

Close-up on *Children of paradise*, from the drawing to the screen

“An adventurous film”

The Carné/Prévert duo

- Meeting

In 1929, Marcel Carné made a short film, *Nogent, Eldorado du dimanche*, that attracted considerable attention. He then learnt the ropes with Jacques Feyder, whose assistant he was on *Le Grand Jeu* (1933) and *La Kermesse héroïque* ('Carnival in Flanders', 1935).

Jacques Prévert made his film debut with *Souvenir de Paris*, a silent short of 1928, shot by Marcel Duhamel and Pierre Prévert. In 1935, he adapted and wrote the dialogues for Jean Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*.

In 1936, Carné approached Prévert for the script of what would be their first joint film: *Jenny*. The director had been marked by *La Bataille de Fontenoy*, an anti-war play performed by the October group, which he saw in 1933.

- Official filmography

After *Jenny*, Carné and Prévert brought *Drôle de drame* to the screen in 1937, with the irresistible: 'I said "bizarre"... bizarre? How strange... Why would I have said "bizarre"... bizarre...'

Then came *Le Quai des brumes* ('Port of Shadows', 1938) and its famous 'You've got beautiful eyes, you know', and again *Le jour se lève* ('Daybreak', 1939) or *Les Visiteurs du soir* ('The Devil's Envoys', 1942).

The last Carné/Prévert collaboration, *Les Portes de la nuit* ('Gates of the Night') in 1946, was a commercial flop. This courageous film, showing French behaviour under the Occupation that was less than exemplary, is characteristic of what was called 'poetic realism', with touches of fantasy inserted into a grim socio-historical context.

- Unofficial filmography

In the 1930s, penal colonies for minors were in the news with escapes, 'child hunts', ill treatment, and even deaths. Prévert revolted, in particular by writing the script of *L'Île des enfants perdus* for Carné in 1936. Censorship held sway.

Eleven years later, under the title *La Fleur de l'âge*, shooting finally began with Anouk Aimée (whose name Prévert had come up with), Arletty, Martine Carol, Julien Carette, Serge Reggiani, Paul Meurisse... It was interrupted after three months, and, to the present day, none of the rushes have resurfaced.

Prévert participated on the script of *La Marie du port* but did not sign his name. This 1950 film sounded the knell of the Carné/Prévert duo.

- The genesis of *Les Enfants du paradis*

After *Les Visiteurs du soir*, Carné and Prévert tried in vain to make *La Lanterne magique*. Planned for Arletty, Pierre Brasseur, Pierre Renoir and Louis Salou, this story of time travel, made possible by crossing a cinema screen, frightened off the producers.

Carné and Prévert, looking for a subject, met Jean-Louis Barrault in Nice. At the time, the actor was immersed in the life of the mime Deburau. Frédérick Lemaître, a famous actor during the heyday of the 'Boulevard du Crime', was also mentioned. The idea of bringing back to life the theatres and crowds of the Boulevard du Temple filled Carné with enthusiasm; as for Prévert, he was excited by the character of Lacenaire, poet and murderer. The project got underway with *Funambules* as its title.

The Kosma, Mayo and Trauner trio

- Joseph Kosma and the music

Prévert and Kosma met by chance in June 1935, when the composer was looking for an author. The song '*À la belle étoile*' was born and was inserted into Renoir's *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, sung by Florelle. Kosma joined Carné and Prévert for *Les Visiteurs du soir* and would also compose the music for *Les Portes de la nuit*.

Starting from excerpts of '*Chand d'habits*' inserted into the film, Kosma recreated this pantomime of Deburau in its entirety. Upon returning to Paris, he offered it to Jean-Louis Barrault who staged it at the Théâtre Marigny under the title *Baptiste*, on a double bill with Marivaux's *Les Fausses confidences*.

- Mayo and the costumes

The painter Mayo accepted the proposition of his friends Prévert and Trauner and, for the first time, designed the costumes for a film. His wife and mother-in-law worked for Lanvin, which provided stocks of fabrics. He would also design those of *Les Portes de la nuit*.

Clothes, the actor's second skin, participate in the characterization of the characters. Prévert helped Mayo in their conception: Baptiste is a prisoner of his cramped clothing, Frédéric Lemaître is elegant only from afar...

