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Vive la Différence: Hollywood and France, 1914-1945

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VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE: HOLLYWOOD AND FRANCE, 1914-1945

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts

in

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ABSTRACT

France in the early decades of the 20th century underwent a profound identity crisis. Torn between tradition and modernity, the country perceived itself to be isolated internationally and threatened politically, economically, and culturally by both internal and external forces. In French eyes, the United States moved rapidly from an ally to an adversary that not only opposed France on major foreign policy issues after World War I, but threatened the European continent both economically and culturally. For broad segments of the French elite, the United States represented modernity – and everything that was wrong with it. Contributing powerfully to anti-American sentiment in France were cultural exports from the United States, especially motion pictures. Hollywood was, for French cultural nationalists, both a symbol of what they disliked about the United States – a society shaped by the assembly-line and, hence, once characterized by intellectual, spiritual, and artistic mediocrity – and a threat to French culture and the very existence of the French movie industry. Hollywood achieved a dominant position in the French (and world) market during the war and maintained that position in the inter-war period. French audiences, in general, applauded American films and were enthusiastic about American film stars, especially those who visited Paris in the 1920s and 1930s, but French film critics tended to regard Hollywood movies as shallow, artificial, and, because they came off studio assembly-lines, irritatingly repetitive. The advent of sound proved to be a boon to French filmmakers, but Hollywood continued to dominate French screens, a situation temporarily ended only by the outbreak of a new war in 1939. Throughout the post-1917 period, including the World War II years, Hollywood studios themselves were a microcosm of the cultural war as French movie

personnel who emigrated to the United States found themselves caught up in a factory-like system that emphasized standardized products geared for a mass market and left little room for artistic creativity.

INTRODUCTION

The tension that arose between France and the United States during the months preceding the second Gulf War in 2003 opened the floodgates of mutual recrimination, suggesting that the friendship that both countries habitually proclaim toward one another perhaps represents only a thin veneer of cordial sentiment covering strong undercurrents of antagonism. In the United States cultural chauvinists urged the transformation of French fries into “freedom fries,” called for a boycott of French wines, and urged American tourists to avoid French destinations, while the Internet hummed with deprecatory comments and jokes about the French national character. In France the Quai d’Orsay steadfastly rejected Washington’s policy toward Iraq and attempted to mobilize broader European opposition, while wide segments of the French public denounced the United States. But at the same time, there was a more reflective response on the part of many French observers. Two authors quickly published best-selling books on the roots of anti-Americanism, recommending that the French reexamine their motives for America-bashing,¹ while significant sectors of French opinion refused to join in the condemnation of the United States. “The quarreling about Iraq, declining U.S. tourism to France and calls for an American boycott of French products have alarmed many in this country and provoked some soul-searching,” one American correspondent reported from Paris. Indeed, at the grassroots level there were even demonstrations of affection and gratitude toward this country, especially on the anniversary of the 1944 landings in Normandy that had led to the liberation of France

¹ Jean-François Revel, *L'obsession anti-américaine: Son fonctionnement, ses causes, ses conséquences*; Philippe Roger, *L'Ennemi américain: Généalogie de l'antiaméricanisme français*.

from Nazi tyranny. “From signs on the Eiffel Tower to red roses on the immaculate graves of U.S. soldiers who fell in France,” read a news item in July 2003, “the French, in large ways and small, offered gestures of healing on America’s Independence Day.”² The French reaction to the abrupt crisis in official relations between the two countries was, in short, ambivalent – and it is ambivalence that characterized French attitudes toward the United States throughout the 20th century.

Underscoring the fluctuating temperature of official waters, today, with Nicolas Sarkozy, the most “America-friendly” president France has seen in decades, occupying the Palais de l’Élysée, relations between the two nations are markedly friendlier than under his predecessor, Jacques Chirac. Sarkozy, a colorful and controversial figure, made headlines in 2007 when he decided to vacation in the United States. The newly-elected French president “risked horrifying the historically anti-American French establishment” by spending two weeks on vacation in New Hampshire, a decision “seen by some as proof of his desire to bolster Franco-American ties sorely strained by the invasion of Iraq.”³ More importantly he reintegrated France into NATO in April 2009, ending nearly a half-century of estrangement from that alliance.⁴

The cultural dimension of Franco-American relations has always been a vibrant one. France long has had the allure of romance and escape for Americans. Scores of students move to Paris every year for their junior year abroad (the author was among those fortunate ranks of temporary Parisians), and artists and writers throughout the

² Jamey Keaten, “Bashing French has long history,” *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge), 1 Sept. 2003, 17A; Elaine Ganley, “French welcome U.S. on Independence Day,” *The Advocate* (Baton Rouge), 5 July 2003, 9A.

³ Henry Samuel, “Nicolas Sarkozy risks revolt with U. S. holiday,” *The Telegraph*, 4 Aug. 2007, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1559445/Nicolas-Sarkozy-risks-revolt-with-US-holiday.html>.

⁴ Paul Belkin, “France: Factors Shaping Foreign Policy, and issues in U.S.-French Relations,” Congressional Research Service, 14 April 2011, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL32464.pdf>.

century have found inspiration in that city, whether it be Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, and other members of the Lost Generation in Paris during the 1920s or Richard Wright and Langston Hughes and other African-American writers who found acceptance and opportunity in France when doors at home were closed to them. Paris also beckoned to pleasure-seekers, old and young, who were thrilled by the titillating Parisian nightlife, far from the judgmental eyes back home.

The sway of Paris over the hearts and imaginations of young Americans was so great that they by the early 20th century had transformed the Montparnasse area into “a center of American Bohemianism.” Concerns that a stay in Paris would erode young women’s morals grew in proportion to this new American student quarter. An article in the April 1906 *Ladies’ Home Journal*, entitled “Is Paris Wise for the Average American Girl?” warned that it was not. The female author of the article insisted that the young ladies’ grand plans to study art or French were merely a “pretext” to live a Bohemian lifestyle: they stayed in dingy apartments, ate in cheap restaurants, mingled with suspicious “foreigners,” and – worst of all – “invited men up to their rooms and sometimes even allowed them to stay until after midnight.” The author warned American parents that “there is something in the atmosphere of Paris, or rather the American Quarter of Paris, that assails even the well-balanced and fairly sophisticated.”⁵

The presence of hordes of American students and tourists who travel to France every year is one manifestation of the often intense cultural interaction between the two

⁵ Mildred Stapley, “Is Paris Wise for the Average American Girl?” *Ladies’ Home Journal* 23 (Apr. 1906): 16, 54, quoted in Harvey Levenstein, *Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age*, 207.

countries. Another is the presence of Anglicisms in the French language on an astonishing scale. Despite the best efforts of the Académie Française, that venerable institution comprised of forty intellectuals known as *les immortels* who are the most outspoken watchdogs of French culture, words and expressions such as *le week-end*, *le business*, *le planning*, *une star*, *le self-made man*, *le rappeur* [sic], *le hands-free*, *c'est cool*!, are now commonplace in everyday French, but represent only a small fraction of the total, especially in the realms of business, fashion, and popular culture. One need only peruse any modern-day French magazine to note the abundance of English expressions. A magazine aimed at the tween and teen set entitled *Girls!* advises readers on *les in & out*, telling them what is currently fashionable and what is not, or *has-been*, another Anglicism commonly used in France. Even more highbrow news magazines such as *L'Express* are not immune to the English invasion; a recent cover story about the falling-out between then Prime Minister François Fillon and President Sarkozy stated that finding a replacement for Fillon represents *le casting impossible*.⁶ According to a statement in 2007 by the head of a special department in the Quai d'Orsay that seeks to promote the French language, over the preceding decade more English-language expressions had crept into French than in the previous century. There were eighteen special committees assiduously studying means of eliminating the problem, he said.⁷

“French Culture and Identity in Danger!” – the concern is a long-standing one.

Present-day anxiety in that regard stems primarily from the effects of television and the

⁶ *L'Express*, 8 September 2010, no. 3088.

⁷ “French traditionalists up in arms as younger generation uses ‘cool’ Anglicisms,” *The Daily Mail*, 14 March 2007, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-442316/French-traditionalists-arms-younger-generation-uses-cool-Anglicisms.html#ixzz1LYjLzJep>.

internet; during the first half of the 20th century the threat came from American motion pictures. Indeed, Hollywood became during the post-World War I period both a symbol of what French cultural nationalists thought was wrong with American society – and by extension the modern world – and a cause of a sometimes strident anti-Americanism with the French cultural elite. The roots of French hostility – *dislike* might be a more appropriate word – toward the United States obviously are varied, as the years following the Great War showed. Policy differences between Paris and Washington explained much of the growing resentment that Frenchmen displayed toward the United States. But Hollywood's movies, which dominated French screens from 1914 on, represented, in the eyes of French observers, a much more fundamental threat, one that was commercial, yes, but one that more significantly was cultural. Shifting international conditions could alter policy disputes; basic cultural traits, values, attributes – these would change much more slowly if at all. And French traditionalists despised and feared the modernity projected in American motion pictures.

The period framed by the two world wars of the 20th century constitutes an interesting window on the subject of anti-Americanism. Not only did that period open with what was arguably the high point of Franco-American amity, it saw the dramatic expansion of American economic interests in Europe, ushered in a period of international instability marked by the emergence of a political and military threat common to both countries – and it witnessed the upsurge of what French cultural nationalists judged to be perhaps the greatest threat yet to the French way of life: Hollywood movies being mass-produced on studio assembly-lines. This study tackles the subject of Franco-American relations in the realm of cinema. It describes the

American penetration of the French film market beginning with the World War I years; the image of France and things French in American film; the ambivalence of France's reaction to Hollywood stars and movies, setting that response in the context of a broader post-war identity crisis; and the function of Hollywood as a cultural battleground in which French actors, directors, and technicians, representing a less structured and artistically constrained film-producing environment, joined battle with Hollywood's "factory" system.

The scholarly literature on the subject of cinema in both France and the United States is voluminous, as the Bibliography for this study suggests, but works in English on the specific subject of film in the context of Franco-American relations are rare. Only two books focus exclusively on aspects of that subject. Jens Ulff-Møller, a Swedish scholar, in his *Hollywood's Film Wars with France* (2001) examines the effort of French film-makers to secure government protection against the influx of American movies, while Charles O'Brien's *Cinema's Conversion to Sound* compares the relationship between technology and films styles in the 1930s. Aside from those two works, various scholars have written more broadly focused studies, either thematically or chronologically or both, that contain useful insight and information on issues explored in this thesis. Richard Abel's unparalleled expertise lies in the sound era, his studies offering valuable commentary on the early penetration of the French market by American film; he has authored a brief article on French actors in Hollywood during the 1920s. Books by Ruth Vasey (1997) and John Trumbour (2002), as well as an older book by Kristin Thompson (1985) deal with the international business of motion pictures, with Vasey providing interesting examples of French censorship of American

film in the interwar period. Dudley Andrew's excellent *Mists of Regret* (1995) provides a thumbnail sketch of the French elite's response to American film and the impact of the sound era on Hollywood's screen presence in France; the book he co-authored with Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, provides valuable context for developments discussed in this thesis. Colin Crisp's *Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960* includes brief discussion of the range of issues covered here, and Charles Rearick's *The French in Love and War* dissects popular culture in general in the interwar period, also providing interesting context and insight into matters affecting French reception of American film. Susan Hayward, Alan Larson Williams, and others have produced contributed broader studies analyzing film content, which proved useful in preparing this study. What this study, based on perusal of movie reviews and articles not only in trade publications but in the mainstream press, and on a wide range of memoir and autobiographical literature, seeks to do is synthesize the information contained in the existing literature and use it as background and context for a heretofore unavailable detailed, systematic analysis of the culture war played out not only on the screen in France, but in the studios that made the movies shown in French theaters.

CHAPTER 1: “WITH FRIENDS SUCH AS THESE . . .”

By the end of World War I, when a movie-goer in France purchased a ticket, it typically gave him the right to see a film produced not in France, but in the United States. In 1917 half of all films shown in Paris theaters had been American and during the last year of the conflict, French production made up a mere 20 percent of the screen fare in the capital. The French film community found itself perplexed, unsure, and fearful. How to meet foreign, especially American, competition was the question that dominated discussion of the movie business – and the very survival of the national film industry seemed to depend on the answer. The irony was overwhelming: France had been the great pioneer in moviemaking and had dominated the American (and world) market with its booming film industry in the early years of the century, when perhaps as much as 90 percent of movies appearing on screens around the world had been French,¹ but now Hollywood seemed poised to crush French production. Deepening the frustration and resentment was the fact that across the Rhine, the movie industry of the hated *Boches* had prospered during the war, offering a stark contrast to the French experience. The decline of France’s relative position in the international film market was a consequence of both the enormous competitive edge of the American film industry by 1914 and the crippling wartime constraints on French production, which opened the floodgates to films from the United States. The French reaction to the sudden American challenge, which loomed as not only a commercial problem, but a cultural one as well, was ambivalent and the wartime discourse in that regard

¹ Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, 6.

foreshadowed the intense debate of the 1920s. Allies during the war, the two countries parted ways in the postwar period, disagreeing on almost every significant foreign policy issue – those, at least, central to French national interests. Buffeted by hostile or discordant pressures on all sides in the foreign policy arena, French authorities and cultural nationalists progressively viewed the United States as an adversary, an image strengthened by increasing American economic penetration of France and Europe in general – and by what they saw as pernicious threats to the French way of life.

Spearheaded by the two major enterprises, Pathé and Gaumont, the French film industry had set the international pace in the early years of the century. Charles Pathé and his brother Émile were businessmen who established the Pathé-Frères Company in 1896, specializing in sound recordings. Seeing the potential in the nascent motion picture industry, the brothers soon expanded their business to include film production, developing a system of renting prints to exhibitors, and a network of exchange houses, theaters, and distribution centers. Pioneers in vertical integration, the Pathé brothers by 1905 had built a factory in Paris to manufacture projectors and camera and another factory near the capital to make film stock in order to end reliance on their American supplier, the Eastman Company. International audiences provided much of the stimulus for the ever-expanding entertainment empire. Pathé simultaneously acted to exploit markets on a global scale, setting up distribution agencies throughout Europe and in the United States, where the nickelodeon craze and nearly 9,000 movie houses offered enormous profits.² Surveying film manufacturers in the United States, one entertainment publication announced in 1908 that “the popularity of the Pathé product is

² Richard Abel, *The Ciné Goes to Town: French Cinema, 1896-1914*, 10-45.

so great that no moving pictures show is considered complete without Pathé pictures.”³ Already supplying about one-third of the films shown in the United States, Pathé, whose emblem was a proud red rooster, established an American affiliate that began production of films in 1910, specializing first in Westerns and Indian features and subsequently in serials, the most famous of which was *Perils of Pauline*, and comedy shorts.⁴ The main competitor of the Pathé brothers was an inventor and businessman named Léon Gaumont, who ran a company that sold camera equipment and began producing motion pictures in 1897. His technical aptitude and business acumen made Établissements Gaumont the second most important French film conglomerate during that period. Emulating Pathé-Frères in diversification of activities, but on a lesser scale, Gaumont by 1907 owned the world’s largest film studio. Gaumont products, known for outstanding cinematography, found outlets throughout Europe and in the United States.⁵

As the Great War approached, France possessed a film industry that was, in fundamental ways, still first-class. Pathé-Frères and Gaumont were the major producers, but there was a host of smaller companies actively vying for market shares. A modern distribution system, based now on film rentals rather than sales as a result of Charles Pathé’s innovative effort to control the market, was well in place.⁶ Chains of movie houses, among them an increasing number of luxurious “picture palaces,” spread throughout the country.⁷ And, as a further sign of the growing maturity of the industry,

³ Richard Abel, *The Red Rooster Scare: Making Cinema American, 1900-1910*, 64.

⁴ Abel, *Ciné Goes to Town*, 52.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11, 35-36.

⁶ François Garçon, *La distribution cinématographique en France, 1907-1957*, 10-16, discusses the commercial impact of the shift to the rental system.

⁷ Jean-Jacques Meusy, *Paris-palaces, ou, le Temps des cinémas*, provides a detailed analysis.

not only had a specialized or corporate press emerged, but the daily press as well was starting to pay closer attention to the new form of art and entertainment.⁸ The French film industry thus “seemed healthy and relatively secure” as holocaust drew near.⁹

A disturbing trend nonetheless had emerged: the progressive decline in the French share of the international, especially American, film market. As other European countries developed their own film industries, French profits naturally declined. But the critical problem was the United States. One reason for the erosion of the French position there was the delayed, but ultimately superior, organizational and productive efficiency of American producers. Charles Pathé may have been a pioneer in vertical integration, but American companies rapidly extended and refined the process, giving them an unassailable competitive advantage. The French film “industry,” on the other hand, despite the efforts of the Pathés and Gaumont, never reached the sophisticated stage of development that American studios did. In France there were numerous companies, many of them constituting little more than a cottage industry and many devoted primarily to the distribution and exhibition of American movies rather than film production itself.¹⁰ American studios also enjoyed strong support from the State Department and worked in an atmosphere free of any significant regulation or taxation. French filmmakers, however, in an environment of total war, faced government regulation and restrictions of myriad kinds, from censorship to increasing taxation.

The sheer size of the United States population and economy provided American producers with an array of advantages, not the least of which was a profit margin that only increased in significance as the position of French producers in the global

⁸ Pascal M. Heu, *Le temps du cinéma*, Chap. 2.

⁹ Abel, *Ciné Goes to Town*, 58.

¹⁰ Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *French Cinema*, 45.

marketplace deteriorated. American studios and film exchanges, furthermore, used nationalism as a weapon against French competitors, especially Pathé-Frères, charging it with unfair competition and, increasingly, with placing morally suspect products on American screens. The overall result was that, on the eve of war, the French share of the world market had declined by two-thirds in a few short years, from approximately 90 percent to less than 35. In part because of a capital shortage, French movies had become more expensive to produce and market, while American films had become cheaper. Even in France, foreign films were starting to dominate exhibition: just a few weeks before the outbreak of war, some 85 percent of the film footage shown on Parisian screens was foreign-made.¹¹

When Europe found itself unexpectedly plunged into war in the summer of 1914, one of the first casualties was the French film industry. Production work on new films ground to a halt and movie houses closed practically overnight. The immediate reason for the paralysis was the general mobilization, i.e., conscription and the calling up of reservists. Like all sectors of French society, that necessary step threw the film community into disarray, as actors, writers, directors, and front office personnel received their orders. National authorities had to divert supplies of various kinds to the war effort and credit abruptly dried up. Markets in enemy countries closed from one minute to the next and some distribution agencies in neutral countries ceased operations. There was, furthermore, a patriotic or moral impediment to any business-as-usual attitude in the entertainment sphere while a grave national emergency played out, and government censorship prevented the recycling of some films, such as those dealing with pacifism or other anti-military themes. Even after the gradual reopening of theaters and limited

¹¹ Abel, *French Cinema*, 9.

resumption of production early in 1915, the situation remained uncertain. Battlefield developments would rattle financial markets and prolongation of the ghastly war of attrition led to shortages of various kinds, such as transportation and coal. The following year, for example, saw a series of legislative measures taken to save on electricity in Paris because of the costly war effort. All stores in the capital city were ordered to close at 6 p.m., except for restaurants, which would close at 9:30 p.m., and pharmacies. Theaters, cinemas, and concert halls would be closed one day a week (on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, respectively, with the elimination of movie matinee screenings altogether except for Thursdays and Sundays), also in an effort to curb electricity usage.¹²

Once the initial shock of war and the German invasion receded, the entertainment industry found its place in the national war effort as a morale-booster, but for a long time French studios placed great emphasis on the production of patriotic films. Gaumont did so early on, and Pathé and Film d'Art became especially known for their "propaganda" films. Typical of the genre were Film d'Art's *Alsace* and *Mères françaises*; the latter posing renowned theatrical actress Sarah Bernhardt "at the foot of Jeanne d'Arc's statue before the ruined cathedral at Rheims." The reorientation of subject matter toward the war proved to be yet another reason for the decline in the viability of French production as audiences preferred distraction from the gravity of the moment and soon demanded the kinds of movies that Hollywood was still producing.¹³

¹² *Le Petit Parisien*, 10 Nov. 1916, 2; 11 Nov. 1916, 2; *Hebdo-film*, 11 Nov. 1916, 2. For discussion of the impact of the war on the French film industry, see Abel, *French Cinema*, 5-14; Garçon, *La distribution cinématographique en France*, Chap. 2; and Meusy, *Paris-palaces*, Chap. 7-8.

¹³ Abel, *French Cinema*, 10.

As the war entered its decisive phase in mid-1919, pioneering film critic Louis Delluc could only lament the “overall mediocrity” of French production.¹⁴

The wartime experience of the American film industry was radically different from that of its French counterpart. Although it aided the Allied cause with loans, credits, and goods, the United States did not enter the war until April 1917. American studios, consequently, film industry did not experience the dramatic decrease in personnel or supply shortages that the French did. They were thus able to reap all the benefits inherent in a booming economy and wartime limitations on competition abroad. They also enjoyed critical structural advantages. The American studio system was well on its way to becoming an almost fully vertically integrated industry. The forerunners of the major studios – a list that ultimately included Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, RKO, Columbia, and Universal – sought increasingly to have in their hands all aspects of production, from the raw materials (directors, actors, scriptwriters, and extras) to the assembly line (sets, sound stages, and technicians). The studios also controlled much of the marketing of their product through publicity departments and progressive ownership of chains of theaters. The initial product (the movie) was extremely costly but duplication (making prints) was inexpensive; since the studios operated in a truly mass market created by a population that was now predominantly urban – approximately half of the world’s movie theaters were located in the United States – they were able to recover in the domestic market their production costs, if not actually make a profit, which meant that they could sell or lease prints to overseas exhibitors, say in France, at a price substantially below what local filmmakers

¹⁴ Delluc, Louis, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 27 June 1919, 2.

had to demand.¹⁵ Much of the studio “factory” system remained to be perfected in the 1920s and 1930s, but the foundations were well established by the end of the war.

When President Woodrow Wilson declared neutrality in 1914, he reflected the universal desire of the American people, but public sentiment had a distinctly pro-Allied hue from the outset. German aggression against Western Europe, the searing episode of the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915, and exposés of German espionage and sabotage in the United States convinced most Americans that the Allies were fighting the good fight. Still, Hollywood endeavored to remain relatively impartial in its films prior to 1917, echoing popular sentiments of neutrality and pacifism. One 1914 film, *Let Us Have Peace*, depicted the war-caused rupture of the friendship between French and German veterans of the Franco-Prussian War who had emigrated to the United States and their subsequent reconciliation. A comedy released that same year, *The Battle of Nations*, told of a French woman in the United States who finds a German attractive but is the object of an Englishman’s affection. The war triggered family quarrels, but eventually the Franco-German union is salvaged. The 1915 film *War* showed the disruption of friendship between French and German families in America and their ultimate rapprochement when their eldest children fall in love. The following year yet another film, *Citizens All*, appeared on the same theme. The films had obvious symbolism, but American producers could take a plague-on-both-your-houses approach, albeit in a humorous vein: *When War Threatened* (1915) depicted a French chef and German butler who, while getting ready for a banquet, end up engaging in a food fight.¹⁶

¹⁵ Thomas H. Gulack, “Hollywood’s International Market,” in Tino Balio, *The American Film Industry*, 465.

