable in the dialogue, exact, incisive, never verbose, the contrary in fact of the language spoken at the time between the Funambules and the Théâtre-Lyrique. If we left matters there, we would be neglecting the essential part—Marcel Carné. . . one of the few directors capable of creating such a personal atmosphere in every film that one recognises his style in the first few feet. Parts of *Les Enfants du Paradis* are certain to be placed among the classics of the screen. . . ." (Georges Charensol, *Renaissance du Cinéma Français*, 1946.)

"Obviously, this is a considerable effort. What is more, it is a magnificent spectacle. It is a very great film as much in its scope as in its ambitions, but it is a very great film that has misfired. I do not believe that the reasons for this setback are due to Marcel Carné, any more than to Prévert, but rather to a lack of harmony and cohesion in their joint work. . . . In the past, though their scenarios had always been the result of a close collaboration, Carné had the upper hand in the breakdown into the shooting script and in the cinematographic construction of the film. After Carné had made a suitable adaptation of the subject chosen, Prévert was content to write the dialogue and to fit this into the limited and pre-arranged framework which had already been determined by Carné. . . . Since *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, the jobs have been reversed. It is Prévert who conceives the subject of the film, who develops it, writes the continuity and often breaks it down into an extremely detailed form. Carné's job is then confined to writing into the script the necessary technical notes and to planning the changes of camera angles. They are no longer Carné's films with dialogue by Prévert, but Prévert's films directed by Carné. It is another world. Where Carné makes a point visually, Prévert makes his point with words. He allows the visuals the sole purpose of showing, presenting and placing the characters in situations cleverly contrived, but controlled by his text. Hence the visuals emptily serve only to identify outwardly characters of whom





## Les Enfants du Paradis

Left: Arletty and Jean-Louis Barrault. Below, the reconstruction of the Boulevard du Crime, "a set over 200 yards long, 60,000 hours' work in the building, and costing over 5,000,000 francs at the time."



## La Fleur de l'Age



A location from Carné's unfinished film, *Isle-en-Mer*. Arletty and Serge Reggiani

Nathalie Nattier and Yves Montand. "The scene of the hero and heroine dancing amid the shabby background rubble of the warehouse failed to convey the lyrical effect intended by Prevert."



Les  
de l



we know nothing except from what they say ; the visuals serve only to illustrate a story whose development is never indicated except in words. . . . Thus—and this is the case with *Les Enfants du Paradis*—in spite of the intelligence of the subject and however ingenious the direction, it is no longer, it cannot any longer, be cinema.” (Jean Mitry, *Intermède*.)

In the summer of 1945, Carné considered and finally set aside two more scripts : *Jour de Sortie*, an original story by Prévert, and *Léocadia*, an adaptation of the play by Jean Anouilh.

## 1946 : Les Portes de la Nuit

*Production* : Pathé-Cinema. *Producer* : Pierre Laurent. *Administrator* : Raymond Borderie. *Director* : Marcel Carné. *Script* : Jacques Prévert, from a ballet written with Joseph Kosma and Roland Petit. *Photography* : Philippe Agostini. *Sets* : Trauner. *Editing* : Jean Feyté. *Music* : Kosma. *Distribution* : Pathé-Cinema. *Première* : Marivaux and Marignan cinemas, December 3, 1946. 106 minutes.

### Cast :

Yves Montand (*Diego*), Nathalie Nattier (*Malou*), Pierre Brasseur (*Georges*), Serge Reggiani (*Guy Senechal*), Saturnin Fabre (*M. Senechal*), Carette (*M. Quinquina*), Mady Berry (*Mme Quinquina*), Dany Robin (*Etienne*), Jean Vilar (*Tramp*), Raymond Bussières (*Lécuyer*), Jane Marken (*Restaurant Manageress*), Sylvia Bataille (*Claire Lécuyer*), René Blancard (*A Friend*).