Even the characters' accessories are significant: in the first part, Garance wears heart-shaped earrings, and Nathalie a cross round her neck.

- Alexandre Trauner and the sets

Prévert and Trauner met in late 1932. At that time, Trauner was assistant to the art director Lazare Meerson for René Clair's *Sous les toits de Paris*. He would design the sets for all the Carné/Prévert films with the exception of *Jenny*.

For *Les Enfants du paradis* ('The Children of Paradise'), Trauner carried out research in particular at the prints department of the Musée Carnavalet. Three months of drawing and three months of construction would be necessary for creating all the film's sets.

The 'Boulevard du Crime' set was gigantic: 80 metres long plus 20 metres in *trompe-l'œil*. It was wide enough to receive carriages and crowd movements. During the carnival scenes, there were up to 2,000 extras!

The shooting

- The quartet gets down to work

Carné, Prévert, Trauner and Kosma worked on the film in an isolated country house, located on the heights of Tourettes-sur-Loup in the South of France. In this sort of phalanstery, they worked in perfect communion.

Prévert wrote his story by beginning with the characters; Carné made return trips between Provence and Paris to bring back documentation. He thought about how to stage the Boulevard du Crime; meanwhile, Kosma composed the music at the piano, and Trauner designed the sets.

They questioned each other whenever the need arose, and the various aspects of the film were thought out in perfect symbiosis. The gathering of these artists in the same place contributed to facilitating exchanges and furthering the creative dynamic.

- The key dates

Shooting began on 16 August 1943 at the Victorine studios in Nice, only to be interrupted on 8 September by the producers, fearing that the Côte d'Azur was going to become a battlefield following the Anglo-American landing in Calabria (Italy).

The crew resumed work on 9 November, and the last shots were filmed in April 1944.

A private screening was organized at the Joinville studios on 22 December 1944; Pathé wrote an extremely laudatory review that was sent round to its agents. On 9 March 1945 a gala screening took place at the Palais de Chaillot.

Les Enfants du paradis was released commercially on 15 March 1945.

- The shooting conditions

Between the Second World War and the German Occupation, the shooting was chaotic. During its interruption in September-October 1943, violent storms damaged the sets, and 67,500 hours of work were necessary to repair them.

Electricity and film stock were rationed. The Gestapo was watchful. Trauner and Kosma being Jewish, they had to work clandestinely, hidden at the Priory above Tourettes-sur-Loup.

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Delays mounted up, and the budget rose. But the crew showed courage and tenacity until the end of shooting in April 1944.

A third period?

- A document to decipher

It has often been said that Jacques Prévert had initially conceived *Les Enfants du paradis* in three periods. However, until recently, no hard evidence allowed for proving that this was not merely a rumour.

Deciphering the scriptwriter's first draft turns out to be highly instructive in this regard. In the line devoted to Frédérick, Prévert notes: 'His altercation with the lawyer and judges'. In Lacenaire's, he wrote: 'The day he is executed, Baptiste goes on trial'.

Thus, Prévert envisaged that Baptiste be the object of a trial, which implies that, beforehand, he killed the ragman. Prévert also planned on the execution of Lacenaire.

- Maria Casarès's contract

In the archives of the Pathé/Seydoux collection is an enlightening contract for Maria Casarès's first major role in cinema. Dated 8 July 1943, it provided for fees for shootings on four sets, from 20 August to 18 September 1943.

One of those sets is called... 'court of assizes', so this document corroborates the idea according to which a trial was to have been held, an idea that survived well beyond the first draft of the script.

But, one disturbing fact is that no other contract mentions this set, whereas it goes without saying that Maria Casarès would not have acted alone in those scenes...

- Designs and notes by Mayo

Several costume designs by Mayo show outfits intended for courtroom scenes: a dress no.7 for Arletty/Garance, a costume no.3 for Maria Casarès/Nathalie.

On a page of the costume, there are also designer's notes: 'négligé Othello, court of assizes, End'.

Finally, drawings of chignons and hats for Arletty/Garance, next to which '*cour d'Assises*' is written and scratched out.

- The discovery of an unpublished synopsis

In 2011, a 14-page synopsis was found. The protagonists at the time were named Leprince, Mécenaire and Tabureau.