¹⁶ Craig W. Campbell, *Reel America and World War I*, 195-204.

During the period of neutrality American distributors continued to import French films and Hollywood in its own productions reflected, sometimes not too subtly, the national tendency to sympathize with the Allies – a fact that contributed to audience enthusiasm for American films in France. French-made documentaries, such as *Somewhere in France*, *Fighting for France*, and *On the Battlefields of France*, played in American theaters, while feature films such as *Alsace* (1916) and *Mothers of France* (1917), starring Sarah Bernhardt, propagated the French view of correct patriotism. American features dealt sympathetically with French themes. A 1914 film *The Ordeal* showed the path of destruction left by German invading forces, while *The Victory of Conscience* (1916) suggested French moral superiority vis-à-vis Germany. Two other releases in 1916, *The Bugler of Algiers* and *The Black Butterfly*, depicted French characters in an approving light, and a young Cecil B. DeMille's *Joan the Woman* portrayed Joan of Arc in expectedly sentimental fashion.¹⁷

American entry into the war in 1917 started a two-year honeymoon in Franco-American relations. Observers in both countries hailed the alliance,¹⁸ while the doughboys crossed the Atlantic to join the *poilus* on the battlefield. Exhausted spiritually and materially by three years of cruel fighting largely on French soil, American belligerency loomed as a godsend for the French. And, although there were sharp behind-the-scenes disagreements between American and French military high commands, the war years saw the apogee of official cordiality and mutual popular sympathy between the two nations. This did not mean that France would embrace

¹⁷ Campbell, *ibid.*, 34, 149-163; Robin Blaetz, "Joan of Arc and the War," in Karel Dibbets and Bert Hogenkamp, eds., *Film and the First World War*, 119.

¹⁸ Elizabeth B. White, *American Opinion of France*, 268-278.

American popular culture in its entirety. “Send a pack of Wrigley’s spearmint [gum] to a soldier in the field, to one wounded in the hospital, [or] to a prisoner of war,” an ad appearing in a French newspaper late in 1916 urged – undoubtedly to little effect. But some 2,000,000 doughboys served in France and took with them some attributes that the French people could smile benignly upon – at least temporarily. If nothing else, American money was welcome to French shopkeepers and those of other professions. Three brothels in the seaport of Saint-Nazaire, one of the two main points of disembarkation for American troops, “gleefully ran up the Stars and Stripes” when troop ships started arriving.¹⁹ The relatively color-blind French found African-American doughboys a novelty and, especially in urban centers, large numbers of French embraced the unusual form of music that those troops took with them overseas. By war’s end a growing number of French performers were incorporating jazz into their programs. “Audiences heard it in cabarets, nightclubs, dance halls, restaurants and theaters.”²⁰ And American movies continued to enthrall the public.

There were undercurrents of tension, arising not just from wartime circumstance but from different world views and the values rooted in them. By the early 20th century, the United States had emerged as the world’s leading industrial power, its business landscape featured modern corporations, and the principles of scientific management laid down by Frederick Winslow Taylor had become the order of the day in factories scrambling to imitate Henry Ford’s pioneering use of the assembly-line. French observers had watched these developments closely and concluded that such a system was stultifying and regimenting, “diametrically opposed to those [values] they

¹⁹ Wrigley ad, *Le Petit Parisien*, 13 Nov. 1916, 4; Levenstein, *Seductive Journey*, 217-219.

²⁰ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Paris in Interwar Paris*, 16-18.

considered indispensable to the blossoming of true culture,” and consequently unsuitable for France, a country that supposedly prized individual freedom above all else.²¹

The French were accustomed to American tourists, but not to hundreds of thousands of young men in uniform, the overwhelming majority of whom had never been abroad. Inevitably, their presence, their values and habits, intrigued French observers, but reinforced the bias of many. While both countries were still basking in the glow of the wartime alliance, Frenchmen who studied the Americans saw something new, something different and potent. One journalist spent considerable time in Brest in 1918 witnessing the arrival of transport ships and the work of the repair docks that the Americans had set up to get damaged ships back into service. He found himself awe-struck by the organization, discipline, and ingenuity that underlay all the activity. One day an American naval officer asked him to explain the system that, day after day, allowed a disabled tugboat to block the docks while many French workmen stood around apparently without anything to do. The journalist experienced a minor epiphany when he realized that the question never would have occurred to him – “I was too much of our Old World where time counts less,” he later wrote. As he watched the machine-like disembarkation of thousands of men and the ceaseless, repetitive dockside activity, he understood that he was seeing an example of the American desire to save time, achieve ever-greater efficiency, and increase output. In the context of the war, he concluded, perhaps the greatest attribute that Americans would bring to battle was a

²¹ Jacques Portes, *Fascination and Misgivings: The United States in French Opinion, 1870-1914*, trans. Elborg Foster, 417. Even Tocqueville, writing *before* the industrialization of the United States, believed that American society was headed toward a “tyranny of the majority” and level of conformity that ultimately would threaten individual liberty. See Jean-Philippe Mathy, “Versions françaises de l’Amérique,” 207-209.

“competitive spirit” that would lead them to do their utmost to “not let themselves be beaten by anybody or anything.” The Americans loved to break records, he commented, and hailed, for example, the “victory of the firm that manufactures in so many hours a Pullman [railroad] car or in so many minutes an automobile.”²²

In many villages and towns, away from the attentive eye of inquiring reporters, culture clash seems to have been the order of the day. Doughboys convalescing at French spas thought themselves exploited financially by local residents, frequently became “exasperated” at the slowness with which the French made decisions and met requests, and marveled that businesses closed their doors for two-hour lunches.²³ Some Frenchmen speculated about what France would be like if it adopted American methods – and the prospect was disquieting. Playwright Eugène Brieux was one of them and in his popular and widely discussed, *Les Américains chez nous*, he addressed cultural differences between the two peoples. In the play an American soldier named Smith purchases an estate for the purpose of transforming it, with Taylor’s methods, from a sleepy sheep pasture into a commercial enterprise. The result was that a factory chimney soon stood where an ancient oak had flourished and a whistle blast – the “cry of the beast,” as the former owner labeled it – greeted the villagers every morning instead of the warbling of birds. A French worker, accustomed to a more artisanal system of manufacturing, who had been subjected to “*le terrorisme*” (a play on *le taylorisme*), quits his job in despair at what he had been expected to do. “It consists in being in front of a machine, and obeying it, serving it,” he exclaimed, “and always,

²² André Chevrillon, “Parmi les Américains (Juillet-Septembre 1918),” *Revue de Paris* (1 Jan. 1919), 24-35.

²³ Jérôme Penez, “Les Américains dans les Stations Thermales Françaises (1917-1919),” 91.

always, making the same movement . . . taking a bit of metal, giving it to the beast, getting back another one from it.”²⁴

The difference in world views was camouflaged momentarily by the enormous sympathy that the very newness of the massive cultural encounter evoked from the French people, by a national sense of relief at having a vigorous new ally – and by the tremendous morale boost that American movies offered to a nation bludgeoned emotionally by news from the trenches. French audiences seemed to appreciate the fact that Hollywood made movies for entertainment purposes – for *mass* entertainment – and not artistic statement,²⁵ and “a number of American stars and films,” as Kristin Thompson has observed, “captured the popular and intellectual audiences of France for the first time.” Serials starring Pearl White, Charlie Chaplin comedies, films by the early great Hollywood (or New York) directors, such as Thomas Ince, Cecil B. DeMille, and D. W. Griffith, and movies starring Douglas Fairbanks and William S. Hart, simply “took Paris by storm.” The future director Jean Renoir discovered American cinema as a young soldier during the war – and never recovered. Stationed in Paris at one point, he frequented a theater where he could see American movies, “preferring to avoid French films, which were too intellectual for my taste,” he recalled. His older brother, an aspiring stage actor, agreed. “French dramatic art is bourgeois,” he remarked one day, “whereas the American cinema is essentially working-class.” Renoir heartily concurred. “I worshipped the actors, and still more the actresses,” he later wrote. “I dreamed of Pearl White, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, Douglas Fairbanks and William Hart”²⁶

The swashbuckling Fairbanks held audiences in rapture; indeed, the “childlike

²⁴ Brooks, *America in France's Hopes and Fears*, 776-792.

²⁵ Jens Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood's Film Wars with France*, 23.

²⁶ Renoir, *My Life and My Films*, 43-45.

happiness” that Delluc noted on the faces of the audience during a screening of a Fairbanks film in 1919²⁷ became the standard reaction of French movie-goers. Serials were one the earliest genres to fascinate French audiences and Pearl White’s *Les Mystères de New-York*, actually made by Pathé in the United States, was the most popular. When a French trade publication conducted a survey in the early 1930s asking people who their first love had been, one respondent was emphatic: “Pearl White.” The actress died in August 1938 in Paris (she is buried at the Cimétière de Passy), leading a film critic to recall his adolescent fascination with her. “I remember that she was adorably pretty,” he wrote, “. . . and that she quite strongly troubled the imagination of young boys.”²⁸

Westerns quickly became American studios’ “most popular product” for foreign audiences, and for the French in particular.²⁹ A series of short French Westerns, filmed in the region of la Camargue and starring the “French cow-boy” Joë Hamman, had been successful in the early years of French cinema, but once the American motion picture industry began its phenomenal expansion, French audiences preferred the Westerns made in New York or New Jersey or Hollywood. The American cowboy personified “typically American qualities of simplicity, energy, and self-confidence,”³⁰ which the French found appealing during the grim war years, and American films had the added attraction of depicting Native Americans who “fascinated” French movie-goers, confirming “their conception of America as a mythic space of the primitive and the

²⁷ Kristin Thompson, *Exporting Entertainment*, 87; Louis Delluc, “La Foule,” *Paris-Midi*, 24 Aug. 1918, and “Cinéma: Grand Frère,” *Paris-Midi*, 14, 17 Feb. 1919, printed in translation in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology, 1907-1939*, 163, 171.

²⁸ Benjamin Fainsilbert, “Leur premier amour,” *Ciné-Monde*, 27 Sept. 1934, in *Chantecler Revue*, 25 (3 Nov. 1934), 1; A. De Masini, “Actualités,” *La Revue de l’Écran*, 27 Aug. 1938, 2.

²⁹ Richard Abel, “A Nation for Export: American Westerns, 1911-1912,” in Martin Barnier and Raphaëlle Moine, eds., *France / Hollywood: Échanges cinématographiques et identités nationales*, 156.

³⁰ Jacques Portes, *Fascination and Misgivings*, 87-103.

barbaric.” Film historian Richard Abel has argued that this fascination stemmed from more than a *soupçon* of French national chauvinism: “[T]he ‘Redskin drama’ symbolized an American barbarism that supposedly could revitalize [France and Europe’s] older civilizations.”³¹ Stars playing cowboys, especially William Hart, the early cinema incarnation of Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and Hopalong Cassidy rolled into one, naturally contributed to the popularity of the genre. A taciturn, stoic symbol of integrity, courage, and honor, Hart captivated French viewers and not merely the “popular” classes. Seeing her first Hart performance during the war changed the life of a future actress. She did not care much for the cinema, she remembers, until the day she saw on the screen that “splendid face,” those “deep-set eyes,” and felt the “magnetism” of his screen persona. Overcome with “admiration,” movies from that point on movies became a “passion” for her. Delluc, near the war’s end, repeatedly commented on Hart’s “godlike serenity,” the “astonishing passions” his “so nobly tragic” character and “so simply grandiose” screen adventures aroused, and the “emotional pleasure” it was to see him confidently in action. Movie magnate Léon Gaumont confided to a younger associate, Léon Poirier, at war’s end that his principal theater in Paris, the Gaumont-Palace, “never made more money than with a Chaplin comedy film or a William Hart.”³²

Chaplin unquestionably was the most popular Hollywood figure and best exemplified France’s burgeoning love affair with American movie stars during the war. Although British-born, Chaplin had made his international reputation in Hollywood and for French fans, who coined the affectionate nickname “Charlot” for him, he symbolized American films. Renoir’s attitude toward the comedic genius was not uncommon. At

³¹ Abel, “A Nation for Export,” 168.

³² Eve Francis, quoted in Robert Spa, “Figaro-Cinéma: Médaille,” *Le Figaro*, Jan. 1925, 4; Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 22 April, 25 May 1919, 2; Léon Poirier, *Vingt-quatre images à la seconde*, 41.

one point during the war, he saw his first Chaplin short. “To say that I was enthusiastic would be inadequate,” he recalled. “I was carried away.” It was years before Renoir even learned what Charlot’s real name was, but that little mattered. “I saw every film of his that was shown in Paris again and again” French newspapers enthusiastically greeted new Chaplin films: “Finally a film from the inimitable Charlot, who deserves a program all to himself,” declared a 1916 movie advertisement. The following year Delluc labeled Chaplin an “expression of beauty” and a “phenomenal actor,” and Henri Diamant-Berger, a rising film director, fully agreed. “The most marvelous actor in film is, without doubt, Charlie Chaplin,” he wrote in 1919.³³ One American doughboy from Louisiana stationed in France was struck by the audience’s enthusiasm when he went to see a Chaplin movie in Paris and later wrote his sweetheart back home that “the French go as wild over Charlot, as they call C. C., as we do.”³⁴

A spate of American war-related movies set in France or prominently featuring French characters deepened the generally favorable reception that Hollywood products enjoyed in that country. DeMille’s *The Little American* (1917) starring the immensely popular Mary Pickford was one of the earliest in a string of such films that year that included *When the Call Came*, *For France*, and *Over There*. The following year such films as *Lest We Forget*, *Fields of Honor*, *A Daughter of France*, *The Way Out*, *The Splendid Sinner*, a new DeMille film *We Can’t Have Everything*, *A Law Unto Herself*, *The Caillaux Case*, *The Road Through the Dark*, and *Wanted for Murder* were among

³³ Renoir, *My Life*, 41-43; *Le Petit Parisien*, 6 Aug. 1916, 4; Delluc, “La Beauté au cinéma,” *Le Film* 73 (6 August 1917), 4-5, printed in translation in Richard Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 137-139; Henri Diamant-Berger, *Le Cinéma*, 141.

³⁴ Letter from Hermann Moyse to Rosalie Gottlieb, 9 Jan. 1919, Moyse-Gottlieb Family Papers, Mss. 4671, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, LSU, Baton Rouge, La. On Chaplin’s popularity in wartime France, see also Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, 20-21.

those with plots and characters designed to arouse sympathy for France and its war effort.³⁵ D. W. Griffith went so far as to undertake location shooting in Europe to give greater realism to his *Hearts of the World*, which he hoped would help to sustain support for the war effort at home. He traveled with a camera crew and stars Dorothy and Lillian Gish first to England and then across the Channel to war-torn France in the summer of 1917. They reached Paris at midnight during a blackout, but “the horrors of war seemed far away,” Lillian Gish recalled. “We were young and in Paris, and Paris in the dark was beautiful.”³⁶ Gish became a major star of the silent era and French critics and audiences admired her not only for her talent, but for her life-long interest in France, an attachment that began on this arduous trip. Despite tense months of filming that included dangerous moments, she was enchanted by the people, their capital, and the countryside. “France!,” she exclaimed. “Why the very name is a poem and a romantic novel, all by itself.”³⁷ Gish’s wartime sojourn in France made her one of the earliest American stars to travel to that country and numerous other representatives of the Hollywood film community would follow her during the two decades of peace that followed the war.

Aside from interesting plots, cinematography, and the movie stars themselves, French observers appreciated the careful preparation and technical excellence that went into American films. In a particularly positive appreciation of the American film industry, one critic proclaimed that Americans were the “uncontested masters” of moviemaking. “They don’t have silly theatrical prejudices, they choose their natural décor well, [and] they have, except in the genre of tragedies, excellent actors who are

³⁵ Campbell, *Reel America*, 164-184.

³⁶ Lillian Gish and Ann Pinchot, *Lillian Gish: The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me*, 196-198.

³⁷ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Life and Lillian Gish*, 134.

little inclined to hamming it up.”³⁸ A well-known director opined that, in order to recover from the severe repercussions of the war, the French film industry would have to blend American “technical progress” with France’s “Latin mentality” in order to surpass the trans-Atlantic competitor.”³⁹ And that was the same conclusion of Charles Pathé himself. “You cannot make a film in France without having visited America,” he admonished Diamant-Berger, whom he had under contract, early in 1918. Diamant-Berger shortly afterward embarked for the United States and on his return published a detailed analysis of filmmaking techniques and problems based on the American example.⁴⁰ The fledgling director was part of a small exodus of French movies professionals, or future professionals, to cross the Atlantic during the war years. Maurice Tourneur in 1914 had gone to New York to perfect his craft and ended up staying for over a decade, becoming a prominent director in the Hollywood of the early 1920s; and the great comedic actor Max Linder went to America in 1917. A sudden illness cut short Linder’s visit, but he made fast friends with Charlie Chaplin, and returned to the United States in 1920, widening his circle of acquaintances to include Douglas Fairbanks and fellow Frenchman Robert Florey. During his time in Hollywood, Linder made a handful of fairly successful films, including *Be My Wife* and *Seven Years of Bad Luck*, both distributed by the newly created United Artists studio, as well as a parody of *The Three Musketeers* entitled *The Three Must Get There*.⁴¹

If Frenchmen drawn from all classes responded reasonably well to American films as entertainment, not all observers embraced the flood of Hollywood products.

³⁸ *Le Temps*, 21 Feb. 1917, 3.

³⁹ *Hebdo-Film*, 22 July 1916, 1.

⁴⁰ Henri Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma*, 47-49; Diamant-Berger, *Le cinéma*.

⁴¹ Édouard Waintrop, “L’Europe à Hollywood,” in Michel Boujut and Jules Chancel, eds., *Europe-Hollywood et Retour*, 14-15.

Elitists and cultural nationalists looked askance at what they saw as American naïveté, lack of sophistication, and insensitivity to traditions and values of other cultures in their films, as well as the packaged, formulaic nature of movie plots. DeMille's *Joan the Woman*, a box office success at the time of its release in 1916, was an example in French eyes of what an American studio could do wrong. With American audiences in mind, of course, he transformed the iconic Joan of Arc saga into what was essentially a love story in which her ghost visits her former lover, reincarnated as a soldier in the trenches, and urges him to perform a suicidal deed on the battlefield as a means of expiating his sin of having betrayed her in their earlier life. The film, in French eyes, depicted the saint as "a victim of emotion, unclear intentions, and bad luck," and its message seemed to be that warfare was for men alone, indeed, that "women and war do not mix." The French version deleted much of the original film, presenting a "no-nonsense, homogenized, conventional" story. Tradition was important to most French audiences and the nation's involvement in a savage war at the time led to frontal rejection of DeMille's treatment. When a French version of the same film appeared later that year, the producer had excised the frame story, reaffirming tradition and holding Joan up as a heroic example meant to inspire for her compatriots.⁴²

With the proliferation of American films in the French market, French observers began to respond with a begrudging tone. Reacting to *David Garrick* and Pearl White's *Mayblossom* (*Fleur de printemps*), a critic for *Le Temps*, acknowledged the entertainment value and technical merit of the American productions, but showed resentment in asserting that French filmmakers, if not facing the wartime crisis, could make pictures that were just as good, if not superior. With regard to *Mayblossom*, a

⁴² Robin Blaetz, "Joan of Arc and the War," 119-122.

period piece set during the time of France's Second Empire, he exclaimed that it was "truly humiliating" for American studios to distort history as they wished – voicing a grievance that would become a constant theme of French criticism in the 1920s. As for *David Garrick*, all of its "brilliant" qualities were the same ones that a "French mind" could have devised. "Are we going to let ourselves be beaten with our own weapons?" he asked rhetorically.⁴³ Another critic anguished over American domination of French screen time, confessing his "stupor" over the fact that Hollywood's "current formula for American scripts, far from improving, is unfortunately beginning to industrialize itself." Only people without culture themselves – the "cultureless" French cinema owners – could tolerate such fare, he complained.⁴⁴ Reluctantly acknowledging technological and artistic improvements in American films, such as realistic action scenes and a more natural style of acting, a colleague dismissed them as "melodramatic extravaganzas" that are "generally of an endearing naïveté and of discouragingly poor imagination."⁴⁵ Diamant-Berger was emphatic: France had become "the garbage dump" for a flood of American and other foreign films that "submerges us in an ocean of turkeys," i.e., poor-quality products, he groused.⁴⁶

Underlying much of the criticism was deep concern over the future of the French film industry, a concern rooted in a growing sense of inferiority vis-à-vis the Hollywood leviathan. That seemingly explains the emphasis on an alleged cultural and artistic superiority that began to appear in wartime discourse and that would become an integral part of the French response to American films in coming years. It also explains

⁴³ *Le Temps*, 16 April 1917, 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1916, 4.

⁴⁵ *Le Temps*, 29 Nov. 1916, 3.

⁴⁶ Diamant-Berger, quoted in *Hebdo-Film*, 14 July 1917, 1.

the emphasis on Frenchness that observers began using in their commentaries. The excitement of one writer over the imminent release of *The Life of Christopher Columbus and His Discovery of America* stemmed apparently from the fact that, although American money had financed the project, the film had a French director and French actors. The advertisement for the movie that appeared in the same newspaper hailed it as a “great, French historical film.”⁴⁷ Yet another article about the opening of a new French film company emphasized the “happy formula” that would govern its products: “French films, scripts taken from the works of the best French writers, [and] movies filmed by the greatest French artists.”⁴⁸ At war’s end, Émile Vuillermoz, on his way to becoming one of France’s top film critics, hammered on the theme: “[W]e have a technical skill as supple as that of the Americans, but more subtle and psychological in its suggestions.”⁴⁹

A rash of articles pointed to the “crisis” facing the national film industry during the war. Describing the situation as “extremely grave,” one reporter mourned the fact that French films were not being produced because of wartime restrictions. “The French [movie] screen has been humiliated up to now by Italian and American films,” he railed.⁵⁰ Another critic, in an article entitled “America beats France with French weapons,” accused the culturally-inferior “American ogre” of stealing, in effect, French literatures to make movies. “Thanks to their dollars, their banknotes, their millions,” he exclaimed, “the Americans, from the film standpoint, are waging a disastrous war on us and the situation becomes daily more grave.” What was worse, that campaign to “crush

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25 Nov. 1916, 6.