*Story* : Paris, February, 1945. On the metro, Diego for the first time meets *Le Destin*, in the guise of a tramp. Diego comes out of the metro at Barbes-Rochechouart, outside which Quinquina and his daughter are selling their odd belongings. He goes to see the Lécuyer family. A discussion occurs between the Quinquina's and M. Senechal, a landlord of shabby houses and building contractor, who has made a fortune during the German occupation. In a restaurant we encounter Guy Senechal, his son, a mixed character who makes a living on the black market, as well as Malou, his sister, just back in France with her rich husband, Georges. The ubiquitous tramp is there again. He foretells the death of a fortune-teller, has enigmatic words for Guy, and shows Malou to Diego.

After a quarrel, Malou leaves her husband, escaping his violence with the tramp's help. She goes to her father, who pretends sympathy and leaves her a pile of banknotes. Diego, staying with the Lécuyer's, is taken to Senechal's warehouse, into which Malou wanders. Diego and Malou discover affinities, under the tramp's eager supervision. Simultaneously, Guy has returned to pack up. He is accused of having informed on resistance plans and people. He wants to seek refuge in Spain. He takes the banknotes left by his father for Malou, when M. Senechal comes in, and they quarrel. Diego and Malou overhear ; Diego recognises in Guy the young man who informed on Lécuyer, and beats him up.

Quinquina is looking for his daughter Etienne, out with a boy-friend. He meets the tramp instead. Guy Senechal is wandering along the bank of the

Canal Saint-Martin, in which the corpse of the fortune-teller has been found. He meets the tramp. Georges also happens to be there, still looking for his wife. He takes Guy with him in his car. In a small café, two couples are reposing : Diego and Malou, Etienne and her boy-friend. The tramp utters harsh words to Diego. Coming out of the café, Diego and Malou meet Georges and Guy. Georges, out of his senses, shoots Malou, who is mortally wounded. Diego helps Georges to take Malou to hospital : Guy runs away and commits suicide on the railway track. In hospital, Malou dies. Diego goes out at dawn. Barbes-Rochechouart station is opening again. In Paris, life goes on.

*Comment* : The reasons behind the production of this film account, to a great extent, for its failure. Pathé wanted Carné to make a film starring Marlene Dietrich and Jean Gabin. A suitable script had to be found. Once the decision was made to base the script on the ballet written by Prévert and Kosma—which was called *Le Rendezvous*, and had been danced by Marina de Berg and Roland Petit at the Sarah Bernhardt theatre—both Dietrich and Gabin refused to play in it. Their reasons were not stated, but quite possibly one of them was that they felt this was going to be an impossible film. That it turned out so is undeniably due in part to the players who took the parts intended for the stars. Nathalie Nattier seemed an anonymous, insipid personification of pulchritude ; and whether Yves Montand, a singer of lively talent and a real person, could act at all, still remained to be seen after *Les Portes de la Nuit*.

But Prévert must be held responsible for the inevitable failure of a film with such an improbable story. One side of it portrayed everyday life in a Parisian suburb, in the days immediately after the war, when much argument and occasional street incidents occurred on the question of suspected collaborators. This provided the environment, and some plausible material. The other side showed Fate masquerading as a tramp and numerous coincidences set in motion by him ; also, the young hero tells the heroine that he had heard her singing on the radio while they were both in the United States, and they had both just failed to meet on a South Sea island. One is left wondering why a writer like Prévert could ever have thought of combining two such stories. His naive, poetic belief, furthermore, in the existence of two parallel worlds—one dedicated to good and peopled with working-class characters, the other dedicated to evil and peopled with bourgeois and would-be bourgeois—led him into some crude, improbable and silly characterisations. Characterisation is hardly the word ; these people are mere figureheads on a pack of cards, shuffled by Fate—played by Jean Vilar in a battered hat, his staring, feverish look heightened by Agostini's ingenious photography. A plot composed of formal, gratuitous incidents may suit the ballet, but is incongruous in a tale with realistic characters in realistic surroundings.

The fine technique of the film increased the uneasy feeling of a divorce between style and subject. The set-pieces—the railway, Paris at dawn, the Canal Saint-Martin, deserted streets—were hardly novel. The narrative is slow, except for the brilliantly edited scene of Guy Senechal's suicide, and its method does not bring life to a story encumbered with too many characters with too many mannerisms. The wonderfully contrasted photography and unrelenting *maitrise* cannot really excuse a film which took eight months to make—a quite