Baptiste strikes Jericho the ragman with his walking stick and kills him. A trial begins. The courtroom is packed. Frédérick testifies at the bar, as does Nathalie. Garance is in the audience. Mécenaire tries to enter but is arrested. Baptiste is acquitted. Shortly thereafter, it is Carnival. Baptiste, Nathalie and their son are taking a walk.

Pierrots call out to Baptiste who suddenly sees Garance, accompanied by a dandy, getting into a carriage. He tries to join her, but the crowd prevents him. He cries: 'Garance... Garance...'
The curtain falls.

“From the drawing to the screen”

A plate by Jacques Prévert

- A singular way of working

For conceiving his scripts, Jacques Prévert invented a specific layout for himself. As a support he chose a large sheet of squared Bristol board.

Freehand, he drew horizontal lines, between which he arranged his characters by decreasing order of importance.

On the left, he wrote the protagonists' names and those of the actors who were possibly going to play them. On the right, he mentioned their primary characteristics and snatches of dialogue. Arrows then created links. This plate, often pinned to the wall, allowed for visualizing the whole at a glance.

- Characters

Prévert began his scripts with the protagonists. At the outset, he laid down their personality traits along with words and acts that would allow for characterizing them. Lacenaire, initially named Mécenaire, was already well defined.

As of his first draft, Prévert thought about the dialogues, and the relevant snatches would be found in the film. This was the case with this line of Garance's: 'bright as day, clear as spring water'.

Prévert liked actors, with whom he was often friends, so he was at pains to serve them with texts that were adapted for them. For Nathalie, he had foreseen Marie Déa, but she being unavailable, he then envisaged Maria Casarès.

- Drawings

The characters are also distinguished by sketches of their attributes: clothing details, accessories, etc. Garance had a mirror in the middle of which Prévert drew a question mark. The omnipresent key question of her identity was thus asked.

Prévert's writing was very visual. He sketched a few scenes and sets, like the murder of Desdemona by Othello, to which he added a balloon: 'deleted by censorship'.

Prévert's plate is illuminated. In addition to the sketches of attributes and scenes, it is also the support of drawings that are only the fruit of pure calligraphic pleasure: flowers, suns, people, characters... A poet at work.

- Instructions and self-evaluation

In his sibylline writing, made up of regular small, barely-formed letters leaning to the right, Jacques Prévert gave himself instructions. He wrote down to detail such and such character, specify such and such aspect of a scene, or again, as here in the line devoted to Nathalie: 'big jealousy scene but with whom?'

As his work advanced, Prévert evaluated himself, rating himself in the midst of the creative process. His experimentations, hesitations, impulses and flashes were then given assessments. For the characterization of Baptiste, he wrote 'TB' [*très bien*].

- Jokes

Prévert never took himself seriously. Thus his support was the object of various jokes, such as this provocative graffiti, already attested to in the mid-19th century: '*Merde* to whoever reads this. How stupid he is!!!' [Translator's note: in French, *merde* means 'shit' but also, especially in the theatre milieu, 'break a leg' or 'good luck'.]

Prévert's anticlericalism is omnipresent in his work. It is manifested amusingly on this plate by the sally: 'Latest news. Jesus Christ has left without giving a forwarding address...'

Prévertian jokes are also graphic. Thus this plate features a drawing of two little characters next to which Prévert wrote: 'the Lumière brothers'.

Jacques Prévert's handwritten continuity script

- Famous lines

Garance's poetic, ironic reply to Frédérick – '*Paris est tout petit pour ceux qui s'aiment comme nous d'un aussi grand amour*' ('Paris is tiny for those who love each other as we do with such great love') – is spoken at the beginning of the film. The alliteration in 'P' and assonance in 'I' contribute to rooting it in the spectator's mind. But beyond its form, this phrase bears witness to Garance's vivacity, freedom and humour.

Garance sings '*Je suis comme je suis*' ('I am as I am') in snatches: in Baptiste's room, which attracts Frédérick, and in front of her dressing table at the Count de Montray's.

The poem '*Je suis comme je suis*' appeared in *Paroles* (1945). It was published with Joseph Kosma's score and entitled 'Et puis après' in *21 chansons* (1946); Juliette Gréco recorded it in 1951.

- Scenes that were cut

Prévert's continuity script attests to scenes that were not kept. Alone in his room, Baptiste mimes the relationship that he was unable to have with Garance: kneeling near the bed, he strokes her hair; she looks at him and smiles. This scene continued to underline Baptiste's dreamy spirit and timidity and allowed Barrault to further demonstrate his talents as a mime.