⁴⁸ *Le Temps*, 2 Sept. 1916, 4.

⁴⁹ Vuillermoz, “Devant l’écran: *La Deuxième Symphonie*,” *Le Temps*, 6 Nov. 1918, 3, printed in translation in Abel, *French Film Theory and Criticism*, 170-171.

⁵⁰ *Le Temps*, 2 Dec. 1917, 3.

our poor, dying French industry” was made possible only because American producers were “shamelessly looting French literary and theatrical works.”⁵¹ Cried another commentator: “Poor French [film] production is bringing up the rear!”⁵² French distributors and exhibitors, who seemed to be focusing exclusively on marketing foreign films, were partly to blame, charged one columnist, and should patriotically reorient their activities to help the struggling French cinema get back on its feet.⁵³ Cultural elitists, such as the author of a particularly vituperative piece in *Le Temps* in 1916 who decried the “vulgar” path that cinema allegedly was on and even took a potshot at “this exasperating Charlot,” clamored for more national production. Denouncing the French fondness for Westerns and a general lack of good taste in current movie offerings, the same author noted sarcastically in a later column that France would more than likely continue to accept the tasteless fare that the “good Yankees” would “impose” on it.⁵⁴ Diamant-Berger sounded a frequent alarm, writing articles, conducting polls, and even forming a Committee for the Defense of French Cinema to help plug the cultural dike.⁵⁵

The French film industry was indeed in lamentable condition at the end of the Great War, its share of films projected in national theaters reduced to an almost marginal level. Cultural critics and journalists alike were perhaps not unfounded in their fears for the future of French cinema. The immediate postwar period saw a “shaking up” of the industry, with the major studios and production houses undergoing reorganization and changes in focus. One prominent casualty was Pathé-Frères, which basically abandoned film production and, through a new organization, Pathé-Cinéma,

⁵¹ *Hebdo-Film*, 22 July 1916, 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20 May 1916, 7.

⁵³ *Hebdo-Film*, 4 Nov. 1916, 14.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1 April 1916, 3; 22 April 1916, 6-7.

⁵⁵ Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma*, 33; Heu, *Le temps du cinéma*, 43-44, 121.

created during the month of the Armistice, would limit itself to distribution and exhibition, expanding its network of theaters in France and across Europe (some of which are still operational today). Gaumont's company would follow Pathé's lead, closing foreign offices and focusing on distributing American films.⁵⁶ "American technique and French subtitles," Gaumont himself lamented, "that's what we have to do now."⁵⁷ Two other important companies, Éclair and Éclipse, underwent even more drastic restructuring. The former would no longer produce commercial films but focus rather on the production of camera equipment and film processing, while the latter halted production entirely. Eternal money problems, technological backwardness, a fragmented production system, relentless competition from a trans-Atlantic behemoth – all of this contributed to a *sauf-qui-peut* attitude within the French film community at the end of the war and left defenders of French cinema to ponder a potentially catastrophic future.

When the American president arrived in France in December 1918 to begin the monumental task of crafting a peace settlement, he was eulogized as "Wilson *le Juste*" in French newspapers and welcomed with an extraordinary outpouring of public affection. For a country ravaged in all senses by a catastrophic war, Wilson seemed to embody the hopes for post-war salvation. Said one French observer, surely now there would be "an increasingly close alliance" between the two countries. Echoing that hope, another writer, in an article titled "Wilson's Smile," reminded the visitor of the price France had paid and, hence, what was at stake post-war. "Thanks to you . . . the wives and mothers will have received the only possible consolation," he declared, "but it is

⁵⁶ Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*, Chap. 1: "The French Film Industry."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 13; Poirier, *Vingt-quatre images à la seconde*, 42.

immense: the joy of not having suffered in vain!" The wartime honeymoon, however, was about to end – and the union itself would unravel with the speed of a Hollywood marriage. The act perhaps most symbolic of American interest in a divorce was Wilson's refusal to visit the French battle zone, because, he said, it might color his views of the Germans.⁵⁸ From that point on the situation worsened for France. Public and private groups in France made a valiant effort to win American support for France's foreign policy needs and requests, but their expectations were unrealistic.⁵⁹ Indeed, on virtually every issue of fundamental importance to France – security issues vis-à-vis Germany, economic reconstruction, reparations, and war debts – the two countries parted company in the 1920s as diplomatic friction and mutual public recrimination became the order of the day.⁶⁰ By early 1923, one French analyst was sadly pointing to the obvious: "Never has Europe [i.e., France] been lower in American opinion." In ensuing years, if the situation changed, it was for the worse in French eyes. "If one needed to attribute to the mass of American voters any feeling at all regarding Europe," another observer said glumly in a front page article in *Le Figaro* three years later, "it would be indifference."⁶¹

In the immediate aftermath of the war, the French government sought two things: American participation in a security arrangement that would protect France against

⁵⁸ Jean Brunhas, "Comment mieux nous unir aux États-Unis," *Le Siècle*, 13 Dec. 1918, 2; Maurice de Waleffe, "La Sourire de Wilson," *Le Siècle*, 16 Dec. 1918, 1; Benjamin F. Martin, *France and the Après-Guerre*, 1-40. Martin provides a detailed discussion of the war's impact on the French economy.

⁵⁹ William R. Keylor, "How They Advertised France: The French Propaganda Campaign in the United States," 351-373.

⁶⁰ William R. Keylor, "L'Image de la France en Amérique à la Fin de la Grande Guerre," 160-162; Martin, *France and the Après Guerre, 1918-1924*, *passim*; David Strauss, *Menace in the West: The Rise of French Anti-Americanism in Modern Times*, 109-119.

⁶¹ Claude Berton, "La Vie Américaine: Les États-Unis Devant le Mystère Européen," *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, 32 (Feb. 1923), 116; Lucien Romier, "Jeux et intérêts américains," *Le Figaro*, 4 Nov. 1926, 1.

future German aggression and economic assistance for the rebuilding of the shattered French economy. On both counts, France met with bitter disappointment. Not only did the United States ultimately fail to join in a mutual defense treaty with France, but the Senate even blocked American membership in the League of Nations, further undermining that new body's ability to prevent international conflict. To maintain peace, the United States placed its faith on disarmament, a cause that aroused little enthusiasm in France. The results of the Washington Naval Conference, convened by the administration of Warren Harding late in 1921, only generated deeper resentment in France. Hoping to review American interest in a defensive pact with France, Aristide Briand decided to attend the opening days of the Conference himself. The first French premier to visit the United States while still in office, he suffered only disappointment.⁶² Indeed, the French delegation received the "cruel blow" of being excluded from decisive committee discussions by the American, British, and Japanese delegates. "In a conference of world powers, France had been relegated to a second rank position." The resultant naval limitations treaty, which allotted to France the right to maintain a small portion of the tonnage of capital ships authorized to the larger naval powers, further wounded French pride and provoked acerbic conversations with the American secretary of state. When President Calvin Coolidge issued invitations for a follow-up disarmament conference in 1927, Paris pointedly refused to attend. Although the two countries did jointly sponsor the famous Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1929, which outlawed offensive war as an instrument of national policy, that pact represented a maneuver by the State Department to block a French proposal for a more binding bilateral agreement

⁶² Martin, *France and the Après Guerre, 1918-1924*, 90-91.

and contributed nothing to the maintenance of international peace.⁶³ The result of French efforts to secure some kind of permanent security commitment from Washington after the war was that the United States retreated into isolationism and left France to its own devices vis-à-vis a disgruntled Germany.

It also became immediately clear after Versailles that there would be no long-term economic aid from the United States and the French reluctantly accepted that setback. But a question that lingered on and was intimately related to French national financial welfare was that of repayment of the wartime debt to American banks. It became one of the most volatile issues, as French authorities, financial and business sectors, and intelligentsia urged a scaling down of the obligation or its linkage to satisfactory performance by Germany on the question of reparations – and anguished over Washington's apparent sympathy for the defeated Huns. The material contribution of the United States to the Allied war effort had been enormous and that country had profited immensely from the conflict, emerging not only as the world's leading economic and financial power, but a creditor nation for the first time in its history. France, on the other hand, had made ghastly sacrifices in the trenches and its economy had been gutted. At the end of the war, it owed to both the United States and Great Britain approximately \$4 billion and had lost a similar amount in investments in Russia when the Bolsheviks seized power; it also faced the herculean task of financing economic reconstruction, which it intended to do partly through reparations from Berlin. Paris, therefore, was determined to extract full reparations from the defeated enemy, but it

⁶³ Strauss, *Menace in the West*, 109-119. The result of the Washington Naval Conference was that "France was to be allowed little more than one-third the tonnage of the Anglo-Saxon powers and slightly better than one-half the tonnage allotted to Japan," 113. See also Martin, *France and the Après Guerre*, 91.

seemed reasonable to French authorities and to the French people that the United States extend a generous hand. “The famous slogan ‘Germany will pay!’ did not describe the fundamental economic policy of the French government at the end of the war,” one analyst has noted. “The phrase ‘America will pay!’ is a better description.”⁶⁴ But while French authorities optimistically devised proposals for Allied sharing of the war’s costs – on the basis of a country’s ability to pay – the Wilson administration, even before the peace talks began, not only abruptly cancelled various arrangements that had channeled resources to the French government during the war, but simultaneously asked Paris for an explanation of just how it intended to repay its wartime debt to the United States.⁶⁵

The war debt issue was thus already a festering wound for France as the 1920s opened and the related question of reparations was critical enough for Paris to order troops into the Ruhr in 1923 in an effort to force payment, a move sharply condemned in American political and financial circles. “It is a defiance of international order and peace,” fumed Senator Woodrow Borah, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “It is an offense against humanity.”⁶⁶ Washington displayed what French observers judged a callous disregard for an ally’s plight, adopting the doubly infuriating policy of insisting on collection of the French debt and urging readjustment of Germany’s obligations. To enable the defeated enemy to make reparations payments, furthermore, a “massive infusion” of American capital in the form of private bank loans to Germany became necessary. While government authorities, political leaders, the press, and intelligentsia in France voiced alarm over America’s sudden financial

⁶⁴ White, *American Opinion of France*, 123-135.

⁶⁵ William R. Keylor, “L’Image de la France en Amérique à la Fin de la Grande Guerre,” 160-162.

⁶⁶ Senator William Borah, quoted in White, *American Opinion of France*, 296.

influence over European affairs, a poignant event that reflected French resentment, but barely concealed the growing anger that lay beneath, occurred in mid-1926. Scores of French “writers” who had fought in the war – among them not only journalists and novelists, but professors, physicians, and several members of the Académie Française – addressed an open letter to American intellectuals asking that they help influence American public opinion to support a resolution of the debt issue in a way more understanding of France’s plight. As part of that gesture of protest, a sizeable body of crippled French veterans paraded down the Champs-Élysées on crutches, in wheelchairs, or, if they had been lucky enough to lose only a hand or an arm, on foot. Crowds lining the sides of the avenue applauded warmly as the former *poilus* passed by and then, suddenly unable to cheer, they fell silent as a final contingent filed by – those whose faces had been so badly disfigured in combat that they “looked like beings from another planet.” The small parade ended at the Place de l’Étoile before the statue of George Washington.⁶⁷

It was all to no avail, of course, as international plans to sustain the flow of reparations from Germany fell short of the mark and diplomatic friction and mutual public recrimination intensified. The dispute would ultimately force the fall of the Édouard Herriot government early in the Great Depression when it reluctantly recommended, after a brief moratorium, that France resume payments; on that occasion there were public protests against the United States and even rioting in Paris by right-wing extremists. The upshot of the years-long quarreling over financial

⁶⁷ “Les Écrivains combattants aux intellectuels américains,” *Le Figaro*, 10 July 1926, 1; Louis Chevreuse, “La manifestation des anciens combattants aura lieu aujourd’hui,” *Le Figaro*, 11 July 1926, 1; Simon Arbellot, “La Manifestation des Anciens Combattants,” *Le Figaro*, 12 July 1926, 1; “La Manifestation des Anciens Combattants,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 12 July 1926, 1.

questions was that broad sectors of French opinion, not merely the Left, had concluded by the end of the 1920s that the United States, now frequently labeled “Uncle Shylock” rather than “Uncle Sam,” was a “materialistic power, immune to moral arguments.”⁶⁸ One writer in 1928 acknowledged his “bitterness” as he noted the “abyss” between the two countries. The authoritative foreign editor of *L’Écho de Paris*, André Géraud, known by his pen name Pertinax, pulled no punches when he addressed the American Press Directors’ Association in New York in April 1930. “What a happy people you are,” he said with biting sarcasm. The United States had imposed the League of Nations on Europe, used its influence to end France’s attempt to settle the reparations issue by force, and had taken the lead in international debt negotiations, he pointed out. And with what result? “More than any other factor,” he said in sharp condemnation, “you are responsible for the state of political chaos in which Europe finds itself today.”⁶⁹

General trends in Franco-American economic relations in the 1920s, especially the increasing penetration of Europe by American capital, progressively sharpened misgivings about the intentions of the United States. Initially, many in France had welcomed the idea of American investments as a contribution to the solution of the country’s economic problems, but by the middle of the decade even those Frenchmen were becoming apprehensive as they watched new multinational corporations controlled by American investors gain ground in strategic sectors such as automobiles, oil, telephones, and electrical equipment. The automobile sector in France at first seemed relatively secure – it was the leading producer of vehicles on the continent – but French analysts were not so certain. As soon as the guns fell silent in 1919, French analysts

⁶⁸ Charles Pomaret, *L’Amérique à la conquête de l’Europe*, 153.

⁶⁹ Maurice Noël, “L’Opinion des autres,” *Le Figaro*, 28 Nov. 1928, 3; R. L., “En quels termes ‘Pertinax’ a dit les faits aux Américains,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 25 April 1930, 1.

were expressing concern about the incredible expansion of the automobile industry in the United States – chauffeurs were rare in that country, one pointed out, because “everybody drives, [including] women” – and the potential “peril” that it offered to French production. Ford did open an assembly plant in France and quickly organized a network of some 300 dealerships. More importantly, Ford and General Motors established plants in Germany and England that threatened sharp competition with French manufacturers, who found themselves forced to seek loans from New York banks. In the oil sector, the United States clearly held the upper hand and with pressure tactics established a dominant position in oil refining and distribution in France. The same was true of communications, where the American-owned International Telephone and Telegraph Company achieved dominance by controlling the manufacture of equipment. The French government had little recourse but to turn to American-owned or American-controlled companies for modernization of the national telephone system in 1930. The pattern of influence in the electrical sector was similar in that American companies were the main producers of equipment.⁷⁰

Constant reminders of the increasing presence of American companies and products in France were ads in daily newspapers for such items as Lux and Palmolive soap, Wrigley’s chewing gum, Kodak cameras, Columbia Records, Camel and Lucky Strike (“They don’t irritate your throat, they don’t make you cough”) cigarettes, Firestone tires, Sloan’s liniment, Gillette razor blades (*Gillette Bleue!*), Colgate toothpaste, Ford and Buick motor cars, and Texaco and Mobil petroleum products.⁷¹ Was there any area

⁷⁰ Strauss, *Menace in the West*, 139-145.

⁷¹ See, for example, *Le Matin*, 19 May 1922, 6; 23 June 1923, 6; 11 July, 13 Dec. 1924, 6; 22 May 1925, 6; 16 July 1926, 3; 7 Jan. 1927, 6; 15 April 1927, 3; 29 April 1927, 6; 13 May 1927, 6; 20 May 1927, 6; *Le*

of the national economy free of American influence – maybe agriculture? A specialist who toured the countryside in 1926 had a disquieting answer. “During the harvest one could see on most of the farms everywhere harvesting equipment that *our friends* [sic] the Americans sold to us at the price of gold,” he groused. “And *gold* is the right word.”⁷² To Frenchmen already suspicious of Washington’s financial policy because of the controversy over debts and reparations, the dramatic surge in American investments strengthened the perception that the United States was a grasping power anxious to extend its dominion over France. Charles Pomaret, a member of the Chamber of Deputies, put it in somewhat extreme terms in a book he completed at the end of the 1920s, but he probably voiced a general concern. If France were not careful, he cautioned, the financial and economic penetration of Europe by the United States could end up creating “a bond of dependence or vassalage so tight that it automatically will make us satellites or servants of American power.”⁷³

Underlying, and strengthened by, the acrimony over political, economic, and financial issues was a much broader reaction against the United States, one rooted in conflicting social values, national self-images, and cultural stereotypes. To be sure, the United States continued to have its defenders in France. A segment of French business and political leaders admired the positive aspects of America’s capitalistic society with its emphasis on mass productivity, and numerous travelers crossed the Atlantic in the

Figaro, 5 Nov. 1925, 8; 22, 29 June 1929, 15 Sep. 1929; *L’Intransigeant*, various issues, June-July 1926, 7 Jan. 1928, 3; *Le Petit Parisien*, 17 March 1922, 6 March 1924, 8.

⁷² Maurice Mery, “L’industrie automobile et la Paix – II,” *Le Gaulois*, 7 Jan. 1919, 2, “L’industrie automobile et la Paix,” 4 Jan. 1919, 3; Brillaud de Laujardière, “La Vie aux Champs,” *Le Gaulois*, 12 Nov. 1926, 5.

⁷³ Charles Pomaret, *L’Amérique à la conquête de l’Europe*, 153.

1920s to see at first hand the wonders of the New World giant and reported favorably on much of what they had observed.⁷⁴ But what seems to have been dominant thought in elite circles – business, political, intellectual, and artistic – veered more and more in the opposite direction by the latter part of the decade. Americans, as many Frenchmen saw them, were superficial and devoid of *savoir faire*; they were youthful and energetic, yes, but immature, crassly materialistic, and indifferent to established mores and tradition. In 1922 a Paris daily asked two young stage actresses, one American and one French, who were appearing in a play *Les perles de Chicago* (The Pearls of Chicago), what they thought it would be like to be from the other's country. The replies were interesting for the image they projected and reinforced. The American was laconic in noting, first, that appearing in the play had stimulated her longing for "soft drinks and chewing gum." And what did she think of French girls? "If we hadn't invented flirting in America," she said, "they would have taught it to us." The response of her French friend was a bit different: if she had been born in the United States, she would see skyscrapers, learn to box in college, and study firsthand the Mormon community in Utah. "And it would also amuse me to live in a country where young women have their own clubs . . . and one can divorce her husband if he plays too much golf."⁷⁵

The symbol of American culture for a legion of critics was the assembly line. From that fundamental instrument of material progress flowed, in their eyes, a regimentation and standardization of virtually all aspects of American life – and that meant a loss of freedom and individualism with an accompanying debasement of more

⁷⁴ Bernadette Galloux-Fournier, "Un regard sur l'Amérique: voyageurs français aux États-Unis, 1919-1939," *Revue d'Histoire moderne et contemporaine* 37 (April-June 1990): 308-323.

⁷⁵ "Girl? Jeune fille?," *Le Petit Journal*, 9 June 1922, 4.

noble instincts.⁷⁶ At its worst, the material success of their more disciplined and organized society bred into Americans, as the French saw it, a cultural arrogance that expressed itself in an impatient desire to make other cultures over in their own image, to reorganize them and make them more efficient and economically productive. A 1924 novel by Pierre Gourdon took up that theme. A young American businessman and former doughboy, Richard Hawkes, returns to France, marries a French woman named Renée, and takes her to home to New York, where they settle into a luxurious hotel suite and, with good intentions, the well-off Richard lavishes comfort on her. She reminds him at one point that their relationship cannot be based on material things, that a wife is not a toy. “You do not treat her as a luxury object,” she said. “You do not buy her. You give her your heart because she gives you hers.” And thus the novelist sets up the contrast between a more human, sentimental, spiritual French culture and a materialistic American one. As Renée grows despondent in America – and Richard’s purchase of a new home for her did nothing to help – he decides to take her back to France and settle down at her home in the Brittany countryside, where her mother rents land to tenant farmers. The dénouement comes when Richard, learning that his mother-in-law is in financial straits, works out a thorough business plan, carefully calculating costs and profits, and then proposes it to her: he will take over management of her property, provide the capital for modernizing it, dismiss the tenant farmers, and raise cattle. It took a family friend to make Richard see what that transformation would mean in the lives of everyone. “If you want to help us with your energetic audacity, don’t alarm us with transformations too radical and too sudden,” the friend remonstrated. “Take into account the past that has molded our soul. Respect our

⁷⁶ Strauss, *Menace in the West*, 175-180.

customs, our traditions, our prejudices. Try, then, not to dominate us, but to hear us and blend with us.”⁷⁷

French critics argued that American intellectual life and artistic endeavor could not escape the consequences of a system of mass-production at the service of mass society. There was wild exaggeration in much of the commentary, but the essence of it gained widespread credence. In a front-page article in a Paris daily in 1927, one writer put it clearly. “*Standardization and mass production* are the two great formulas that excite Americans; their praises are sung daily in speeches, the press, and magazines . . . ,” he wrote. But while “marvelous” from the standpoint of productivity, the system tended to deaden thought, *he* obviously thought. What he *said*, euphemistically, was that “rationalization [of work] on such a scale tends to make the thought of the inhabitants perhaps a little too uniform.” And he explained: “From reading the same newspaper articles, the same books, wearing clothes that look pretty much the same, you create a uniformity of tastes, feelings, [and] judgments. . . .” A John Hopkins doctor, he added with incredulity, was even talking about “standardizing the birth of babies” by selecting for motherhood only those women who really wanted to have children.⁷⁸

Months later a writer for another Paris newspaper gained front-page space for an article on that same subject. “The Americans are firmly convinced of their victory over the Old World . . . ,” he wrote, because of their material and organizational supremacy. “The leitmotif of the hour is *efficiency*,” he continued, meaning “increased productivity, a reduction in costs, the elimination of wasted time.” The way that Americans achieved

⁷⁷ Pierre Gourdon, *À l'Américaine*, 21-27, 69-89, 102-135, 231-234.

⁷⁸ Jean Roquevaire, “Standardisation à outrance,” *Le Petit Journal*, 7 Jan. 1927, 1.

that was through “scientifically determined” standardization. “Shoes, clothes, even meals are *standardized*, as are their nuts and bolts,” he marveled. “One literally lives in a standardized way.” The following week the paper’s editor gave space, again on page one, to a female writer who had just visited the United States. “The American, in all his affairs, has one goal: to obtain from his activity the maximum of output so as to maximize benefits,” she reported. He believed, moreover, that collective gain spelled individual gain, an idea that had not taken deep enough root in France, “where individual competition [benefit] remains the motive for the businessman’s effort.”

Another element in the American world view that differed fundamentally from that of the Frenchman was this: “We place a value on the past – and what value!,” she pointed out.

