

Document Citation

Title	All my sons
Author(s)	Amy Taubin Amy Taubin
Source	<i>Village Voice</i>
Date	1994 Feb 22
Type	article
Language	English English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Hélas pour moi (Oh woe is me), Godard, Jean Luc, 1993

All My Sons

By Amy Taubin

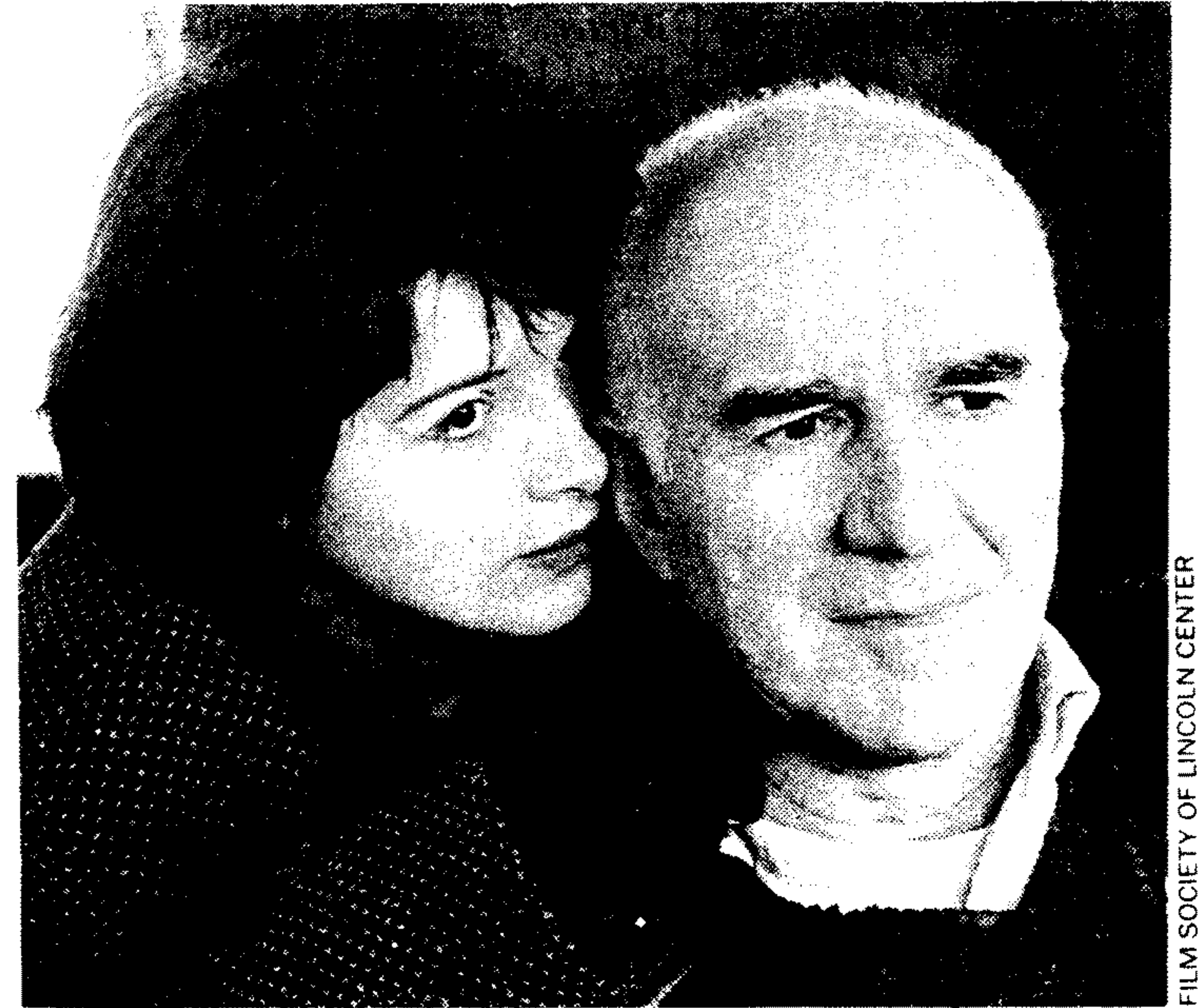
Jean-Luc Godard's gorgeous but dead-ended *Hélas Pour Moi* opens with an evocation of the father as the essence of history: "When my father's father's father had a difficult task to accomplish..." This mock-commercial venture shot in and around a picturesque Swiss lakefront café stars Gerard Dépardieu, who walks through his part, such as it is, looking as miserable as a beached whale. Considering its paternal obsession, it's fitting that *Hélas Pour Moi* is premiering in New York in a French film series titled "*Cahiers du Cinéma Selects*" (Febru-

ary 18 through March 1 at the Walter Reade).