The scene of Count de Montray and his friends in the audience of the Théâtre des Funambules was more coarse and virulent. With a very Prévertian tone, the gap and incomprehension between aristocrats and proletarians were more asserted.

- The evolution of the carnival

Prévert allegedly gave Lacenaire the traits of Milord l'Arsouille, the character of an aborted project and one of the celebrities of the Carnival of Paris c.1830. The idea of the carnival was perhaps born in that way. In the synopsis, Prévert planned on the parade of the Bœuf Gras.

An article in *Comoedia* from 24 April 1943 mentioned the carnival planned for *Les Enfants du paradis*. Fellow director Claude Autant-Lara immediately wrote to Carné, fearing that Prévert would reuse what he had envisaged for their project *Mon associé M. Davis*.

The producer André Paulvé passed the letter on to Prévert, who replied on 16 May.

In any event, the carnival disappeared from the continuity script but reappeared in the shooting script and in the film.

Marcel Carné's shooting scripts

- Handwritten shooting script

From Prévert's continuity script, Carné drew an extremely faithful handwritten shooting script, dividing the text into 1,062 shots: 587 for the first period and 475 for the second. He added technical notes for camera movements, frames, music, sound... In the end, 20 shots would be cut, including shots 224-226, which featured a longer conversation between Frédérick and his landlady, Madame Hermine.

This exchange provided more information about the actor's past: born in Le Havre, he travelled extensively since he was 'something of a soldier', then 'won the lottery' and went to Paris where he lost it all at cards.

- Typed shooting script

The typed shooting script was meant for the whole film crew, from the actors to the technicians. Carné confessed to not being 'an enthusiast of the immutable shooting script', adding: 'The only thing I scrupulously respect is the dialogue. That's why I don't allow actors to modify in the course of shooting.'

It is surprising to note that this shooting script still proposes as a dénouement the death of the ragman, killed by Baptiste, and that the names mentioned are still Mécenaire, Tabureau and Leprince. Those key elements seem to have been modified at the last minute.

The directing time

- Close-ups

Marcel Carné staged masterfully, filming with brio the characters in close-up, facing the camera, with Roger Hubert's magnificent lighting, to bring out the solitude of Prévert's protagonists.

His characters are, in fact, frequently cut off from their family and rely only on themselves. Image and text are in perfect symbiosis.

During the intense final jealousy scene, this type of shot contributes to the climax. Nathalie, Garance and Baptiste are forsaken beings, locked into their own solitude within a framework where they attempt to struggle.

- Crowd scenes

The close-up scenes contrast with the crowd scenes. Marcel Carné excelled at creating movement, mastering the complexity of scenes of such scope.

Les Enfants du paradis begins with an entrance *in medias res*: the bustling crowd of the Boulevard du Crime as the 'theatre' for the encounter of Garance and Frédérick.

The *excipit* is the opposite reflection of the *incipit*: Garance and Frédérick's meeting is echoed by Garance and Baptiste's separation.

The mime tries to push his way through the crowd to join the woman he loves but is swallowed up by this sea of humanity, symbol of social pressure. The film ends with his stifled words: 'Let me be'.

- Mirror and framing effects

The film is constructed on the *mise en abyme* of life and the theatre and refers to truth and image.

This duality is cleverly signified by the direction of Carné who uses mirror effects. One of them is present as of the continuity script: that of Nathalie and the bridal gown.

To make the isolation more oppressive, Carné uses frames and embedded frames. When Nathalie speaks to Baptiste, the director seats her on a step so that the bars of the banister separate her from the man she loves. She then appears like a bird in a cage.

- Dramatic intensity

Marcel Carné turned out to be equally brilliant at directing moments of powerful dramatic intensity. He managed to put his perfect technical mastery at the service of the script's highpoints.

His camera starts from Garance and Baptiste, embracing tenderly, passes by the white of the wall and ends up on the smile of Lacenaire. The latter, after having declared to Count Édouard de Montray, 'I'm not a vaudeville character, me, whereas you're one, and I'll prove it,' suddenly pulls the curtain, revealing the two lovers. A panoramic shot equal to the dramatic intensity.