“The Americans attach value only to the future. They do not know the soul of things at all; they know only movement.” The French, in that sense, were markedly different.

“We frequently reject any new system or any perfected method,” she reminded her countrymen, “because we do what our fathers did, we consider ourselves guided by truth and reason.” For Americans, she concluded, the key to moving ahead lay in details. As the manager of a large locomotive factory had explained to her, “The elimination of a single unnecessary gesture achieved daily by a thousand workers . . . may save so many hours of work per day, [and] therefore so many dollars per year. . . .”

Another writer who felt qualified to speak on American national character and its relationship to mass-production, suggested a sort of reversal of the linkage, although he recognized that the apparent effects were the same. Americans possessed “an inferior level of general culture, arising from the lack of common traditions and of a patrimony of art, literature, and taste,” he said confidently, so the national melting pot had already

produced standard outlooks and values. That, in turn, facilitated “standardization of the product,” i.e., adaptation to the assembly line, and led to workplace demands that European workers would justifiably resist.⁷⁹ The most disdainful adversary of the American way of life was the traditionalist curmudgeon Georges Duhamel, a prominent member of the Académie Française who spent several weeks in the United States in 1929 and then published *Scènes de la vie future*, one of the most widely read and dissected books of the era. Laced with sarcasm, irony, and hyperbole, the book was the most severe attack on American culture to appear in the interwar period – with the probable exception of Marxist diatribes. “If one imagined the stages of this [industrial] civilization as a series of experiments pursued by some malicious genius on laboratory animals,” Duhamel proclaimed, “North America [i.e., the United States] would appear immediately as the most savagely toxic subject.”⁸⁰ Fourteen years later Duhamel would return to the United States, where he visited his old friend André Maurois. “It was a charming stay,” Maurois later wrote, “although Duhamel still had a hard time forgiving the Americans for not being French.”⁸¹

The broad public in France did not seem to share the scornful opinion of the literati and other segments of the French elite, a fact that was particularly galling to cultural nationalists who resented American influence in almost all its forms. Urban French, at least, were more receptive to American popular culture and some eagerly embraced it. Jazz, for example, and certainly movies both seemed to be reaching

⁷⁹ C. [sic] Faroux, “L’Amérique prospère,” *L’Intransigeant*, 14 May 1927, 1; Suzanne Grinberg, “30 étages en 3 mois,” *L’Intransigeant*, 21 May 1927, 1; Marc Nody, “La standardisation et l’industrie française,” *Le Figaro*, 14 Aug. 1927, 3.

⁸⁰ Georges Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future*, 16. For the impact of the book, see Anne-Marie Duranton-Crabol, “De l’antiaméricanisme en France vers 1930: la réception des *Scènes de la vie future*,” 120.

⁸¹ André Maurois, *Mémoires, 1885-1967*, 388.

increasingly broader and sympathetic segments French urban society. Shortly after the war had ended, one writer on cultural affairs had explained the attraction of the new form of music. It was “new, whimsical, lively in its rhythm” and the “expressions and enthusiasm” of the musicians were catching.⁸² In the early 1920s the craze spread rapidly, as growing numbers of French performers incorporated jazz into their programs and dance halls proliferated, both leaving the imprint of American influence on popular entertainment.⁸³ “Jazz was a religion which attracted devotees,” Jean Renoir, son of the famous painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, who was himself a fledgling film director at the time, recalled of his fascination with that cultural import in the 1920s; one of his first efforts at filmmaking, an unfinished product he entitled *Charleston*, “was born of my enthusiasm for jazz,” he said.⁸⁴ Hollywood movies and tourists from the United States introduced French urban audiences to the latest dance crazes, which the fun-seeking segments of the French public embraced enthusiastically. “The presence of Americans, their music, too, contributed greatly to maintaining an atmosphere of craziness, with jazz, the Charleston, the Black Bottom,” one prominent French musician remembered. The terms *jazz*, *jazzband*, and *dancing* (a place to dance) became a permanent part of the Parisian vocabulary.⁸⁵

Late in 1925, the drive toward cultural “modernity” spearheaded by American jazz found dramatic reinforcement with a new show brought over from the United

⁸² “Coulisses: *Jazz Band*,” *Le Siècle*, 19 May 1919, 2.

⁸³ Jeffrey H. Jackson, *Making Jazz French: Music and Modern Life in Interwar Paris*, 16-18, 21, 34. Charles Delaunay, a pioneer in the field of French jazz criticism, conceded that *le jazz* had been born in the United States, in New Orleans specifically, but that “all its originality and promise were first discovered by the intellectuals of ‘old’ Europe, the French artistic avant-garde to be specific.” Charles Delaunay, quoted in Robert Walser, *Keeping Time: Readings in Jazz History*, 130. For the French avant-gardes’ use of black art and music as an anti-bourgeois instrument, see Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*.

⁸⁴ Jean Renoir, *My Life and My Films*, 92-93.

⁸⁵ Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 41, Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, 68-71.

States: *la Revue Nègre*, which featured a style of “frenetic pacing and dancing” that came to be labeled *la danse sauvage*. One of the lead dancers was a nineteen-year-old African-American woman named Josephine Baker who took Parisian nightlife absolutely by storm. Baker simply “exploded on the scene along with the Charleston in 1925” and “seemed to meld jazz and sex seamlessly,” opening a cabaret in the Paris neighborhood of Montmartre after her triumphant year-long engagement as the embodiment of *le Tumulte Noire* (the Black Tumult) in the *Revue Nègre* at the Folies-Bergère.⁸⁶ Stunning in her on-stage eroticism, she became a cultural icon in France almost overnight, quickly branching out into film and recording.⁸⁷ One of Baker’s later hit songs *J’ai deux amours*, captured the symbolism of her expatriate status: in the song she sang of her two true loves, “*mon pays et Paris*” (“my country and Paris”).⁸⁸ If jazz and the variations of dance that flowed from it needed renewed stimulus, Baker provided it and the imported form of music continued to enthrall widening segments of Parisian pleasure-seekers. One observer late in 1926 expressed wonder at the audience reaction he had witnessed in one night spot: the performer seemed to be playing with patrons’ emotions, his discordant notes constituting a “dangerous caress.” When he finished playing, the room erupted in applause, both with relief and at the talent of the musician who had “acted on their nerves with such virtuosity.” Who was the object of their emotion? “It is the black man of jazz, the exotic Don Juan.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Levenstein, *Seductive Journey*, 243-244.

⁸⁷ Rearick, *French in Love and War*, 81-82.

⁸⁸ Phyllis Rose, *Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in Her Time* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 94-180; Tyler Stovall, *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 89-92; Levenstein, *Seductive Journey*, 51.

⁸⁹ Louis-Léon Martin, “Les Dons Juans de Paris: Le Nègre,” *Le Siècle*, 18 Dec. 1926, 1.

Defenders of the French way of life observed the phenomenon with despair. Here, for them, was yet another example of a noxious interference of the United States into French life. “As jazz grew in popularity, it came to represent for some a particularly troubling example of everything that was wrong with the New World,” historian Jeffrey Jackson has noted. “It also threatened to bring those problems to France.”⁹⁰ From the outset there were strident denunciations of the subversive import. The archbishop of Paris in 1920 lashed out at the immorality of the jazz-induced dances, and one gynecologist warned that they could cause all kinds of physical ailments, including impotence. In the case of Josephine Baker, even those who subsidized her career by patronizing her shows and movies, distanced themselves psychologically – a form of resistance – viewing her as “a specimen of the African savage, the Other, whose wildness could never be matched by the civilized.”⁹¹ The author of one letter to the editor of a film trade publication complained sharply of the impact of the new Parisian nightlife on the appearance of women. “[J]azz, jazz, jazz . . . [sic],” he cried. “It’s no longer the mode, it’s the rage.” Georges Duhamel scorned jazz as the “triumph of barbaric stupidity.” Since American popular culture *had* to reflect the effects of mass-production, some French critics expectedly based their condemnation of jazz on that perceived connection. One saw in the new music form the “nervous uniformity of the pistons of a steam engine,” while another scorned it as the “music of . . . mass-produced men.”⁹² But if jazz was an irritating American intrusion into French cultural life, American motion pictures, which reached a vastly larger audience, loomed as

⁹⁰ Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 78.

⁹¹ Rearick, *French in Love and War*, 82.

⁹² Quoted in Pierre Rambaud, “La mode . . . [sic],” *Ciné Pour Tous*, 15 Aug. 1927, 33; Duhamel, *Scènes*, 129; Jackson, *Making Jazz French*, 79.

perhaps the most dangerous threat, given their perceived power to shape attitudes.

Indeed, no other vehicle of American influence elicited such passionate criticism from the French elite – or was so enthusiastically welcomed by the French public.

CHAPTER 2: "IT'S AN ILL WIND . . ."

Hollywood continued to dominate movie exhibition in post-war France, maintaining a firm grip on its wartime gains and occupying 85 percent of the screen time in French theaters. Italian films were difficult to market, one analyst noted in March 1921, but American movies found acceptance "in all regions" of the country. When a new theater opened at that time, an anonymous observer was outraged that it opened, "by the devil," with a Hollywood product. "Always American," he complained. Films that sold tickets were those that "please everybody and . . . I am speaking of American films," a critic in July pointed out. For those hoping to see a full-scale resurrection of French production, the trend sadly continued. "The Select [theater], in keeping with its [announced] program of French films," fumed one critic the following year, "is showing us American movies" – and to make certain readers knew how he felt about that, he ended his sentence with three exclamation points.¹ Hollywood was the streamliner pulling the half-empty cars of international film production. It set the bar for global competition, offered a familiar but exciting and entertaining range of movies, pioneered in new technology, and sought constantly to improve its products. And French audiences returned week after week to buy tickets and watch their favorite stars in fascinating and often exotic settings. Through the rapidly proliferating fan magazines, trade publications, and on the pages of the mainstream daily press, they eagerly followed the activities of American screen personalities. And if they were lucky enough

¹ Pierre de Verneuil, "À ceux qui vivent du cinéma," *La Scène*, 26 March 1921, 4; "Le Cinéma: Le Madeleine-Cinéma," *La Scène*, 2 April 1921, 6; P. M. [sic] "En tournée dans les cinémas," July 1921, 7-8; "Les Nouveautés de la Semaine," *La Scène*, 23 April 1922, 7.

to live in Paris, they might even get to see a favorite star. All in all, there had never been a foreign cultural import to rival Hollywood movies.

French audiences liked all genres of American film, from comedies and westerns to gangster movies and melodramas, and they acclaimed the same movies that audiences in the United States did. The films of certain directors usually met with a favorable audience reaction – and, in some cases, an even warmer one from critics. D. W. Griffith's movies were the best examples. Griffith, of course, had been a seminal figure in the development of the craft of directing, his innovations influencing all who followed. He had been the first to take the daring step of freeing the camera from a stationary position during a scene and moving it toward the actor in what came to be called a "full shot" and the first, as well, to position it even nearer him in a "close-up." The next step was to shoot a scene from different angles in order to be able to capture details or angles that might create more viewer interest or emotion. Those alterations meant that Griffith was the pioneer in breaking up scenes into a series of separate shots that, with proper cutting, instilled action, back and forth movement (initially called in the movie industry the "Griffith last-minute rescue," but later the "cross-cut" or "cut-back"), and hence greater dramatic effect into a film. He did two other things that helped revolutionize filmmaking: he used lighting for dramatic effect, allowing shadow and tone to appear on screen, and he was also the first to realize fully that the theater and film were separate things and required different acting techniques – for movies, he imposed more "natural" acting.² Griffith transformed movie-making everywhere, so it is no small wonder that French movie-goers hailed his works. His 1916 film *Intolerance* enjoyed a

² Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film*, 102-110, 128.

second run in Paris theaters right after the war, leading Louis Delluc to pose a question: “It’s just that if all our [French] directors saw *Intolerance* two years ago Why have they continued to make bad films?” Griffith was indeed an “incomparable artist” and “extraordinary innovator,” wrote a fellow critic in 1922 after seeing Griffith’s latest film, and a colleague marveled at his staying power with French audiences. “Today, the name of D. W. Griffith,” he said, “is more popular than ever.” René Jeanne systematically praised Griffith’s work, wondering (in 1921) at the director’s ability to “make poetry of everything he touches” and, in typical admiration, labeling his most recent movie in 1923 “a masterpiece of cinematographic technique.” The question asked by another reviewer in the middle of the decade summed up prevailing thought in French critical circles. “Why is it that Griffith’s films are always so perfectly engaging?”, he wondered. “One never finds a defect in his art.”³

Another director whose films could count on a favorable reception in France was Cecil B. DeMille, whose first epic films on religious themes, *The Ten Commandments* (1923), which played for sixty-two weeks at one Paris house,⁴ and *The King of Kings* (1927) had a particularly marked impact on French audiences. His attention to detail brought the Biblical periods to life for movie-goers everywhere and in that “really great and really beautiful” *King of Kings*, said one critic, there was “not an instance of a lack of taste in the whole enormous film.” Indeed, the biblical settings, especially the scenes on Calvary, showed DeMille’s “indisputable professional mastery” and his artistry imbued film with “an impression of power, of grandeur.” The irascible Émile Vuillermoz,

³ Louis Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 19 May 1919, 2; Gaston Tournier, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 6 Oct. 1922, 5; Louis Guilloux, “Un animateur américain – D. W. Griffith,” *Le Petit Journal*, 24 Nov. 1922, 4; René Jeanne, “Les films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 29 Oct. 1921, 4, 6 Oct. 1922, 4; 11 May 1923, 4; Robert Spa. [sic], *Figaro-Cinéma*, 1 Jan. 1926, 4.

⁴ Denys Ambel, *Le Matin*, 19 Dec. 1924, 4; *Cinémato*, 10 April 1925, 8.

chief critic of *Le Matin*, ever alert to defects in American movies, was among the few to find minor fault with the “slowness” of the rhythm of *The King of Kings*, but had to recognize its “grandiose” proportions and educational value.”⁵

The same films popular in the United States enthralled French fans as well. One of the decade’s blockbusters was the MGM production of *The Big Parade* (1925), the company’s highest grossing film until *Gone With the Wind* in 1939.⁶ The story concerns a doughboy who falls in love with a French woman, then loses his innocence – and a leg – on the battlefield, returns home only to realize that he does not fit in and cannot be happy without her, and so rejoins her in France. The film starred John Gilbert and his co-star was Renée Adorée, the most successful French actress in Hollywood in that era, whose presence in the cast enhanced its appeal for French audiences. Numerous dignitaries attended the gala premiere in Paris, among them the ministers of war and navy, the military governor of Paris, director of the American Affairs Department of the Foreign Ministry, the minister of pensions, and representatives of President Raymond Poincaré, the American embassy, and French veterans’ groups.⁷ The military governor subsequently sent a well-publicized letter to the managing director of MGM theaters in France expressing his satisfaction with the film, which he labeled a timely reminder of “the powerful aid that America gave France at the hardest moment of the war,”⁸ while a leading film critic hailed its “vivid and authentic atmosphere,” the “lyrical and delightful

⁵ Paul Gourdeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine: *Le Roi des Rois*,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 11 Nov. 1927, 4; Jean Prudhomme, “Critiques: le Roi des Rois,” *Le Matin*, 18 Nov. 1927, 4; Émile Vuillermoz, “Courrier Cinématographique: Instruction religieuse,” *Le Temps*, 13 Nov. 1927, 5. For another laudatory reaction to a DeMille film, see G[eorges]. R[oches]., “Répétition générale du film *Le Tourbillon des Âmes*,” *Le Matin*, 3 April 1925, 4.

⁶ Richard P. May, “Restoring the *Big Parade*,” *The Moving Image*, 5 (Fall 2005): 140-146.

⁷ “À propos de *La Grande Parade*,” *Le Petit Journal*, 21 Jan. 1927, 4.

⁸ Military Governor of Paris to Harry Portman, 25 Dec. 1926, in “Une Lettre du Général Gouraud,” *Le Petit Journal*, 14 Jan. 1927, 4.

details” of the non-violent scenes, and “above all the extraordinary realism of the battle scenes.”⁹ The movie enjoyed a two-month run at its initial venue and later appeared in other theaters.

MGM’s other mega-hit of the silent era, *Ben Hur*, which made Ramon Novarro an international star, was enormously successful in France. Periodic reports on pre-production and filming captured public attention – among other things French film fans learned that producer Samuel Goldwyn had contracted Italian experts in art, architecture, and literature to help give the film greater authenticity, and that director Fred Niblo had hired a dozen horse experts to prepare the great chariot race.¹⁰ The studio gave the film special handling to ensure a popular impact when the film reached Paris at the end of 1927: MGM representatives showed the movie to President Gaston Doumergue and his guests at the Palais de l’Élysée on Christmas Eve; later ambassadors and members of the French parliament were well-publicized patrons at a screening at the Madeleine-Cinéma, all allegedly agreeing that *Ben Hur* was the “most beautiful film” yet made. When it finally stopped its months-long run there in September, it immediately transferred to another prominent movie-house in Paris.¹¹

Westerns seemed to occupy a special place in the French popular imagination – and even the critics normally liked them. Provincial exhibitors at the start of the decade supposedly were “unanimous” in saying how profitable “cowboy” movies were,¹² and Parisian movie-goers ensured healthy takes for theater owners there, too. The major

⁹ Paul Gourdeaux, “Les films de la semaine,” *L’Echo de Paris*, 24 Dec. 1926, 4.

¹⁰ “Quelques Informations,” *Le Gaulois*, 14 March 1924, 4; Robert Spa, “Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 4 Dec. 1925, 7.

¹¹ R. V. (sic), “Petites Nouvelles,” *Le Gaulois*, 30 Dec. 1927, 4; “*Ben Hur* for ever!”, *Le Petit Parisien*, 24 Feb. 1928, 4; “Les Échos des Studios,” *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 3 March 1928, 4; “Les beaux programmes,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 21 Sept. 1928, 4; “Figaro-Cinéma,” *Le Figaro*, 22 Sept. 1928, 7.

¹² “Des films comiques,” *La Cinématographique Française* 78 (May 1920), 79.

draw remained William S. Hart, or “Rio Jim” as the French sometimes called him after his character in an early film by that title. “Hart arouses astonishing motions,” Delluc wrote in mid-1919. He was, to be sure, the “darling of the ladies and of the admirers of prowess,” commented one critic in 1921 – which means, added another, that “Rio Jim is as popular in France as he is in America.” But suddenly the news in 1922 was grim: “Hart was “gravely ill” – would he die? No, the looming tragedy receded as word came that although he did have typhoid fever, but was recovering. As the frequency of his screen appearances declined, French observers bemoaned his absence from the screen. “When will William Hart mount his horse Pie again?” one asked wistfully in 1923. The answer was: later that year, when he appeared as “stunning as always” in a new release. The continuation of his career until the middle of the decade kept his popularity alive. “The pleasure of seeing him again, and in doing so reliving . . . some of our best cinema memories,” said one prominent critic in 1926, “is enough to make us like this [latest film].”¹³ Tom Mix replaced Hart as the top western star in France, where observers attentively followed his activities and cheered his films. “Tom Mix is stunning in his dexterity, energy, and dynamism,” one reviewer exclaimed in 1926; to be sure, “thousands of [French] citizens . . . go each week to thrill to Tom Mix galloping about,” another wrote the following year.¹⁴

¹³ Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 15 May 1919, 2; Pierre de Verneuil, “Les Présentations de la Semaine,” *La Scène*, 26 March 1921, 4; “William Hart,” *Le Petit Journal*, 11 Nov. 1921, 4; “Echos de Paris et d’ailleurs,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 17 Nov. 1922, 5; 24 Nov. 1922, 5; “Et les cowboys?,” *L’Intransigeant*, 20 March 1923, 4; Paul Goudeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 14 Sep. 1923, 5; Robert Spa., “Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 17 April 1925, 4; Paul Goudeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine: *Cœur de brigand*,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 29 Jan. 1926, 4.

¹⁴ Goudeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine: *Ferme au poste*,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 26 Nov. 1926, 4; Gaston Thierry, “Dans les tenebres,” *Le Siècle*, 4 June 1927, 5.

American comedies habitually pleased French audiences – and frequently critics as well. At war's end Delluc wrote glowingly of a funny Hollywood import he had just watched – “When will the French do as well?” he wondered – and the answer was that they would not. The fact that Max Linder, the country's greatest comedy actor and international star, had encamped for Hollywood in 1917 was symbolic. A critic lamented in 1920 how “rare” it was to see French comedy on the screen. One reason might be that movie-goers liked American comedies so much, René Jeanne, film editor of *Le Petit Journal*, acknowledged somewhat ruefully in 1923; and the situation was all the more perplexing, he added the following year, because France had such a great *theater* comedy tradition. But “the fact is that we do not make humorous films in France [and] we are not even thinking of doing so.” The trend continued, leaving another critic to admit despondently four years later: “We have left to the Americans a monopoly on comedies.” A review by René Jeanne of an unremarkable comedy starring Edward Everett Horton was fairly typical of critiques of countless American films of that genre. The movie, he told readers, “makes you laugh almost constantly.” A critic for *Le Figaro* blamed French filmmakers for American predominance. “We do not see more French comedy films,” he said, because French directors lacked the sensitivity, the powers of observation, to make a good comedy. The American comedy, declared Marcel Carné, a future acclaimed director, in 1929, was simply better than that produced anywhere else, including France.¹⁵

¹⁵ Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 1919, 2; “Des films comiques,” *La Cinématographique Française*, 78 (May 1920), 79; René Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” » *Le Petit Journal*, 13 April 1923, 18 April 1924, 4; Jean Renouard, “La Semaine au Cinéma: Le Film Comique,” *Journal des Débats Politiques et Littéraires*, 29 Sep. 1928, 4; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 25 March 1927, 4; Marcel Carné, “La Comédie Américaine,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (19 July 1929), 87-89.

Individual stars captivated French audiences and help to explain the popularity of the genre and the product. Roscoe Arbuckle, known universally as “Fatty,” was a major attraction in France, as elsewhere, but his career ended in the early 1920s when he could not survive professionally the effects of a scandal arising from the death of a young woman in his hotel room after a drunken orgy. The attentiveness with which the French press, at times with front page stories, followed his fall from grace reflected readers’ interest in Arbuckle and growing fascination with the lives of screen stars; and there was a wistful tone in the reports that he had lost his wealth and would not be returning to the screen.¹⁶ He perhaps was not long missed because Harold Lloyd’s career reached the take-off stage in the early 1920s as did that of Buster Keaton and both not only served as magnets for French movie-goers, but enjoyed critical success as well in France. Late in the decade relative newcomers Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy attracted increasing attention, the French considering them “inimitable *American* comics,”¹⁷ even though Laurel actually was British as was his countryman “Charlot.”