Home to the auteur theory, *Cahiers* rewrote film history in terms of Dad-the-director, venerating the good fathers (Renoir, Ophuls, Hawks) and trashing the bad. Having institutionalized the director as the bearer of cinematic meaning, the Young Turk critics of *Cahiers* followed in the footsteps of the fathers they adored and became the French new wave. That nothing much has changed at *Cahiers* in 40 years is evidenced by the fact that so many of the films chosen for this series by *Cahiers's* current editorial board are hinged on the power of the

father—even when he's absent from the screen.

Thus, Alex, the fledgling gangster of Léos Carax's *Bad Blood*, referred to affectionately as "his father's son," is consumed by a guilty passion for his dad's best friend's mistress. In Olivier Assayas's *A New Life*, two half sisters defy their despotic but elusive father by symbiotically bonding with each other. And Serge Toubian and Michel Pascal's documentary *François Truffaut: Stolen Portraits* reveals that Truffaut hired a private detective to search for his real father, who turned out to be a Jewish dentist. Commented the director's younger daughter: "He never talked about his father or told us he'd found his real one. We didn't know he had a 'real' father and a 'fake' one. It shook me up because it means we haven't got our real surname."



Juliette Binoche and Michel Piccoli get oedipal in Léos Carax's *Bad Blood*.

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Toubiana and Pascal's documentary goes to great lengths to show how *Cahiers du Cinema* became a second home for Truffaut. The magazine's great editor André Bazin (who, 34 years after his death, remains the most influential film critic of our time) and his wife Janine were loving substitutes for the mother and stepfather who had consigned the 17-year-old Truffaut to a reformatory. His fellow critics—Godard, Eric Rohmer, Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol—became his brothers in the French new wave.

By programming recent films by or about new wave directors (in addition to the Godard film and the Truffaut doc, there's *A Tale of Winter*, Rohmer's poignant but slightly predictable

reading of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, and Chabrol's *The Eye of Vichy*, a compilation of official newsreels produced during the German occupation) with work by the next two generations of French filmmakers, the series foregrounds the question of paternity and the anxiety of influence. While Assayas's glamorous gloss on familial dysfunction and Jacques Doillon's pallid *Young Werther* are hardly in a class with *The 400 Blows* or *Two English Girls*, *D'est/From the East* shows that Chantal Akerman is the new wave's most wayward daughter, and the trilogy *Boy Meets Girl* (1984), *Bad Blood* (1987), and *Les Amants de Pont Neuf* (1991) proves that Carax is its truest heir (not necessarily an advantage: the

ravishing *Les Amants de Pont Neuf* has had as much trouble getting U.S. distribution as have the last half dozen films by Godard).

If Carax's street-urchin alter ego (played in all three films by Denis Lavant) has everything in common with Truffaut's Antoine Doinel (Jean-Pierre Léaud), his vision of mad love is closer to Godard's in *Pierrot le Fou*. So too is his use of Paris as a metaphysical landscape, a condition of being, and a matter of documentary fact. Carax's reconstruction of the Pont Neuf when the real bridge was declared off-limits made *Les Amants de Pont Neuf* the most expensive film ever produced in France. It's also, like the two earlier films in the trilogy, madly lyrical, dazzlingly balanced between

control and abandon. No one has ever evoked the ecstasy of adolescent sexual passion with anywhere near the intensity of Carax. Unlike Godard, however, he's incapable of analytical distance, let alone a politics. When sexuality is naturalized, romance becomes reaction(ary). *Bad Blood's* double parachute jump—Lavant holding the unconscious Juliette Binoche as they fall slow motion from heaven to earth—is not enough to compensate for the homophobic AIDS metaphor that gives the ganster narrative its sci-fi twist (a deadly virus infects everyone who has sex without being in love).

If Akerman's *Night and Day* (1992) was an explicitly feminist critique of Truffaut, Godard, et al., *D'est* mixes American avant-

garde film minimalism with the anthropological margin as it was defined by new wavers like Rouch and Marker. Akerman's vision of the East in limbo was filmed during a six-month trip from Berlin to Moscow. The camera tracks across faces of people dazed and waiting—in train stations, on bus queues, on shopping lines. From time to time, it enters a house to observe daily domesticities and the interactions of women. A woman gives a cello recital—music as abstraction stops the film cold. Paralyzed by an unimaginable future, we're revived in the present, not by an idea, but by aesthetic pleasure. For Akerman, alienated from a patriarchal construction of history, art is a victory against time. ■