
QUAI DES BRUMES

What accounts for Carné's prestige abroad is the fact that he attacked problems.
 Henri Langlois

With *Port of Shadows*, Marcel Carné, child prodigy of French cinema during the interwar period, delivered one of the uncontested masterpieces of 'poetic realism'. The epitome of this movement, the film offers a complete anthology of its themes and aesthetic proposals. The credits of this disastrous 'no exit' are literally splendid, with the greatest talents of the time brought together in front of and behind the camera: Jacques Prévert was the author of this adaptation of a novel by Mac Orlan; Eugen Schüfftan, 'one of the best cameramen in the world for halftones, fog and mist'¹ did the photography of this sombre 'film of atmosphere'; Alexandre Trauner designed the sets; and Maurice Jaubert composed the haunting, funereal melody. At the film's release, the press was not mistaken, hailing the grace of this 'belle équipe'²:

Cinema is a team art. Here, the team is perfect, in terms of both the comprehension of a certain way of life and the knowledge of a certain tact that accompanies true social misery. Gabin is a very great artist and a valuable collaborator whose sensitivity goes beyond the limits of the screen. And what can we say about this young woman, the Morgan girl, who goes round in circles in her grief before the terrifying silhouette of this astonishing Michel Simon. Everyone – Gabin, Michèle Morgan, Michel Simon, Le Vigan, Aymos, Brasseur, Panama – acts real, without trickery, in this film that was difficult to make, this bare work, devoid of the great decorative and sentimental effects that automatically act on most spectators³.

The premiere, at the Cinéma Marivaux, 17 May 1938, was a resounding success. Part of the critics heaped praise on the work, but a dark cabal was hatched, denouncing its pessimism and defeatism. Frightened by the project's unconventional, 'immoral' nature, the producer, Grégor Rabinovitch⁴, had already made shooting an ordeal, constantly insisting on cuts. The film, in the sights of the censors in the autumn of 1939, was banned. In order to avoid confiscation or destruction, Henri Langlois hid it in a warehouse, along with some twenty other films, and it was not shown on French screens under the Occupation until 1941, and then in mutilated form.

Concerning *Port of Shadows*, Henri Langlois wrote:

Never, since 1914, had French cinema been so highly regarded by spectators, or found such accents, gone so far in the human element, produced such popular works, or responded to the worries, needs, and problems of their time to such an extent: Escape from Yesterday, La Belle Equipe, Pépé le Moko, Port of Shadows, Hôtel du Nord, Daybreak, Boys' School, The Crime of Monsieur Lange, Grand Illusion, La Marseillaise, The Human Beast, The Rules of the Game, Espoir... French cinema outclassed American cinema and triumphed abroad, less for the quality of its technique and form than for the human value, for the message it bore.

¹ Claude Briac, *Ce Soir*, 20 May 1938.

² Translator's note: Or 'fine team'; a reference to Duvivier's 1936 film of the same title.

³ Pierre Mac Orlan, *Le Figaro*, 13 May 1938.

⁴ UFA, which was initially to produce the film, had finally given up the project, Marcel Carné's attachment to the Popular Front, and the film's 'decadent' nature not being in keeping with the firm's demands.

CINEMA AS A MEANS OF RESISTANCE

Programming
Thanks to Henri Langlois

Port of Shadows / Quai des brumes

France, 1938 – 91 minutes

Direction: Marcel Carné

Adapted from the Mac Orlan's novel by Jacques Prévert

Assistant director: Guy Lefranc, Claude Walter

Production : Ciné-Alliance

Photography: Eugène Schüfftan

Set: Alexandre Trauner

Music: Maurice Jaubert

Cast: Jean Gabin, Michèle Morgan, Michel Simon, Pierre Brasseur, Edouard Delmont, Raymond Aimos, Robert Le Vigan, René Génin, Marcel Pérès, Roger Legris, Jenny Burnay, Raphaël, Claude Walter, Martial Rèbe, Marcel Melrac, Raymond Pélissier, Gaby Wagner

In Le Havre, a certain Jean, a deserter from the Colonial Army, meets Nelly, a young woman adrift who has been taken in by a vague guardian. The latter, Zabel, is a shady individual whose conscience is troubled by a few murders. Jean falls in love with Nelly but, feeling hunted, seeks and finds a way to expatriate himself to Venezuela. However, when it comes time to leave, he wants to see Nelly again...

The film was restored in 2011 by StudioCanal and La Cinémathèque française with support from the Franco-American Cultural Fund - DGA MPAA SACEM WGAW. The 2K digital restoration, carried out from the original negative of the film and two master positives, allowed for getting closer to the version desired by Marcel Carné and regaining an optimal quality of image. Work was carried out at the Neyrac Films and Eclair laboratories, with L.E. Diapason for the sound.