Chaplin – hands down, was the most popular, widely discussed, and admired Hollywood screen personality in France, largely because of his representation of the little man, caught between powerful social forces, who struggles on, trying to maintain his dignity with a melancholy nonchalance. The “ace of American cinema,” a columnist labeled him in 1921, the same year that Delluc published a book on Chaplin in which he said that the comic’s “mask” possessed a “strange Latin character”; indeed, with his subtlety and irony, as well as a “sensual sentimentalism,” Chaplin was a “master of

¹⁶ “L’Affaire Fatty,” *Le Gaulois*, 21 Sept. 1921, 1, “On arrête à nouveau Fatty,” 9 Oct. 1921, 1; “Fatty en liberté,” *Le Siècle*, 1 Oct. 1921, 1, “Fatty en voyage,” 4 Oct. 1921, 1; various articles, *Le Matin*, 21, 22, 26, 28 Sep. 1921, 22 Sept., 1 Oct. 1921, 1, 14 April 1922; “Ce qu’on a fait, ce qu’on va faire,” *L’Intransigeant*, 17 Feb. 1923, 4.

¹⁷ “Eux!”, *L’Intransigeant*, 2 Aug. 1930, 2. Italics added.

Latin taste” and fit in well with a French tradition dating back generations. “I admire Chaplin’s profound sadness,” wrote Delluc. In his book the critic quoted an interview that Max Linder gave in 1919 after his first trip to the United States. The famous comic’s words could only have endeared Chaplin further to French audiences. “He intends, moreover, to come to France as soon as he can. He actually loves our country a great deal” For the time being, said Linder, Chaplin was busy lending his prestige and time to the “pro-Allied” movement in the United States.¹⁸

René Clair, just setting out on his career as a director, added his voice to the chorus: “Chaplin’s genius impresses the crowd and elite alike . . .,” he wrote, “and the masterpieces of the screen are almost always his greatest successes.” His *Gold Rush* was certainly “a new masterpiece of psychology and interpretation,” said a reviewer in 1925. And Chaplin’s mystique did not diminish as the decade wore on. A French film magazine conducted a survey of its readers in 1926 to determine who the most popular American movie stars were and Chaplin topped the list of male actors. Noting that he had never placed higher than fourth on top-ten lists in the United States, one daily knew why: “The *Latin* public,” it said, “understands him better than the Anglo-Saxon public.” Chaplin’s standing remained unchallenged as the decade ended. Of all the major stars dating from the earliest days of the movie industry, only he had endured, one observer wrote in 1929. “That one, he has never lost his brilliance, his popularity, or his influence.”¹⁹

¹⁸ P. Landry, “Charlie Chaplin et *Le Gosse*,” *Le Petit Journal*, 4 Nov. 1921, 4; Delluc, *Charlie Chaplin*, 6-7, 11, 66-71.

¹⁹ René Clair, “Exemples,” *L’Intransigeant*, 13 Jan. 1923, 4; R[obert]. S[pa.], “Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 25 Sept. 1925, 4; “Les Petits Référendums du Cinéma,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 27 Jan. 1926, 4; Jean Arroy, “Le Cinéma américain en 1928,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (18 Jan. 1928), 103.

French movie fans were obsessed with Chaplin's every movement. Witness the attention, paid not by sensationalist rags but by the mainstream Parisian press, to his possible marriage early in the decade. The frenzy started with a report in December 1922 that he had married Polish actress Pola Negri; perhaps with tongue in cheek, one daily in January issued a denial: "We announce, this week, no new marriage for Charlie Chaplin"; in mid-February it issued an update: "Charlie Chaplin has not married again"; that is because Pola Negri apparently did not want to marry him, *Le Matin* said late that month. As the days passed in March, the same daily fretted because no news about the matter had arrived – "It's worrisome," it exclaimed. "Has the cable from New York been cut?" Still no news, the paper lamented early in April. Chaplin was going to be a member of a friend's wedding party, a rival daily announced toward the end of April. Will the friend reciprocate at Chaplin's wedding? it wondered. As the rumors continued to swirl, internationally, over the next year, the actor thought it best to issue a public denial of any imminent change in his marital status. Obviously, his messy divorce three years later was the subject of immediate comment in France, where observers worried about the impact of moral outrage in some sectors of the American public on Chaplin's career. And interest in his relationships with women remained evident as the decade ended.²⁰

The frequency of commentaries devoted to Chaplin were part of a broader interest in France in all the top Hollywood screen personalities of the silent era, whose careers and lives came under constant scrutiny. How can you determine what kind of

²⁰ "On dit," *Le Matin*, 29 Dec. 1922, 5; *L'Intransigeant*, 20 Jan. 1923, "Charlie Chaplin n'est pas encore marié," 17 Feb. 1923, 4; "On dit," *Le Matin*, 24 Feb. 1923, 5; *L'Intransigeant*, 24 March 1923, 4; "On dit," *Le Matin*, 6 April 1923, 4; *L'Intransigeant*, 28 April 1923, 4; Robert Spa., "Informations," *Le Figaro*, 24 April 1924, 5; Jeanne, "En marge de l'écran: L'Affaire Charlot," *Le Petit Journal*, 25 March 1924, 4; L. [Lucienne] Escoube, "Charlie Chaplin et les femmes," *Ciné-Magazine*, 10 (Aug. 1930), 7-10.

films to produce for the public, one columnist asked in 1924, when it “seems to be interested only in the color of Mary Pickford’s hair or Charlie Chaplin’s divorce”?²¹

Systematic tidbits about American actors and actresses stars appeared not only in the proliferating trade publications, but in the mainstream print media as well, so all classes were exposed to the relentless stream of publicity, much of it provided by studios in the United States. Urban fans had access to all that information and could, of course, see their favorites frequently on the screen. Reflecting the widespread nature of the obsession with keeping up with Hollywood news, even counterparts in the provinces, less privileged in that sense, were eager to give at least the impression of being *au courant*. One leading Paris film critic saw a Gloria Swanson movie at a small provincial house early in 1927 and was amused to hear two young people seated behind him talking about the identity of the stars – “Don’t you recognize Pola Negri?,” one said smugly to the other and then with absolute confidence went on to identify the male lead equally incorrectly as Rudolph Valentino.²² If news and gossip about any major American actors and actresses interested French movie-goers, within that cinematic galaxy, there were a select few stars held in special esteem – if the frequency and intensity of press commentaries are any indication. A quantitative indication came with the 1926 film magazine poll. Chaplin headed the list, and the 14,700 movie fans who sent in ballots put Douglas Fairbanks in third place behind Rudolph Valentino, while Mary Pickford placed first among the actresses.²³ If female readers tended to vote more than males, however, that might have skewed the results in the actor category. The matter is interesting because Fairbanks received substantially greater coverage in

²¹ Robert Spa., “Figaro-Cinéma: Du Public,” *Le Figaro*, 10 Oct. 1924, 7.

²² Roger Régent, “Les stratèges en salles!” *L’Intransigeant*, 15 Jan. 1927, 4.

²³ “Les Petits Référendums du Cinéma,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 27 Jan. 1926, 4.

the French press than did Valentino, even before the latter's untimely death later that same year. Did the fact that the movie critics and columnists were males account for that difference? Possibly it did, but, for whatever reason, the exultation over a screen appearance by Fairbanks, widely referred to simply as "Doug" or "Douglas" in the French press, was striking.

Delluc, in 1919, had difficulty describing what Fairbanks represented. He was more than an actor and magnificent physical specimen, he offered. "It is something else, . . . really something else." Observe the spectators as the final scenes of a Fairbanks film unfolds, he suggested. "A new spirit – yes, that's it – thrills them, galvanizes them, makes them glow." That Fairbanks fascinated both men and women, a female reporter made clear in 1922. "Dazzling joys . . . transport us to an immense solitude where pure air penetrates us" was how she described the emotional effect of his films. Their plots were incidental, René Jeanne added. What counted was Fairbanks, "his audacity, gaiety, good humor, [and] decisiveness." Little wonder that the fact that he had shaved his moustache in 1923 was newsworthy. Did a less hirsute Fairbanks change anything? No, he was still a dominant force, as the Paris debut of *The Adventures of Robin Hood* in February of that year showed. The direction of the film and its décor were wonderful, said a reviewer. "But the great triumph of this incomparable film is Douglas Fairbanks, . . . an artist without equal." He was simply a consummate actor whose "extraordinary" feats on the screen transformed a film, *Le Figaro's* specialist concluded. His colleague on the staff of *L'Écho de Paris* announced that Fairbanks's performance in *The Thief of Bagdad*, which reached Paris screens the following year, would not disappoint his fans. "Douglas Fairbanks overflows with life,

spirit, and panache, as always,” he said.²⁴ Even Vuillermoz of *Le Temps* liked Fairbanks. Seldom did the critic praise an American film without reservation, but he did so in the case of this film. The sets, script, and direction were all excellent – and then there was Fairbanks, “marvelously at ease” in a role demanding extraordinary acrobatic verve. His reaction to *The Black Pirate* two years later was similar. If the script was a bit weak, it did not matter because there was “the good Douglas, smiling athlete . . . and incomparable gymnast,” a “splendid human animal” to captivate viewers. What explained the appeal of Fairbanks? Vuillermoz asked rhetorically sometime later. It was the fact that modern, civilized man, beset by difficulties on all sides, enjoyed seeing “a kind of savage superman” with “muscles of steel” subduing any adversary. And that is why even the “most blasé intellectuals” derived “secret pleasure” from his movies. Going a long way to prove that point, his colleague at *Le Figaro* waxed enthusiastic about Fairbanks’s latest film, *The Gaucho*. “Douglas is extraordinary in his fluidity and [physical] gracefulness; you’ve got to see him jump on a running horse, bound from the top of one tree to another, [and] scale walls and roofs with ease . . . ,” he exclaimed. The 1920s came to a close with the star’s popularity undiminished. The John Barrymores, John Gilberts, and Ramon Novarros were all “superb romantic heroes,” another critic reflected. “But the one who, incontestably, best carries on the romantic tradition, is Douglas Fairbanks. . . .” His popularity in France was so pervasive that the American Tobacco Company, as part of a worldwide drive to boost sales, began using a

²⁴ Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 19 April 1919, 2; Marianne Alby, “Portrait: Douglas Fairbanks,” *Le Petit Journal*, 16 June 1922, 4; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 16 June 1922, 4; “Ce qu’on a fait, ce qu’on va faire: À L’Étranger,” *L’Intransigeant*, 27 Jan. 1923, 4; “Les Grands Films: *Robin des Bois*,” *Le Matin*, 23 Feb. 1923, 5; Paul Gordeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine: *Le voleur de Bagdad*,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 19 Sept. 1924, 4.

Fairbanks testimonial in French newspaper advertisements for Lucky Strike cigarettes in 1929.²⁵

If a Paris newspaper from the 1920s cited the single name “Mary,” there could be no doubt, ever, about whom it was talking. No other actress of the era had the hold on French affection and admiration that Mary Pickford, Fairbanks’s wife, did. She was “a prodigious talent,” Delluc wrote after seeing one of her films in April 1919. “How can one believe that a single actress has embodied so much ability?” he wondered on watching another. A film might be badly produced, wrote René Jeanne in 1921, but her presence would save it.²⁶ Would she abandon her career to have a baby?²⁷ Her fans in France hoped not. Her sister, who was not in show business, was injured in a car accident? If it was linked to “Mary,” it was news.²⁸ A photo of Mary playfully “conducting” a military band at a charity function is available? Print it. If her husband could display great physical prowess on the screen, so could she – and her film *Rosita*, in which she was “one of the most expert Amazons,” proved that.²⁹ Much of the appeal that Pickford and Fairbanks exercised, both in the United States and France, as indeed throughout the Western world, stemmed from their respectability, the mooring of their public conduct – and films – in traditional values,³⁰ although that acceptability required that audiences overlook his divorce from his first wife, which they obviously were willing

²⁵ Émile Vuillermoz, *Le Temps*, 20 Sept. 1924, 4; 9 Oct. 1926, 4; 21 Jan. 1928, 5; Robert Spa., “Figaro-Cinéma: *Le Gaucho*,” *Le Figaro*, 27 Jan. 1928, 7; Robert Vernay, “Le Romantisme au cinéma,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (19 April 1929), 101; K. L. Lum et al., “Signed, Sealed and Delivered: Big Tobacco in Hollywood,” 314-316; Lucky Strike ad, *Le Figaro*, 22 June 1929.

²⁶ Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 22 April, 21 May 1919, 2; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 11 Nov. 1921, 4.

²⁷ “On dit,” *Le Matin*, 29 Dec. 1922, 5.

²⁸ “Ce qu’on a fait, ce qu’on va faire: À L’Étranger,” *L’Intransigeant*, 27 Jan 1923, 4.

²⁹ Photo with heading “La Vie des Étoiles de Cinéma en Amérique,” *Le Petit Journal*, 20 April 1923, 4; “Informations,” *Le Gaulois*, 1 Feb. 1924, 4.

³⁰ Charles J. Shindo, *1927 and the Rise of Modern America*, 138-143.

to do. The *Le Figaro* critic in 1924 called attention to Pickford's virtuous, uncomplicated character. Despite her fame and wealth, he said, she remained "a delightful, simple, and good little creature" who was happy with "the simplest of joys." And, the author of that description subsequently wrote, she was a "perfect actress of unequaled [dramatic] tact and moderation."³¹ News of Mary could never be too plentiful. She gave a speech in Los Angeles in which she offered advice to aspiring actresses? Heed her words, young women of France.³²

The French papers kept their readers informed on the professional activities of all the prominent Hollywood stars and the mundane details of their personal lives as well. Lillian Gish, Madge Normand, Norma Talmadge, John Barrymore, Clara Bow, Lon Cheney, John Gilbert, child actor Jackie Coogan, Valentino, Ramon Novarro, Louise Brooks, and, increasingly toward the end of the decade, Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford, and Gary Cooper all were subject of periodic scrutiny, as were myriad others. French trade publications frequently carried articles on those personalities and regularly featured American stars on their covers.³³ The news items were somewhat less than earth-shattering. Tom Mix was preparing to make a movie in Argentina – he sailed – yes, but Joseph Kennedy persuaded him to return and sign a new contract. Unfortunately, Mix later had to pay a large sum in taxes! Barrymore married for the third time in 1928. Did you know Richard Dix originally wanted to become a doctor after graduating from college but he could not stand the sight of blood? It is impossible to

³¹ Robert Spa., "Figaro-Cinéma: Mary Pickford," *Le Figaro*, 8 May 1924, 5, "Figaro-Cinéma: Du style," 4 Oct. 1924, 5.

³² Pierre-Gilles [Veber], "Discours," *Le Matin*, 15 Feb. 1924, 5.

³³ M. Passelergue, "Stars: Joan Crawford," *Ciné-Magazine* cover story, 12 April 1929, 49-52; "Joan Crawford: Histoire de ma vie," *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (Feb. 1930), 16-21, 89-90; Lucienne Escoube, "Stars: Janet Gaynor," *Ciné-Magazine* cover story, 2 Aug. 1929, 167-171; Lucienne Escoube, "Stars: Evelyn Brent," *Ciné-Magazine* 9 cover story, 7 June 1929, 407-409; M. Passelergue, "Stars: Buster Keaton," *Ciné-Magazine* cover story, 26 April 1929, 147-150.

say how excited Parisians became after reading that Jackie Coogan had gone to Mexico with his parents and met a Navajo chieftain who named him Talking Eyes.³⁴

As the 1920s opened, Pearl White was one of the most popular American screen figures, although her star was fading rapidly. During the early silent era, she had appeared in the first major serial, the widely popular *Les mystères de New-York*, which she made for Pathé and which made her a name in every movie-going household France.³⁵ Even though he decried the “mediocrity” of the story told in a subsequent serial of hers, which opened in Paris right after the war ended, Delluc exulted in her screen persona and the impact she had on audiences.³⁶ Her career actually was entering its final phase by the start of the 1920s, but that was not yet apparent. The trajectory of Gloria Swanson’s career, on the other hand, was steadily upward in the early years of the decade, and Parisian audiences normally applauded her films. Adolphe Menjou became increasingly popular as the decade unfolded, in part because the characters he portrayed tended to be urbane and sophisticated and exuded *savoir faire*, which the French middle-class and certainly the film critics appreciated.

Aside from their recognized talent, Hollywood stars had something else that endeared them to French audiences: their personal interest in France and contact with that country. The small, but steady stream of Hollywood visitors to Paris was, of course, part of a broader historical phenomenon. The French capital long had been a refuge for

³⁴ P[ierre].R[amelot]., “Que font les étoiles avec leur argent,” *L’Intransigeant*, 21 Sept. 1929, 6; “L’Activité à l’Étranger,” *Le Matin*, 23 March, 27 April, 18 May 1928, 4; “Fisc Américain,” *Le Matin*, 14 March 1930, 4; “Le Sensible Richard Dix,” *L’Intransigeant*, 15 March 1930, 6; Spa., “Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 11 Feb. 1928, 18 Dec. 1925, 6.

³⁵ Manuel Weltman and Raymond Lee, *Pearl White*, 15-17.

³⁶ Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 7, 21 Feb. 1919, 2.

political dissidents and a mecca for those seeking to expand their cultural horizons – as well as those simply seeking fun and adventure. That city occupied a mandatory place in the Grand Tour that American upper classes *had* to undertake and tourism, in general, from the United States to France had been steadily increasing for some time. The strength of the American dollar over the French franc in the 1920s brought a rise in middle-class Americans with the means and leisure time to tour Europe, and with them came a slew of new celebrities of American mass culture – the stars of screen, stage, and radio, as well as famous athletes. “On the luxury liners over [to Europe], the captain, crew, and passengers fawned over these celebrities the way they used to kowtow to Vanderbilts and Astors.”³⁷ Whereas before the war, the English-language press in Paris would print news of the comings and goings of the visiting American members of the upper class, now the papers breathlessly reported where American entertainers stayed, what they visited, and where they bought their clothes.³⁸ The “lost generation” of American writers – the Hemingways, Fitzgeralds, and others –, artists, and would-be writers and artists, who flocked to Paris after the war became a celebrated part of the recent trans-Atlantic migration, as were a small, but highly visible, group of African-American musicians and performing artists. Hollywood celebrities were especially welcome. They brought added publicity to the city and, in an era in which France was feeling besieged on all sides and isolated in the foreign policy arena, the attraction that the City of Lights exercised for international personalities was highly flattering to a national ego that needed reinforcement.

³⁷ Alain Corbin, *L'Avènement des loisirs, 1850-1960* (Paris: Aubier, 1995), 70, quoted in Levenstein, *Seductive Journey*, 237.

³⁸ Helen Josephy and Mary Margaret McBride, *Paris Is a Woman's Town* (New York: Coward McCann, 1929), 26-29, quoted in *ibid.*, 237.

Chaplin's visit in 1921 was perhaps *the* event of the decade for many Paris residents. France had been the first foreign country Chaplin ever visited as a young man when he played a limited engagement at the Folies-Bergère in the summer of 1909 and he loved the city. "Paris was everything I expected," he later wrote. "The golden lights shone invitingly from the cafés, and their outside tables spoke of an enjoyment of life. But for the innovation of a few motorcars, it was still the Paris of Monet, Pissarro and Renoir [E]veryone seemed pleasure-bent."³⁹ Eager to experience all the "culture and decadence" the city had to offer, he experienced a whirlwind of activities, "sampling museums and art galleries, bistros and brothels."⁴⁰ He returned to the City of Lights in September 1921. Excitement had built ever since word came that, after a visit to England, he would be visiting Paris. The fact that his ship had stopped at Cherbourg, even though he was en route to England, was top center, front-page news for *Le Petit Parisien*. One of its reporters managed an interview aboard Chaplin's ship and the comedian recalled his earlier visit and acknowledged that his name was French in origin. Then you speak French, the reporter said playfully. "I speak it very badly," Chaplin replied. Boisyvon, the film critic for *L'Intransigeant* interviewed Chaplin as well and his editor put the story on the front page. As the actor surveyed the "army" of photographers, reporters, dockworkers, and common people that had gathered to see, he whispered jokingly to Boisyvon, "I was nothing, if I had asked for a dollar, people would have refused it. Am I a king now?" When the reporter queried him about reports

³⁹ Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 109-110.

⁴⁰ Harry M. Geduld, ed., *Charlie Chaplin's Own Story*, xxix.

that he would make a film based *Hamlet*, Chaplin chuckled. “That’s not serious enough for me.”⁴¹

Chaplin returned two weeks later to a delirious reception. The docks at Le Havre were “packed with people” who waved, blew him kisses, and screamed his name, he later wrote. “Vive Charlot! Bravo, Charlot!” they shouted. The crowd thrust pieces of paper at him hoping for an autograph – the first few he signed “Charlie Chaplin” and then noticed the disappointment on faces. They wanted the signature of “Charlot.” It was raining when the train reached Paris, but that did not prevent a crowd of reporters and multitude of fans from being on hand. What do you think of Paris? one reporter yelled. “I never saw so many Frenchmen!” he replied. At the Hotel Claridge another throng of reporters waited for him, jostling for interviews, while onlookers called out to him. Photographs show gendarmes struggling to restrain masses of people when he subsequently appeared on the streets. Attempting to attend a circus performance in anonymity, he unleashed bedlam once he was recognized. As word of his presence spread throughout the show area, the crowd was “suddenly shouting *Charlot!* with a thousand throats.” Escorted out of the building onto Place Pigalle, he encountered a “magnetized mob” and “thousands came pouring, pushing, shouting” to draw near the actor. “Men touched him; women tried to kiss him.”⁴² He was widely photographed in the company of the European heavyweight boxing champion and French national idol, Georges Carpentier. One of the things that Chaplin most wanted to see was the

⁴¹ Henri Beraud, “Charlot Chez Nous,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 10 Sept. 1921, 1; “Charlot en Europe,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 10 Sept. 1921, 3; Boisvyon, “Hello Charlot!,” *L’Intransigeant*, 11 Sept. 1921, 1.

⁴² Hayes, *France*, 185-186; Renoir, *My Life*, 41-43; Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 275-276; Kenneth S. Lynn, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times*, 261, n. 26; “Le Recit par Charlot de son voyage à Paris, [Part 1],” *Le Petit Parisien*, 13 Dec. 1921, 1. This is a translation of the first of a series of articles he wrote for a British newspaper shortly after ending his trip to the continent.

nightlife of Montmartre and he spent an evening visiting several cabarets. “It’s new, for me. It’s different,” he commented. “It is several steps ahead of America Nothing else compares to the clothes, the manners here.” At one bistro the owner asked him to sign a guest book. “I drew my hat, my cane, and my shoes,” Chaplin said. And then he wrote beneath the drawing: “I would rather be a bohemian than a man of the cinema.”⁴³

He left Paris for several days, but returned in October when his close friends and business partners in the new United Artists company Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford showed up for an extended visit. Having that trio of their favorite movie stars visiting their city at the same time further enthralled Parisians. Chaplin was promoting his latest film *The Kid*, with the child actor Jackie Coogan in the title role, and agreed to give the proceeds of the film’s premiere to an organization doing relief work in the devastated war zones of France. The day of the *soirée de gala* at the 5,000-seat Palais du Trocadéro, he signed 250 programs that Fairbanks and Pickford volunteered to sell at the theater for a hundred francs each. Chaplin said later that he had hoped to be able to enter the theater unobtrusively, but that a crowd the likes of which he had never seen had blocked the streets all around the area. “It was the most extraordinary demonstration that I have ever seen,” Chaplin subsequently commented. Inside, elements of French high society, the diplomatic corps – the American ambassador was there –, city and government officials, along with the press and middle-class moviegoers, eagerly awaited the event. Henri Diamant-Berger, a rising star in the Pathé organization, accompanied Chaplin and later commented that theater was “packed.” A reporter likened it to a “sea” of people – a “phosphorescent sea” at that because of all the diamonds and other jewelry adorning the society matrons. While Chaplin, after

⁴³ “Le Recit par Charlot de son voyage à Paris [Part 2],” *Le Petit Parisien*, 14 Dec. 1921, 1.

being introduced to the ambassador and members of the French cabinet, sat in a loge, the program opened with a documentary on the devastated regions – and then, that finished, the host for the evening brought Chaplin on stage, at which point the audience of over 5,000 people burst into a deafening applause that went on for minutes. It was, Diamant-Berger recalled, an “indescribable ovation.” Fairbanks was then summoned and a second wave of thunderous applause swept through the building. The French government, following the event, decorated Chaplin for his public service.⁴⁴

Fairbanks and Pickford made several trips to Paris in the 1920s, constantly reinforcing the emotional bond that their fans felt with them and the public typically showed up *en masse* whenever they appeared. During a trip in the summer of 1920, a revealing incident had occurred. They visited the central market area one day and touched off a “mild but ample riot” that could have ended badly. According to a *New York Times* report, word had leaked out that the couple would be in the early, so a huge crowd had gathered, blocking access so that the car conveying the stars took “half an hour to go fifty yards” upon arrival. As throngs of people surrounded the vehicle and they got out, they were “literally swept off their feet by the crowd, surging and pushing as only a Paris crowd can.” Three stout butchers elbowed their way forward, lifted Pickford up to remove her from harm, and put her in a large meat cage for protection. “Finally Miss [sic] Pickford got out of the meat cage and walking along the tops of tables among mutton chops and veal cutlets achieved her automobile and her husband” and

⁴⁴ Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography*, 275-276; Chaplin, “Les impressions de Charlot à Paris,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 21 Dec. 1921, 1; Henri Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma*, 81; Kenneth S. Lynn, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times*, 261, n. 26; *New York Times*, 6 Oct. 1921.

left the scene.⁴⁵ The trip the following year that united them with Chaplin saw less dangerous, but no less enthusiastic demonstrations of affection. They returned in 1924 to an equally fervent welcome. Ever the good-humored showman, Fairbanks knew what gestures and levity could do to please fans. Before he and Pickford departed on this occasion, he addressed Parisians over the radio. “He started by speaking a few words in French, saying how happy he is to be in Paris” and finished by saying that, since he could not shake *hands* with his listeners, he was glad to be able to “shake their ears.”⁴⁶ Because of his father’s iconic stature, the French press began paying attention to his son from a previous marriage, following closely his efforts to carve out a movie career for himself. Fairbanks, Jr., who had lived in Paris as a child and into his adolescence with his mother, spoke French fluently and had studied art in Paris. He would later write that press coverage of his father and stepmother consistently had eclipsed news of the start of his own movie career while a teenager in the mid-1920s. “The news of the trips taken by ‘Mary and Doug,’ the great mobs that continued to greet them everywhere, their receptions by heads of state and prominent figures in many countries, more than smothered the relatively chintzy news of my upcoming debut as an actor.”⁴⁷

“Fatty” Arbuckle’s trip to Paris late in 1920 occurred before his personal life unraveled in the face of the scandal that would also end his acting career, so Parisians were unrestrained in showing their affection for him. A *New York Times* reporter calculated that some 4,000 people gathered outside one of his stopping places the day

⁴⁵ “Movie Stars Upset Paris Morning Market: Mary Pickford Is Saved from the Crowd by Being Exhibited in a Meat Cage,” *New York Times*, 21 July 1920.

⁴⁶ “Douglas Fairbanks et Mary Pickford au *Petit Parisien*,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 9 May 1924, 1.

⁴⁷ Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., *The Salad Days*, 88.

of his arrival. Newspapers besieged him and he added to his popularity by going to a bank to contribute a thousand dollars to a national loan drive. As he went sightseeing by car, crowds hailed him everywhere. He diplomatically went to place a wreath of flowers on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, but forgot to remove his hat, a point that some papers recalled as they monitored his fall from grace a result of his trial for manslaughter the following year. Partly to exploit the scandal, but surely because he remained a popular figure with movie fans – he was, after all, acquitted – a Parisian theater offered him a long-term stage contract in 1923.⁴⁸

Pearl White made a much more lasting impression. When the flow of movie offers dried up, she established her residence in Paris in 1922. It was her third trip, she told reporters, and boasted that she was the “most Parisian of American women.” She tried her hand at a music hall career, landing a contract with the Casino de Paris, but a fire gutted the establishment, ending that opportunity. She then decided to produce and star in a new serial which she filmed in France; its title was *Terreur*, but she sold it in the United States as the *Perils of Paris*. Critics endorsed the result, proclaiming that she had lost none of her vitality. “Pearl White has just proved that we can make a film in France that concedes nothing to American films,” gushed one. But that was White’s last hurrah in movies. When an American reporter later asked if she would ever go back to the United States, the actress replied that she had returned on occasion. “But there’s something about Paris that gets you body and soul,” she said. Her new venture was to open a casino so she purchased the former château of the Empress Eugénie, then the Hôtel de Paris, in Biarritz. “I turned the drawing room into the casino,” she explained,

⁴⁸ “Arbuckle Popular in Paris,” *New York Times*, 1 Dec. 1920; “Fatty en voyage,” *Le Siècle*, 4 Oct. 1921, 1; “On dit,” *Le Matin*, 23 June 1923, 5.

“and I’ve kept the imperial boudoir for my private apartment.” Toward the end of the decade, a trade publication praised her for leaving the screen with her beauty and talent intact; the former actress owned a luxurious apartment in Paris, a château, had purchased race horses, and traveled at her pleasure. “Settled in Paris, her favorite city,” said the article, “she is enjoying all the liberties dear to Americans.”⁴⁹

Actress sisters Norma and Constance Talmadge were screen favorites in France and made their first trip to Paris in 1922, their fascination with the city endearing them all the more to French audiences. “Paris, how marvelous it is!,” Constance exclaimed to a French journalist as they prepared to leave. “I had a great time during my visit. I danced, visited all the boutiques, and I am bringing back dresses, lots of dresses! We would like to come back as soon as possible.” Norma chimed in, “Here, I love walking around the streets where business is calmer than in New York. The smiling, affable faces create a gay atmosphere that enchants me.”⁵⁰ Norma’s implicit suggestion that Paris had a more “human” society than the one associated with the hustle and bustle of large American cities could only have met with approving resonance in France.

Gloria Swanson was an ardent Francophile and left a colorful, and perhaps exaggerated, account of her trips to Paris beginning in 1922. On that first visit, she discovered that “Paris seemed like home” to her. “The flowers, clothes, foods, perfumes, wines, all delighted me,” she would write.⁵¹ When she returned to France in

⁴⁹ Weltman and Lee, *Pearl White*, 136-141, Interview with *Motion Picture Classic Magazine*, same, 191-192; “On dit,” *Le Matin*, 17 March 1922, 5; Robert Spa., “Quelques Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 24 Jan., 4 April 1924, 4; François-Robert [sic], “Informations,” *Le Gaulois*, 29 Feb. 1924, 5; J. de M. [sic], “Pearl White loin des studios,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (24 May 1929), 346.

⁵⁰ Marianne Alby, “Un quart d’heure avec les sœurs Talmadge . . .,” *Le Petit Journal*, 10 Nov. 1922, 4.

⁵¹ Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 178.

October 1924 to film *Madame Sans-Gêne*, “traveling like a diva” – she received a staggering \$7,000 a week for the duration of the film shoot – a “crowd of several thousand” greeted her at the Gare Saint-Lazare, while a “string of Renault limousines” waited to drive her and her party to the famed Hôtel Crillon, where Léonce Perret, who would direct the movie, welcomed her. She met *le tout Paris* soon after arriving: “Hundreds of snobbish Parisians . . . waited patiently in turn to touch me and hear me talk, to tell me that all of France was enthusiastically behind me . . .,” she recalled. When her reception party was over, her producer kissed the star “ecstatically on both cheeks and told me that . . . Paris was mine.”⁵²

It was an exciting time to be an American in Paris, she remembered. “The Revue Nègre was knocking Parisians out with waves of energy and noise that engulfed audiences from the floodlights. Fred and Adele Astaire were showing them how to dance, while the onrushing literati set sat at the Dôme debating how lost their generation was.” Swanson found the rhythm of life in the art and fashion capital of the world exhilarating. “When they weren’t filming, it was Sherry’s or the Tienda Oyster Bar for lunch, a midnight supper at Le Perroquet in the rue de Clichy, Harry’s Bar around the corner from the Ritz for after-hour music, or a last drink with friends at Jimmy’s.” She “quickly adapted the Coco Chanel silhouette” in order to keep up with the latest Parisian vogues.⁵³ As one biographer put it, Swanson was “young, rich, and until Josephine Baker arrived and danced on the Casino de Paris stage in nothing but a frill of bananas, the toast of the town.”⁵⁴ Because Swanson did not speak French, she was paired with a translator: a handsome young Frenchman of noble birth but who was now

⁵² Ibid., 221-223.

⁵³ Axel Madsen, *Gloria and Joe: The Star-crossed Love Affair of Gloria Swanson and Joe Kennedy*, 65.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 108.

impoverished: James Henri Le Bailly de la Falaise, Marquis de la Coudraye, known simply as “Hank” by his American acquaintances. The two spent so much time together that perhaps the inevitable happened: they fell in love, making it a magical period for her. “All I wanted in the world was to become the Marquise de la Falaise de la Coudraye,” she recalled, “and eventually make Paris my home.”⁵⁵ Swanson got her wish; she and Henri married in January 1925, the mayor of Paris performing the civil ceremony, and she did indeed assume the title of *marquise* for the duration of their marriage. A mutual admiration society had developed between the actress and the French public – in the 1926 fans’ poll to select the most popular Hollywood actresses, she placed fourth, but only sixty-six votes separated her from second-place finisher Pola Negri. The press continued to follow her activities and took special note of the fact that she furnished her new apartment in New York with “pieces mainly from France” and that among them was a spinning wheel said to have belonged to Marie-Antoinette. When Swanson returned to Paris with her husband in August 1929 – he was now the representative of the Pathé organization in the United States for all of France – she explained that she had dropped “Falaise” and used only “Coudraye” in her title because it was easier for Americans to pronounce. As a special tribute, her photograph adorned the cover of one of the main trade publications at the end of the month.⁵⁶

The visit of Tom Mix, the popular star of cowboy films, in April 1925 with his family and his horse Tony generated widespread public excitement. A report released before he arrived in France reminded readers that no cowboy had been to France since

⁵⁵ Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 230.

⁵⁶ Ibid.; “Les Petits Référendums du Cinéma,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 27 Jan. 1926, 4; Robert Spa., “Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 4 Dec. 1925, 7; “Echoes et Nouvelles,” *Le Figaro*, 18 Aug. 1929, 6; Jean de Mirbel, “Gloria Swanson à Paris,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (30 Aug. 1929), 287.

“Buffalo Bill” Cody had toured with his western show before the war. And the bulletin announced a surprising itinerary: “Mr. Mix will ride his horse through the Bois de Boulogne and will canter along the Champs Elysées [sic], and possibly on the boulevards.”⁵⁷ The crowd awaiting Mix at the Gare St.-Lazare when his train arrived late in the afternoon on April 19 was massive and deliriously applauded and cheered as he and his wife and mother-in-law disembarked to wonder if they would make it through the mob to waiting automobiles. Later that evening Fox gave a dinner for the press in the star’s honor. Mix made an excellent impression: “A handsome man, distinguished, elegant, and exceedingly alluring,” noted one writer, “he is in flesh and blood just as he is on the screen.” And Mix played the Hollywood notable for full effect, showing up in “a violet-colored dinner jacket with a diamond-encrusted ring on the little finger of his left hand.” After the meal, the actor gave a gracious speech in which he joked about his concerns at the *gare* a few hours earlier and said that he thought it might be safer to cross Paris on Tony than in a taxi. He made sure to emphasize how much he had looked forward to this first visit to Paris.⁵⁸ Mix was front page news the next day and photographs showed Parisians the “real” star. As scheduled, that morning he took Tony to the Bois de Boulogne, where a huge crowd estimated at 10,000 had started gathering around the Dauphine gate long before his arrival. When he showed up, that massive throng of fans, most on foot, but some on bicycles, motorcycles, and in cars obviously intending to “ride” with him, surged toward the star dressed in his screen clothes: “white shirt and pants, a large, hard-brimmed sombrero, elegant brown boots.” Unflinching, as American movie cowboys were in the face of danger, Mix walked Tony up to the

⁵⁷ “Cowboy Star Going Abroad,” *New York Times*, 29 March 1925.

⁵⁸ Y. Sarllès, “TOM MIX est notre hôte . . .,” *Le Siècle*, 20 April 1925, 1.

starting point, climbed into the saddle, and trotted off, a procession of cheering fans, bicycle riders, and belching motorcycles and cars, with horns honking, fell in behind him. The actor took it all in stride, smiling and waving, and when he stopped at a café further along, he dismounted to shake hands with fans and autograph postal cards. That afternoon he took his wife to the Longchamps race course, catching everybody's attention with his Stetson and full-length "frock coat." And the god of vote-getting smiled on him: looking the horses over at the paddock between races, one, Coram, ridden by a famous British jockey named Donoghue, became startled and Mix reached out to snare the bridle and calm the animal. A sign! exclaimed on-lookers and they rushed off to put money on the steed. Hollywood could not have scripted it better: "And, in effect, guided by Donoghue in a lightning rush, Coram won . . . and so did Tom Mix."⁵⁹ The next day the actor took time to speak to the public over the radio, another gesture that probably won new admirers, although he spoke in English and needed a translator. Looking "impeccable," and drinking only Vichy mineral water – "he is very respectful of Prohibition," a reporter noted – Mix told the audience he was thrilled to be in Paris, that he had "loved it before he got to know it."⁶⁰ A subsequent shopping trip – his wife wanted to see the latest in *haute couture* – jammed traffic for blocks on the Avenue de l'Opéra.⁶¹

Adolphe Menjou's Frenchness was a key ingredient in his popularity with the French public. He was born in the United States, but his father, a restaurateur, was French and Menjou had grown up speaking the language and knowing French cuisine;

⁵⁹ *L'Intransigeant*, 20 April 1925, 1; "Nos Échos," *L'Intransigeant*, 21 April 1925, 2.

⁶⁰ "Tom Mix A Parlé Hier Soir . . .," *Le Petit Parisien*, 22 April 1925, 2; Paul Gordeaux, "Les Films de la Semaine: *Tony l'indompté*," *L'Écho de Paris*, 14 Jan. 1927, 4.

⁶¹ "Nos Échos," *L'Intransigeant*, 23 April 1925, 2.

during the late stages of the war, moreover, he commanded an ambulance unit near the front lines in France. That partial ethnicity became his “hook” in the early 1920s and brought him increasingly significant screen appearances, such as the role of Louis XIII in Fairbanks’s *The Three Musketeers* and playing a French doctor in *The Sheik*, which made Valentino a star. Menjou’s own breakthrough role was in Chaplin’s directorial debut *A Woman of Paris*. The role and success of the film led to Menjou’s first trip to France as a “movie star”: his performances landed him a contract with Paramount, he subsequently quarreled over the terms, and embarked in a huff for Europe. A surprise awaited him in Paris, when reporters crowded around him for an interview. “They assured me that I was the greatest actor in American movies; for was I not a Frenchman and were not Frenchmen the finest actors in the world?” Menjou recalled. When he revealed that he was an American, the reporters were incredulous. “All Paris, they informed me excitedly, believed that I was a Frenchman – in fact, all patrons of the cinema in France had been led to believe by the distributors of American pictures that I was a citizen of France.” Menjou and his wife spent the next few days on a “wild cultural orgy,” visiting all the famous places in and around Paris.⁶² The romantic allure of the City of Lights did not help Menjou’s ailing marriage and, when he returned to France later in the decade, it would be his fiancée who accompanied him. As his star rose steadily in the mid-1920s, the Paramount publicity department churned out countless items on his activities, attributes, and interests – real and imaginary – and the French press made sure that Paris readers heard the news. Menjou is an accomplished concert pianist! True, but was he really an avid philatelist who owned an extremely valuable collection of several thousand stamps? Also true, but what was

⁶² Adolphe Menjou and M. M. Musselman, *It Took Nine Tailors*, 89-95, 105-127, 145-146.

perhaps more important, he reportedly did not want to shave his moustache because it had always brought him good luck. In the spring of 1928 the news that the “French” actor was returning to Paris, this time to marry his fiancée, the actress Kathryn Carver, who had co-starred in two of his films, generated excitement. When the couple arrived at the Gare Saint-Lazare in April, an exuberant crowd pressed in on all sides, cheering and applauding, wanting autographs and to shake hands with Menjou. “They say he speaks our language perfectly, without the slightest accent,” one excited fan was overheard saying to another. A squad of gendarmes had to force a passage through the throng so Menjou and Carver could reach a waiting vehicle, but the milling fans still blocked passage for several minutes.⁶³ During his weeks’-long stay in Paris, Menjou agreed to give a talk at the Club Américain on life in Hollywood. He told the audience that, for every would-be actor who succeeded, 5,000 would fail, and that anybody willing to take those odds should be sure to have enough funds to last at least a couple of years without employment. “For not having known that,” he was quoted as saying, “hundreds of members of the European aristocracy are living in poverty after having believed that they would become stars rapidly.” A Paris daily gave Menjou and Carver a farewell dinner, and the next day the couple were married at the mayor’s office. Top couturiers had collaborated in making the bride’s trousseau, and for the ceremony she wore a blue cloche hat and blue kasha gown. Twelve guests and witnesses looked on, while over twenty photographers and newsreel cameramen filmed the proceeding. The mayor gave a short speech emphasizing Menjou’s war service and his French background, the party then moved to a brief reception at the couple’s hotel before

⁶³ *New York Times*, 7 April 1928.

heading to the train station where Fred Waring's 25-piece band The Pennsylvanians, in Paris on tour, gave the Menjous a surprise send-off.⁶⁴

Another "movie star" to cross the Atlantic was Jack Dempsey, the heavyweight boxing champion in the early 1920s. Dempsey had made a fifteen-chapter Western serial, *Daredevil Jack*, in 1920 that had been distributed by Pathé. His boxing career, of course, accounted for more of his popularity and when he put his title on the line against the French national champion, Georges Carpentier, in Jersey City in 1921, newspaper coverage in France was frenetic. "In all circles, high and low," reported *The New York Times* on French press coverage, "the fight has made German reparations, war scandals, the Turkish muddle, Lloyd George's activities, railroad accidents, and the high cost of living matters of secondary interest." Frenchmen, said one journalist, vowed not to go to sleep until they learned who the victor was. Jacques Chastenet, future editor of *Le Temps*, remembered the novelty of trans-Atlantic radio in those days, with a broadcast of the fight's result promised. It had been arranged, as well, he recalled, that planes would circle over Paris to release red smoke if Carpentier won and white if Dempsey prevailed. The main newspapers, he said, all had lighted screens fixed to the exteriors of their buildings to display the results. Carpentier's friend singer-actor Maurice Chevalier, who would go on to a meteoric career in Hollywood later that decade, predicted confidently that his countryman would prevail in three rounds. The fight went four, Parisians looked to the skies, and about 10:30 p.m. white smoke streamed over the city. Dempsey had knocked the popular French champion out and

⁶⁴ Ibid., 179; Robert Spa., "Figaro-Cinéma," *Le Figaro*, 18 Sept. (p. 4), 9 Oct. 1925 (p. 6), "Information," 14 Nov. 1925, 4; "Movie Fans Mob American Screen Idol," *New York Times*, 7 April 1928; "L'Activité en France," *Le Matin*, 13 April 1928, 4; "La vérité sur Hollywood: Ce que dit M. Adolphe Menjou," *Le Petit Journal*, 25 May 1928, 4; "Adieu Paris," *L'Intransigeant*, 2 June 1928, 6; "Menjou Is Married to Kathryn Carver," *New York Times*, 17 May 1928.

retained his title, dealing a sharp blow to French national pride. People on the street, Chastenet later wrote, were incredulous and believed that the pilots had made a mistake. When Dempsey's victory had been confirmed, he said, "there was generalized stupor." Parisian newspaper boards tried to look on the bright side – "Well, at least we beat the Germans," read one – but the nation was glum and French movie houses showed little interest in a film of the fight hastily prepared by an American company.⁶⁵ Dempsey's trip to France the following year, however, did much to take the sting out of French disappointment. He was an instant hit in Paris and his visit received widespread press coverage. He signed so many autographs his first day that his wrist was sore, so when he stopped for a *café crème* the next morning at the famed Café de la Paix by the Opéra Garnier and was instantly besieged by more fans, he had to beat a hasty retreat. A colorful article with the headline "Jack Meets Venus and the Mona Lisa" reported on Dempsey's visit to the Louvre. When the fighter saw the famous statue of the bare-breasted Venus de Milo, he remarked, "Perhaps not so bad, living in the day of that Hercules." At the end of his stay in Paris, a reporter for the French newspaper *Excelsior* asked the boxer what he would like to take back to America. Dempsey's response set the hearts of many *Parisiennes* "aflutter" – he said, "I'd take back une jolie petit[e] Parisienne to marry," setting off a flurry of letters from hopeful young women to his hotel. One indignant girl told reporters in a snit that the only response she received from the letter she sent Dempsey was a photograph signed 'Sincerely yours.' Upon leaving the French capital, the bemused athlete declared, "Paris is a great town – none

⁶⁵ "Only One Interest Possesses Paris: Papers Are Printing More Fight News from America Than They Did U. S. War News in '17," *New York Times*, 30 June 1921; "Paris Awaits Fight News: French Journalist Says Capital Will Not Sleep Till It Gets Details," *New York Times*, 28 June 1921; "All Paris Is Sorry Frenchman Lost: Boulevard Throngs, Loath to Be Convinced, Say, 'Well, We Beat the Germans, Anyhow,'" *New York Times*, 3 July 1921; Jacques Chastenet, *Quatre fois vingt ans*, 136-137.

better.”⁶⁶ Both Dempsey and Carpentier rode their encounter in time to movie connections: Dempsey in 1925 married actress Estelle Taylor, who starred opposite John Gilbert in *Monte Cristo* and appeared in *The Ten Commandments* as well. Carpentier, for his part, landed a movie contract with a small American production company around the time of Dempsey’s visit and set off hoping to make a career there. He lingered there for years, became a song-and-dance man of sorts, appeared in three films, and at the end of the decade reports were that major studios were starting to take an interest in him.⁶⁷

As French observers scrutinized the enormous international impact of Hollywood, the weaknesses of the French film industry vis-à-vis Hollywood were a source of endless complaints and introspection. French movie-makers simply could not compete head to head with Hollywood for international markets and, even more humiliating, for screen time in France itself. But French cultural nationalists could take solace from three things, only one of which was a matter of opinion, that were enormously flattering and did much to fuel national vanity in an era in which their country seemed to be isolated and on the defensive in most spheres. First, they believed that the good French films, reflecting unique national characteristics, were superior in quality to the best that Hollywood had to offer. And then France had something that the United States would never have – it had Paris, *the* international symbol of gaiety, taste, culture, and refinement, an image that no American urban center possessed. The steady flow

⁶⁶ “Jack Meets Venus and the Mona Lisa: World’s Champion, Finding Outdoor Paris Rainy, Turns His Attention to Art,” *New York Times*, 27 April 1922; “Paris Midinettes Are All Aflutter: Dempsey Says He Makes a Million a Year and Would Like to Marry a French Girl,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1922; “‘Yours Sincerely’ on Dempsey Photograph Is Disappointing to Paris Midinette,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1922.

⁶⁷ “On dit: La boxe mène à tout . . . [sic],” *Le Matin*, 28 April 1922, 5; Paul Audinet, “Nouvelles d’Amérique,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (6 Dec. 1929), 379; “Échos et Informations: Carpentier à Hollywood,” *ibid.*, 379.

of American tourists to the City of Lights reflected recognition of that fact by the American middle and upper classes themselves. Hollywood stars, as a body the most popular people in the world, themselves made constant pilgrimages to France's very own capital to sing its praises and, through their prestige, lend prestige to it. And there was another unique area of justifiable national pride, one closely related to movie-making: *haute couture*. France not only provided the inspiration for costume design in films depicting upper class settings, but American stars themselves flocked to Paris in part to avail themselves of the latest fashions. In the domain of fashion, the French indeed reigned supreme.

When Lillian Gish visited Paris in 1917 while filming a movie, she did what virtually all of her fellow actresses, if not actors, who reached Paris in ensuing years did: she bought clothes. She was not on salary at that time, so director D. W. Griffith paid her an advance to finance her purchases. She later remembered venturing with her sister to the "great couturiers of the day – [Paul] Poiret, [Jean-Philippe and Gaston-Lucien] Worth [their father, the Englishman Charles Frederick Worth is considered the father of *haute couture*], and [Jeanne] Lanvin – where we daringly ordered our first *haute couture* gowns." When the Talmadge sisters, Gloria and Constance, arrived in Paris in the early 1920s, what did they do? They went shopping. "Paris, what a marvel!" Constance exclaimed to a reporter, emphasizing the fun that the city offered and the fact that she was taking back to America "clothes, a lot of clothes!" The French press subsequently reported that Norma was showing off to her friends the hats and dresses that she had purchased in Paris and that "many ladies" were pressing her for information on the salons. When Gloria Swanson, who assiduously cultivated her

reputation as someone *au courant* in matters of fashion, visited Paris that same year, she said that the “styles and cuts and fabrics in the best Paris showrooms took my breath away.” Had a love affair not distracted her, she said, she “would have bought out [Jeanne] Panquin [sic; Paquin] and Worth and Poiret and Lanvin and all the rest of the great couturiers.” Claire Windsor, a B-list starlet, made her sojourn to Paris in 1924 and on her return to the United States made a telling announcement. “American women are the best dressed women in the world, although the most beautiful dresses are made in Paris,” she said. “It is as though the great Parisian couturiers work almost exclusively for them, because their salons are full of American women”⁶⁸

Asked what the prestige of French fashion was in Hollywood, Arlette Marchal had no hesitation. “Huge,” she said. “Almost all [well-to-do] American women buy their wardrobes in Paris, or they go to certain American shops that sell French models.” Norma Talmadge and Gloria Swanson she cited as prime examples of tasteful American women who, she implied, used Paris as their source of fashion. When Talmadge returned to Paris again in 1927, she told a reporter that she wanted to renew her wardrobe with “the very latest Paris fashions.” Her friends, she indicated, had been “stupefied” to see her using “medium-heeled shoes,” because, “for American women, French high heels were of course exaggeratedly high.” Even American male stars recognized the primacy of Paris clothing styles. Richard Barthelmess, on visiting Paris that same year, was struck by the elegance he observed. “The French woman possesses an inimitable elegance and knows how to dress herself with daring, but without calling too much attention to herself or being vulgar,” he wrote. “The brilliant

⁶⁸ Gish with Ann Pinchot, *Lillian Gish*, 198; Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 178; Marianne Alby, “Un quart d’heure avec les sœurs Talmadge . . .,” *Le Petit Journal*, 10 Nov. 1922, 4; “À l’Étranger,” *L’Intransigeant*, 24 Feb. 1923, 4; Robert Spa., “Quelques Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 16 May 1924, 4.

colors and the designs seem to blend together marvelously with her personality – something she does not lack.” Actress Sylvia Beecher, who had just starred in Maurice Chevalier’s first American film, was not out of the ordinary for the Hollywood star who *could*, so, when she had an important engagement in London, she stopped over first in Paris to have dresses made for the occasion. She arrived incognito, but once discovered, confessed that she was staying on another month to give her designer time to finish the new wardrobe.⁶⁹

The late 1920s saw the coronation of a new queen of French fashion: Coco Chanel. Credited with liberating women from the constraints of the corset and instead clothing them in comfortable fabrics such as jersey, Chanel and her simple, yet chic, designs took the fashion world by storm. She was the first *grande couturière* to popularize such now-classic items as the little black dress, the cardigan, the collarless jacket with three-quarter length sleeves, costume jewelry, Breton stripes, the long pearl necklace, even the suntanned look for women, and her designs were widely imitated if not copied outright by other designers. American *Vogue* called Chanel’s little black dress the “a Ford signed ‘Chanel,’”⁷⁰ accurately predicting the robe’s immense success and longevity. Chanel’s designs were having an increasing international impact and she was squarely in Hollywood’s sights.

⁶⁹ Marianne Alby, “Arlette Marchal et Hollywood,” *Cinéa-Ciné Pour Tous*, 1 Feb. 1927, 16; *Le Figaro*, 28 Oct. 1927, 6; Richard Barthelmess, “Ce que je pense des femmes,” *Le Siècle*, 19 Feb. 1927, 5; Pierre Ramelot, “Sylvia Beecher est à Paris,” *L’Intransigeant*, 31 Aug. 1929, 6.

⁷⁰ Edmonde Charles-Roux, *The World of Coco Chanel: Friends, Fashion, Fame*, 227.

CHAPTER 3: “AUX BARRICADES! . . .”

The reaction of cultural nationalists to Hollywood revealed a cleavage of sorts between elitist critics and the “popular classes.” The average French movie-goer embraced American films for the excitement and sense of adventure they offered; the vocal segments of the French elite, and certainly the corps of movie critics who formed part of it, saw in those same movies an almost overpowering commercial rival that threatened the very existence of the French film industry. That perception was part of a broader one, a view of Hollywood movies as a reflection, a symbol, of practically everything French cultural nationalists disliked about the modern world, about modernity itself. The California studios, in their eyes, were nothing but factories that spewed out mainly standardized packages of insipid pabulum for the unthinking masses. And there was still another danger, perhaps the gravest of all, in the dominating presence of Hollywood films on the screens of France. American film producers insisted on depicting France, Frenchmen, and Frenchness in an unfavorable light, denigrating overtly or implicitly national customs and traditions, and thus contributing to the deterioration of France’s international image and prestige. In the context of deepening national resentment over broader foreign policy issues, a marked sense of isolation, and progressive fears that national culture was under siege on all sides, Hollywood became the target of systematic criticism and deepening suspicion.

The cultural backlash occurred on multiple fronts. By the mid-1920s there was pervasive concern that the “foreign threat” to France’s very identity had reached

intolerable levels. Everywhere, but especially in Paris, the heart of France, a pernicious foreign presence and influence was becoming increasingly pronounced. France had seen an unprecedented wave of immigration since the war and the capital had become home to a higher ratio of foreigners to total inhabitants, one-to-ten than any other city on the continent. "Parisians believed themselves to be suffering at the hands of others," one historian has written. "Indeed, one of the darkest truths in postwar Paris was the multifaceted and growing xenophobia of its residents." Jacques Chastenet, a banker and journalist who became editor of liberal *Le Temps* in the early 1930s, recalled of this period the disturbing influx of foreigners, who brought to Paris "the customs, tastes and eccentricities until that time unknown to us." Reflecting the growing concern, the Ministry of Interior (i.e., Justice Department) announced in July 1925 that it was creating a "special brigade of inspectors" to keep suspicious foreign elements under constant surveillance. A symbolic event occurred in the fall of 1926 when provincial administrative representatives entreated the Ministry of the Interior to triple the tax on commercial signs written in a language other than French. The "streets of Paris" were beginning to show evidence of "veritable colonization," as increasing numbers of foreign merchants printed signs in their native languages, one observer complained. "They think they are in a conquered country."¹ There was abundant evidence of increasing foreign encroachment upon Parisian popular entertainment and the resentment produced flowed over into French song. It was not only jazz that had hit Paris with the doughboys, but American popular music as well. More conservative sectors in the early 1920s worried increasingly about the widening space occupied by American songs in

¹ Henry Bordeaux (Académie Française), "L'Insuffisante propagande," *Le Gaulois*, 17 Dec. 1926; Brooke L. Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris*, 8, 59; Jacques Chastenet, *Quatre fois vingt ans*, 142; Louis Forest, "Propos d'un Parisien," *Le Matin*, 3 Oct. 1926, 1.

their music-halls, fretting over the “death” of French tunes. A reaction was inevitable and a widely performed hit song of 1925 openly attacked “magnificent America” and painted an unflattering portrait of life there, as it lamented the disappearance of the good old days in Paris. The following year one of the country’s most popular singers came up with a new tune, “Mon Paris,” that was similarly anti-foreign in tone. In it he evoked the city before the foreign storm. “Ah! It was beautiful my village, my Paris, our Paris,” ran the lyrics. “People spoke there only a single language.” Cultural populism, addressing the common man’s situation and grievances, became the order of the day in the latter 1920s. Mistinguett, the most popular female dance-hall songstress of the era, introduced in 1929 what became a smash hit, her “Gosse de Paris” (“Kid from Paris”), the lyrics of which assured listeners that a Parisian girl would not sell herself to the rich foreigners constantly pursuing her, but will wait for a “simple but honest” Frenchman.² A negative reaction to American movies on the part of the French intelligentsia, including the film critics who wrote for the mainstream press, was thus part of a general sense that French culture was being progressively undermined by foreign influences.

The critical reaction of French intellectuals to Hollywood had its roots partly in a debate that had raged in French cultural circles since the birth of cinema over whether or not the new medium was to be an art form or a business. Many artists, writers, and critics associated originally with the theater resisted the idea that the broad movie-going public had a right to simple *entertainment*; what the cultural elite insisted upon was *educating* the people. The new cinema was an art form, they tenaciously argued, and so it should challenge, arouse, and disturb audiences, demanding of them an intellectual response. On that ground, the case for an indictment of Hollywood’s typical

² Rearick, *French in Love and War*, 88-92, 115-117.

fare was evident. It was mass-produced on an assembly-line basis and the final product was packaged for sale to the average *American* consumer. That meant that its ingredients included, in French eyes, a sophomoric sense of morality, a repetitive, often illogical, fanciful story line that frequently defied the imagination of those who, like the French, understood life, and a child-like emphasis on the inevitable triumph of good, represented by the final scene involving either a kiss or a marriage or both.

Exacerbating elitist irritation were two facts: first, American films, as French critics usually would acknowledge, tended to be state-of-the-art in terms of directing, photographing, editing, and acting, and that unfortunately diverted attention from what they saw as systematic defects of plot and story line; and, secondly and perhaps worst of all, the broader French public actually liked such movies.

The repetitive nature of plots was one of Hollywood's major offenses in the eyes of French observers. Even Delluc, who admired so much in American films, expressed bewilderment at yet another we've-got-to-win-the-big-race horse story he saw early in 1920. Mentioning three similar films, he told his readers that he could not recall any more names of the "nine hundred ninety-seven other American films dealing with the same subject." The thematic assembly line had to be shut down, a film writer told an American importer in mid-1920. French audiences could only take so much of the "cow-boy story with the headlong chases, kidnapping of the heroine, gun fights, punishment of the abductor, and a long kiss on the mouth in perpetual [happy] endings." The monotonous inclusion of formulaic elements such as the ubiquitous and unrealistic happy ending bothered a critic for *La Presse*, Gaston Tournier. A film he reviewed in March 1922 was typical, he thought. A husband disfigures his wife, she runs off with

another man, and then, “since they are in New York,” Tournier said mockingly, the couple reconcile. To be sure, said the *Le Figaro* film editor, “American taste . . . includes a desire for a happy ending despite countless ups and downs” in a film. For Americans, who believed the United States to be a “marvelous country” that provided “miraculous benefits” to all who reached its shores, “the rule, or better yet, the axiom, was ‘No unhappy ending,’” he subsequently wrote. American films, Tournier suggested after seeing Valentino’s *The Sheik* late in 1922, were all made from the same cloth; if a particular setting, such as the desert, stimulated interest at the box office, then Hollywood would make a series of films set in the desert, each one nothing but a “pastiche, a re-edition or amalgamation” of the previous ones. Jackie Coogan may be a good child actor, “but we’ve seen all this a thousand times,” a critic for *L’Intransigeant* groaned after seeing a Coogan film in 1923. The motion picture industry in the United States might be “in full commercial expansion,” he later wrote, “but American film is dying intellectually.” René Jeanne of *Le Petit Journal* developed the same disdainful attitude early on. Watching American movies made him feel “like the worker, who, in an automobile factory, puts screws in a bumper with mechanical regularity,” he commented in 1921. A Gloria Swanson film in which she played a mother who sacrifices everything for her daughter struck left him exasperated and he told his readers in 1926 that “this has been the theme of at least twenty American films a year.” Walking out of the theater after watching a western in May 1927, he was not surprised by what he had just seen; the cowboy saves the girl and then marries her. “Twenty times, a hundred times and more,” he exclaimed, “that story has been told to us.”³

³ Louis Delluc, “Cinéma,” *Le Siècle*, 2; Paul de la Borie, “Perspectives nouvelles,” *La Cinématographique Française*, 89 (17 July 1920), 7; Gaston Tournier, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *La Presse*, 24 Feb., 3

Pierre-Gilles Veber, chief critic for *Le Matin*, scorned the American approach to filmmaking. French films could not penetrate the United States market because they conflicted with the tastes of Americans, he realized. “But if . . . we send them mass-produced films, with nice little plots having no [intellectual] pretensions, in which we see love between a dancing girl and a poor but honest policeman,” he said with biting sarcasm, “then we will touch the hearts of international [i.e., American] crowds.” Look at Hollywood’s big productions with all their sumptuous sets and dramatic action scenes, he wrote at one point in 1924. They all rested on “poor little scripts, offering nothing at all” because, “ideas for them are secondary.” Hollywood’s camera techniques were partly responsible, he commented in January 1925. The emphasis there was on movement, action, which left no time to develop scenes of deeper emotion or intellectual impact. Whatever the cause, he marveled at how often an American film would depict “fanciful adventures,” perhaps with the hero “splashing about in blood,” only to lead audiences to “a pleasant dénouement in which virtue is rewarded and the vicious punished.” Even Hollywood actors reflected the studios’ mass-production mentality, he railed, and if the trend persisted, “we will see actors enter the factor and come off the assembly-line all made alike, like the cow that goes into a Chicago slaughterhouse and is transformed into corned beef packed into a tin can.”⁴ French critics never doubted the technical quality of American films, but the state-of-the art

March, 1 Dec. 1922, 5; Robert Spa., “Figaro-Cinema,” *Le Figaro*, 29 Nov. 1923, 5, 14 Nov. 1924, 4; Raymond Berner, “Écrans et Studios: Un nouveau péril,” *La Presse*, 9 Feb. 1923, 2; René Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 28 Oct. 1921, 5 Nov. 1926, 4, 27 May 1927, 4; Pierre-Gilles [Veber], “Comédie,” *Le Matin*, 20 Feb. 1925, 4; Boisvyon, “Le Cinéma,” *L’Intransigeant*, 25 March 1923, 2.

⁴ Pierre-Gilles [Veber], “Le Film International,” “L’Idée,” “La Scène,” “Comédie,” “En Série,” *Le Matin*, 9 March 1923, 5; 16 May 1924, 4; 30 Jan. 1925, 4; 20 Feb. 1925, 4; 7 Jan. 1927, 4.

facilities and methods, as well as the acting talent, available to Hollywood producers and directors created a disturbing contrast with the content of their final product, a point that René Jeanne, for example, repeatedly emphasized. The Mary Pickford film *Pollyanna* portrayed “a morality so ingenuous that we probably could not bear to watch it to the end,” he wrote in November 1921, “were it not played out by the charming actress.” The story of a young woman who learns that, in order to be content with her own lot, must have sympathy for those less well off than she, simply challenged his world view. “It would be monotonous for the viewer if it were not disarming because of its childishness.” Again, Pickford helped to overcome the story, as did the fact that “the directing and photography are like those of almost all American films, which is to say, perfect.” A few months later he cautioned readers that a new Hollywood film, which told the story of a group of swindlers who repent in the face of the ethical strength of one of the characters, was “the most American” movie that he had seen in some time. The French and Italians selected scripts based on their dramatic potential, he pointed out, but American filmmakers concentrated on the moral impact, a trait rooted in the “Puritan doctrines” still predominant in the United States. French audiences generally did not like a “sermon” when they went to a theater, but Jeanne emphasized that, in terms of technique, it was “a perfect film.” The following year he viewed a film of the kind that enjoyed the “warmest sympathy” of French theater managers, i.e., that would sell tickets. This movie possessed the strengths and the weaknesses (“alas!”) of “innumerable” American films: the plot reflected a “disconcerting naiveté,” while the “photography was perfect, the directing polished, and the acting interesting.” Why should this film be given screen time? he subsequently asked of another Hollywood

import. The plot was merely a pretext to take viewers on a voyage into “the Unrealistic and the Fanciful” – from a technical standpoint, however, it was “perfect.” And the story line of a western he saw in mid-1927 was hackneyed, he said, but the performance of Buck Jones made it “bearable.”⁵

Hollywood gave French critics of standardization no reason to modify their views as the decade unfolded. Reviewing three American films hitting Parisian screens early in 1928, a Paul Gordeaux column in *L'Écho de Paris* on one occasion later in the decade was typical. What's the first movie about, the one starring the actor “Jones Buck” whose photo adorned the column? “A cowboy story like the ones we've seen so many times,” he said. The second film elicited “Another sports film!” from him. And then there was a melodrama. “Let's hope that their relationship doesn't experience further trouble,” he wrote of the screen couple. “They might make yet another movie about it!” Hollywood films, in fact, seemed “truly all manufactured in great series like tins of corned-beef, Fords, and sticks of chewing gum,” wrote another observer at the beginning of 1929. Indeed, a *Le Figaro* critic said wryly: “all American comedies must infallibly end in a wedding.” And how, future directing great Marcel Carné declared. After watching a Bessie Love film that year, he admired her performance, but could only shake his head at the story. “For the one hundredth time, we have the young girl, poor but honest, the star with the insensitive heart, the impresario never satisfied with his shows,” he grouched. “We know in advance, because ninety-nine movies have already told us, that the theater director will marry the young girl.” Well, that's what one has to expect from the “American formula of standardization” with “films manufactured in huge

⁵ Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” 11 Nov. 1921, 12 May 1922, 30 March 1923, 31 Dec. 1926, 27 May 1927, *Le Petit Journal*, 4.

series,” another analyst said. One writer who visited the United States in 1929 thought that American movie-goers themselves bore the imprint of Hollywood’s assembly-line approach to filmmaking. The huge New York theater he went to reminded him of “a factory distributing distraction in a series to a people completely standardized.” As the crowd headed into the theater, “I perceived only the muffled, shuffling monotony that I would find later at the gates of Detroit factories,” he wrote. “An uneasy feeling seized me on seeing those men, those women, wrapped up in their American discipline, coming inside . . . to seek without joy the dose of happiness that their standard of living owes them.” Georges Duhamel described a similar impression. As he stood in line to purchase a ticket at a Chicago cinema, he scorned the other patrons for their “hypnotic condition” as they waited to enter the “throat of the monster.” The theater itself, he wrote in disgust, offered the “luxury of some big, bourgeois brothel, an industrialized luxury, made by soulless machines for a crowd whose own soul seems to be disappearing.”⁶

The experience of the French movie émigrés to the United States reinforced the image of Hollywood as a large factory whose assembly lines mass-produced bland, packaged tasteless films. Numerous French professionals began careers, some short and some long-running, with the Hollywood studios during the 1920s,⁷ and the resultant culture shock opens interesting windows on the divergent French and American approaches to life, labor, and art. Put another way, the confrontation between French

⁶ Paul Gordeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 3 Feb. 1928, 4; Jean Arroy, “Le Cinéma américain en 1928,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (18 Jan 1929), 95; L. R., “Chronique des Cinémas de Paris,” *Le Figaro*, 9 June 1929, 7; Marcel Carné, “Les Présentations,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (28 June 1929), 555; Jean Tedesco, “Le cinéma depuis la guerre,” *La Revue de Paris*, 1 June 1929, 680, 681; Claude Blanchard, “Le cinéma à New-York,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 25 July 1930, 1; Duhamel, *Scènes de la vie future*, 58-59.

⁷ Dominique Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 13-58. Richard Abel, “The Long Fade: French Actors in Silent Hollywood,” discusses the pre-1920 migration to Hollywood as well.

film professionals, particularly directors, and the studio system, which had not yet reached its definitive form but which was rapidly consolidating itself, reflected the fundamental differences in social values and world views that underlay much of the debate in France about the United States. Diplomat-Modernist writer Paul Morand, who was not a film professional, although he would be head of the film censorship commission in Vichy France at one point during World War II,⁸ visited the United States in the 1920s, a trip that resulted in a book entitled *New York* (1929) and poem published a year earlier entitled “Hollywood” that was based on his interest in, and observations of, the movie capital. In the poem he touched on the glitz of the movie industry, but also on the superficiality just below the glamorous façade, and used an expression that summed up how traditionalists viewed the cultural environment of American film production companies. In the poem he described his favorite place in Los Angeles – a lot behind DeMille’s studio, from where one could see the Pacific Ocean and the MGM and Paramount studios – where he would go to reflect on “all the pretty young country girls, who would give anything to be here,” and on all the young people in general “who do not know that a [Hollywood] studio is what most closely resembles a Soviet administration.”⁹

Among the bona fide film émigrés in Hollywood, the example of director Maurice Tourneur is illustrative. Arriving in the United States in 1914, the thirty-six-year-old Tourneur, who spoke English, had quickly gained a reputation for his deft, nuanced direction. The studio system had not taken root yet and feature films (two-reelers) were in their infancy, so he enjoyed great freedom on his sets and could more or less give

⁸ “Paul Morand,” <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/immortels/base/academiciens/fiche.asp?param=637>.

⁹ Paul Morand, “Hollywood,” from *USA, album de photographies lyriques* (Paris: Plaisir du bibliophile, 1928), reprinted in Boujut and Chancel, eds., *Europe-Hollywood et Retour*, 8-9.

free play to his considerable artistic sensitivity. Over the next several years, the movie business changed, but Tourneur did not. “Long before the word ‘auteur’ was ever applied to a film director,” one student of his work has noted, “Tourneur exemplified the idea.” Having recently moved to Hollywood from the East Coast, he joined forces with other directors, including Mack Sennett, in 1920 to form their own production company as a way of resisting the “assembly-line” approach to filmmaking demanded by studio moguls. Hollywood, he said openly, would have to abandon “machine-made stories and come to a closer and truer view of humanity.”¹⁰ Robert Florey, a young writer for trade publications, was in Hollywood to report on the movie business; fascinated, he decided to stay on in order to learn the trade himself inside and out, and he worked on various film projects in different capacities in the early 1920s. He became good friends with the older Tourneur, who told him at one point in 1921 that producing an excellent movie did not depend on lavish sets. “To be interesting, a film must reflect the personality of an individual, his qualities and his defects, [it must be] the echo of the battles he has waged; in a word, a film must have a soul,” Tourneur said. “That is what you cannot achieve in these studios where everything operates like a machine, where responsibility is divided among so many individuals that the final result is collective one.” In a book published in 1926, Florey commented that Tourneur was interested only in the “artistic side” of filmmaking. “The question of ‘box office’ doesn’t seem to interest him.”¹¹ Tourneur said the same things publicly. In a 1923 statement to *Variety*, he was critical of the progressive subordination of the director to the increasingly powerful producer, arguing, in effect, that Hollywood had it backwards. “The director is to the motion

¹⁰ Harry Waldman, *Maurice Tourneur: The Life and Films*, 26, 28.

¹¹ Robert Florey, *Filmland*, 85; Florey, *Deux ans dans les studios américains*, 37.

picture what the artist is to the painting,” he declared. “You cannot tell the artist what to paint, what colors to use and what size the painting should be, and expect a masterpiece.”¹²

What Tourneur, perhaps because of his French origins, was conveniently overlooking was the fact that the studios were interested in making money, not masterpieces, and they had decided that the best way to achieve that goal was, generally, to turn out more or less standardized products as economically as possible. And that required, in the studios’ view, organization, tight scheduling, budgetary restraint, and centralized control of all phases of filmmaking – in the hands of the producer. Tourneur did direct a number of popular films in the 1920s, including *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Poor Little Rich Girl* (with Mary Pickford), but he apparently paid too little attention to the commercial side of making movies because his company folded and he had to go to work for the studios. There he discovered in 1926 that occasional successes counted for little if he insisted on his artistic prerogatives. Things came to a head when he was shooting a film at MGM. Louis B. Mayer, the studio head, decided to rein him in by assigning a supervisor for the project to ensure that the director kept to both script and schedule. Tourneur refused to buckle under, which made him persona non grata in Hollywood and ended his career there. In an interview sometime later, Tourneur lambasted the restrictive nature of American method of movie-making, attributing its alleged crisis to “standardization,” which allowed no experimentation and ensured “mediocre” films. “To produce a ‘human’ work, you need

¹² Maurice Tourneur, quoted in Graham Petrie, *Hollywood Destinies*, 2-23.

to feel as though you are fighting against something,” he said. “In America they don’t fight against anything. They easily fall asleep worshipping the god Dollar.”¹³

Another director who had been in Hollywood since the war period and who also ended his career in Hollywood in the early 1920s because he remained wedded to his French ways and loyalties and was unwilling to adjust to the United States was Léonce Perret. Arriving in California in 1917, he worked for Pathé until 1921, but insisted during that time on producing *French* movies, basing scripts, for example, on French, not American, works – only two of the eighteen films he directed were based on American literary properties – and on employing as much as possible only Frenchmen on his projects. One of those two films, marketed in 1919, brought in receipts double those of his next most successful film, but Perret stubbornly persisted in scorning American collaboration. After a falling out with Pathé, he moved his operations in 1922 to New York, where he made it clear he would hire only French actors, no matter how little known they were. His attitude alienated American film interests, made financing difficult, and angered labor unions. The situation obviously was unviable, and he returned to France in 1923. A French trade publication hailed him as a man who had refused to sell out to the Hollywood studio system, unlike others who had been “entirely converted to the religion of the dollar.” In France he enjoyed the reputation of a director who had been able to “adapt American technique to French taste,” an alleged fact reflected in the “perfume of elegance” that supposedly permeated his films.

Symbolically, he worked, in a sense, for Hollywood on only one more film and only

¹³ Dominique Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 23; [françois]. M[azeline]., “Interview derrière le décor: Maurice Tourneur,” *L’Intransigeant*, 26 May 1928, 6.

because it was shot in France – *Madame Sans-Gêne*, the Franco-American co-production that starred Gloria Swanson.¹⁴

Florey himself was no adversary of the Hollywood system and was gaining experience, among other things, as director's assistant, but a book he wrote, *Deux ans dans les studios américains* (Two Years Inside American Studios), which was published in Paris in 1926 and described the conditions accurately, provided grist for the critics' mill. "American directors are first and foremost artisans of 'routine,'" he said. "One finds few 'innovators' among them." They tended to specialize in a particular genre of film – crime films, comedies, romantic dramas, and the like – he continued. After "200 bad films" in their genre, they might one day make a good one, he continued. "And, because they have the [material] means, they set that rubbish in luxuriant decors, and the public supports this without protest, remembering always that the director had made a good film once" The methods of the directors, more or less imposed by the studio system, were all similar. "During months and months I watched the majority of the 'well-known' directors at work," he said, "and almost all use the same procedures." Hollywood directors, he further explained, because of the resources and support personnel available to them, did not have to bother with the kinds of issues and questions that so beset French. Prolonged story conferences and screenplay analysis by a team of people provided him with a script; he did not have to worry about materiel or equipment. "You will never see a director [in Hollywood] scratch his head and wonder where he will find a crocodile or fifteen machine-guns . . . ," said Florey. Financing, furthermore, was the producer's concern; all the director had to do was stay

¹⁴ Waldman, *Hollywood and the Foreign Touch*, 229-230; Edmond Epardaud, "Léonce Perret," *Cinéa-Ciné Pour Tous*, 15 Sept. 1926, 22-23.

within budget. “He shoots what they tell him to,” Florey added, “and he is never a thousand dollars off.”¹⁵ Critics back in Paris could point to the description of the well-meaning Florey and say, *Voilà!*

Diamant-Berger filled in the picture a bit. He traveled back and forth across the Atlantic during the early 1920s, making almost yearly trips, trying to arrange distribution rights for Pathé, meeting with top studios executives, and discussing possible film projects. He had written a book, based on a trip to the United States, right after the war discussing the technical aspects of filmmaking, so he knew the system well. He saw the tendency to specialize in genres, even originally at the studio level in some cases—Universal, for example, which gave heavy emphasis to westerns at one time – and Sam Goldwyn provided insights into the power of the producer, showing him how he prepared and controlled budgets, set up work schedules and gave out daily shooting assignments. Ernst Lubitsch, the German director brought over by Paramount, opened windows on homogenizing influence of studio methods. “These people are incredible!” Lubitsch confided to him at one point in 1922. “They have us come here because we can bring them something new, different; and then, their only desire seems to be to Americanize us! They want us to make our films as they make theirs” Diamant-Berger landed a contract with Pathé to make six films with the actress Hope Hampton; he set up his own small production company in New York, a city he progressively disliked – “Everything that comprises the leisure of a civilized being,” he later recalled, “was reduced to the basest quality” – and fulfilled his obligation.¹⁶

¹⁵ Robert Florey, *Deux ans dans les studios américains*, 15-24.

¹⁶ Henry Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma*, 54-56, 109-133.

When Paramount offered him a contract, he accepted – and then came painfully to understand other aspects of the studio system: the producer controlled what the story line of the next film and could whimsically alter the content of a literary work if he thought it would bring in greater profits. Diamant-Berger suggested as his first project a film based on a work by two French writers about returning veterans; Jesse Lasky, Paramount's vice-president in charge of production, vetoed the idea of a war theme – this was 1925 – and, when the Frenchman objected that the whole point of the film would be to show how a husband and wife discovered they had changed after his return from the battlefield, Lasky derisively retorted, “Well, then, that's nothing: we'll have him come back from a football game!” On all sides Diamant-Berger heard stories of the ignorance of the major studio heads, almost all of whom were immigrants of modest means from Eastern Europe. The weeks dragged on without a project for him, and his patience grew thin. Then a studio executive proposed in the spring of 1926 that he make a film with Gloria Swanson. Diamant-Berger knew the stories about her haughty behavior and knew that other directors shivered at the prospect of working with her. He nonetheless agreed to consider it. When she drove up to the studio in a white Rolls-Royce, followed by her husband the Marquis de la Falaise in his own identical Rolls-Royce, except that it was black, the director calculated that things would not turn out well and he was right: when he discussed a possible shooting schedule, Swanson objected that she had other commitments, in London, in Australia, and elsewhere. Coming at a time when studio operations were being shifted more and more to Hollywood, Diamant-Berger decided that he could not work in the United States and he secured a suspension of his contract. His stay of almost two years had driven home

two points: directors had little authority – and everything was a financial calculation. It was naïve to think otherwise, and to do so smacked of the tomorrow-will-take-care-of-itself approach to filmmaking in France, but it rankled. “Always that mania of using the cost of a film as the criteria for determining its value . . .” was the repugnant thought he took with him back to France.¹⁷ And back in Paris he could share stories of his experiences and critics could say *Voilà encore une fois!*

The experience of French émigrés who stood in front of the camera may have been similar in basic ways to that of other film specialists and technicians. Culture shock, in any case, was to be expected, but moving to Hollywood, California, from Paris, France, was moving from one world to another. The movie capital at first was exciting because of its stature in international cultural mythology and because of its locale and way of life. But the newness of the town wore off quickly, people came to realize that Hollywood offered really little of broader cultural attraction, residents tended to talk about one subject – movies – and work in a studio could be grinding with long hours, hot lights, repetitive steps, multiple takes, a contract typically restrictive of individual freedom, and constant reminders that time was money – in short, an assembly-line atmosphere. What had her first months in Hollywood been like? a Parisian interviewer asked Arlette Marchal, who had played the queen in Gloria Swanson’s *Madame Sans-Gêne*, early in 1927, as the actress prepared to return to the United States. “Very painful; I arrived over there not knowing a word of English and a little surprised by the customs very different from ours,” she replied, adding that she had worked hard. “In Hollywood I thought I was in the country; the town is calm ...; they live there only for their work, an intense work, by the way” Arlette then turned and

¹⁷ Ibid., 135-141.

looked out the window and made a comment that probably captured her innermost thoughts: “How pretty Paris is!,” she exclaimed all of a sudden. “And how I appreciate that beauty better after this long absence!” She explained further, “If you are not shooting a film in Hollywood, you get bored; there aren’t many distractions, you only find cinemas there”¹⁸

Critics in France could read and hear such things and reply that *anybody* who went to Hollywood for a first-hand look at the studio system could see what the reality was, that the critics were right, that American films were mediocre and vapid, and that this was the result of an inhumane, machine-like productive system. One did not have to be a director or actor to see that. René Guetta went over at the end of the decade and published a book on what he witnessed: “In sum, these studios are marvelously organized factories, in which each department depends on the other.” Journalist Paul Achard also toured Hollywood at the same time and wrote his book. What can he tell us? “The Paramount studio is about the size of one of our provincial towns,” he said, and practically everything in it is, in one or another, a piece of the assembly line. If Guetta wants to add that Hollywood producers impose rigid time limits for shooting a film, or that it is “ridiculous” to insist on a happy ending for all movies, we, the critics, have been hammering on those points for years.¹⁹

The trials and tribulations of compatriots who braved the Hollywood (or New York) lots thus provided ammunition for the critics of the standardized films relentlessly coming out of the American movie factories. But it was not merely the repetition of themes that left French observers dismayed, but the scripts that fleshed them out, the

¹⁸ Marianne Alby, “Arlette Marchal et Hollywood,” *Cinéa-Ciné Pour Tous*, 1 Feb. 1927, 15.

¹⁹ René Guetta, *Trop près des étoiles*, 158, 221; Paul Achard, *A New Slant on America*, 103-108.

implausibility of situations, the *intellectual* void, the frequent absence of real-life logic as seen through a French prism. Hollywood screenplays, in their view, normally ran the gamut from the almost mindless to the utterly infantile and unbelievable – and those defects, the harshest critics believed, reflected national character. The materialistic Americans were always boasting of how much they spent making a particular movie, said a critic for *Le Gaulois*, a habit that not only was in “bad taste,” but that gave the impression that the producers were “mocking” audiences; besides, he implied, the content of the films was frequently of such poor quality that the production expense was their only noteworthy feature. American movies offered a viewer action and movement, but “he whose intellect is hungry for verisimilitude and logic will find only disappointment,” another film analyst commented in 1921. “What is there interesting in this film?” a *La Presse* reviewer asked rhetorically the next year regarding an American western. “Nothing – except to show that French cinema is superior.” That was not a new complaint for that reviewer, and his colleague on the newspaper, Raymond Berner, went further, arguing, in effect, that the mediocrity of American films, which were frequently based on the “most unrealistic episodes of bad literature,” had almost crushed the creative potential of the new medium. Indeed, Hollywood’s movies, he charged, rested on such “improbable” story lines and were so full of “silly twaddle” that surely American audiences themselves were tiring. “It is rare to find an American production based on an interesting script, or even a fairly good one,” commented *Le Figaro*’s main critic in 1924. “On the contrary, there is always that striking puerility and often that disjointedness, those contrived, muddled situations grafted onto a plot of disappointing banality.” France should not ban all American films, as some demanded,

he said a few months later, “but simply those that are painfully ridiculous, or of exaggerated stupidity, the kind we are being flooded with.” A good example later cropped up, a film, he said, that “insults our common sense” and “attains the summum of imbecility.” Jeanne told his followers in 1926 that the screenwriter for a newly arrived American film must be “protected by a powerful god to have succeeded in getting approval for a script so deliberately infantile and devoid of any human truth.” American filmmakers were so “full of disdain for the intellectual complications of old Europe,” wrote a reviewer later that decade, “that for a long time they have been incapable of making a film that is not conventional, naïve or ridiculous.” Paul Gordeaux gave voice to a consensus after viewing what he thought was a particularly shoddy work. “Let’s admire the Americans: they succeed every month in producing scores of films always of the same kind of silliness,” he said. “And they show no signs of tiring!”²⁰

The progression in the tone and volume of Vuillermoz’s rejection of Hollywood is suggestive. One of the most respected of the film critics, early in the decade he tended to use irony in underscoring what he perceived as the many fatal defects of American films. Movie-makers in America, he mused in March 1923, were prone to slight the talents of French writers and directors. Well, Griffith himself had been quoted as saying that Hollywood films were geared to the “mentality of a nine-year-old child,” he said. “That, in effect, is how one can quite well synthesize the entire American esthetic.” So when the Americans, with their “magnificent self-assuredness and professorial and

²⁰ Jacques Cor. [sic], “Incohérence,” *La Cinématographique Française*, 142 (23 July 1921), 8; E. L. Guillaume, “Le Cinéma,” *La Presse*, 14 April, 31 March 1922, 2; Raymond Berner, “Écrans et Studios: Conte de Fées,” *La Presse*, 23 Feb. 1923, 2, “Écrans et Studios: Un nouveau péril,” 9 Feb. 1923, 2; Spa., “Figaro-Cinéma,” *Le Figaro*, 17 Oct. 1924, 6, 25 Sept. 1925, 4; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 19 Feb. 1926, 4; André Lang, “Le Cinéma,” *Les Annales Politique et littéraire*, 1 May 1928, 441; Gordeaux, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 24 Feb. 1928, 4.

patronizing tone” speak of the superiority of their scripts, France should remain skeptical and hope that the “young-girl-and-the-revolver esthetic” would someday change. The quality of Hollywood’s output “becomes lower day by day,” he subsequently added, so maybe the California studios will do better. Indeed, the current “childishness and silliness” of the American approach were nothing for the French film community to emulate, he commented that May. His hopes were misplaced, however. In August 1924 he attended a rerun of a Fairbanks film, *The Mark of Zorro*, which had been released in 1920, and decided that Hollywood had “learned nothing” in the intervening period. As a result, and in the face of Hollywood’s continued success and domination of the international market, his patience wore progressively thin and the tone of his criticism became more caustic. “For many Americans the Old World is peopled with beings belonging to an inferior race, semi-savages ignorant of the twin benefits of mechanical progress and Yankee morality,” he declared in May 1926. But after viewing countless Hollywood movies and the society they reflected, Frenchmen were “scandalized” by the “unbreathable” atmosphere that apparently pervasive violence had created in the United States. “Frankly, despite its perversity and its immortality,” he snidely concluded, “our Old Europe does not need to be ashamed of its civilization and its culture in the presence of the American people.” The theme of American arrogance and shallowness figured prominently in Vuillermoz’s criticism in ensuing months and years. He continually mocked American claims to excellence and Hollywood’s pride in super-productions “so devoid of taste and so poor intellectually.” In July 1926 he even hailed the growing presence of German films in French theaters because they represented a weakening, however slight, of American dominance:

Germany's intellectual commerce is obviously preferable to the industrial dictatorship of the United States. Our artists can get along with those of a race that has given us so many great musicians, painters, savants, poets, and philosophers. There is in this a European solidarity the value of which we feel as soon as we compare achievements of that kind . . . with the naïve and pretentious 'super-productions' in which those people from across the Atlantic so childishly pursue the sublime and grandiose with rounds of dollars.

Even *Ben Hur* could not escape his sarcastic barbs: the film displayed "an extraordinary absence of taste and critical sense" in some ways, he said. Crowning his decade-long diatribe against Hollywood was a column in mid-1930 that castigated American studios and denigrated American society, at least its screen version, for its "commercial cynicism, egotism, insensitivity, and brutality."²¹

What was the French option to the objectionable content of American films? What was it about French tastes and likes and dislikes that the critics preferred to American products and values? The perceived differences formed, explicitly or implicitly, a permanent part of their discourse in the 1920s, but a definition remained somewhat elusive. They obviously assumed that readers understood what they meant, which was itself an interesting statement on understanding culture. The clash of cultures on French screens did not, of course, take long to surface. The war had not quite ended when critic Jean Renouard took up the issue. "We need more substantial and less disjointed works; in this country of clarity and moderation, where everything is linked to classical rhythm," he explained, "we have difficulty understanding the improbability of certain situations [in American films and dislike] the clash of unforeseen

²¹ Vuillermoz, "Un Aveu," "Le bluff," "Le gagman," "Les évangélistes," "Faust," "Fausse alerte," "Importations," "Ben Hur," "Reprises," "Appel aux ciseaux," *Le Temps*, 17 March 1923, 5; 7 April 1923, 3; 5 May 1923, 4; 9 Aug. 1924, 3; 1 May 1926, 4; 3 July 1926, 4; 22 Jan. 1927, 3; 26 Feb. 1927, 4; 30 April 1927, 5; 26 July 1930, 6. See also his "La loi de la jungle," "Graziella," "Une libération," "Le Joueur d'échecs," *Le Temps*, 15 May 1926, 4; 24 July 1926, 5; 8 Jan. 1927, 4; 15 Jan. 1927, 4.

scenes that detonate like a false note in a melody.” And in addition, screenplays should make the viewer *think* a little more. It happens that “Americans are quite different from the inhabitants of the Old World,” Berner of *La Presse* wrote in 1923, so a film was not a “mirror,” but a cultural “documentary.” American art was not French art, he continued. “It is ‘your’ art and we look at it with a curiosity that at times is not free of irony.” That explained only that French observers believed that all film bore a national imprint, but what was that imprint? Jeanne expanded the criteria a little more in praising a film that Max Linder had directed in the United States, but that the critic thought remained French in nature because Linder had succeeded in shaping it according to his “so delightfully French qualities of gaiety, moderation, elegance, and wit.” *Le Figaro*’s film critic took a stab at an explanation late that year. French filmmakers would reconquer the country’s screens again, he said, when their works reflected “our qualities of intelligence and grace.” They had to combat American methods with “more subtle work, less infantile screenplays, [and] greater tastefulness.” Indeed, they should avoid the “lavishness and movement of crowds, as in American films” and concentrate on “a perfection of art, intelligence, [and] sensitivity,” agreed a fellow critic.²²

Vuillermoz contributed to the discussion in 1924 when he welcomed a new French film that he considered a “small masterpiece” because it reflected “tastefulness, tact, ingenuity, and self-control.” The director had not wanted to make a “heavy film packed with extras, in the American style,” but instead told the story of innocent young love with a “delightful finesse and sweetness and a thousand charming little details.” A

²² Jean Renouard, “La Semaine au Cinéma,” *Journal Diplomatique, Politique et Littéraire*, 18 Feb. 1918, 4; Berner, “Écrans et Studios: Un film est toujours documentaire,” *La Presse*, 12 Jan. 1923, 2; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 13 April 1923, 4; Robert Spa., “Figaro-Cinéma,” *Le Figaro*, 27 Dec. 1923, 6; J[acques]. Vivien, “Le Cinéma à Paris,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 3 May 1924, 6.

huge budget was not necessary to make a good movie, he wrote in mid-year, obviously referring to American studios' access to abundant financing. All that was necessary was a "serious expenditure of sensitivity and intelligence." One of the things that most clearly defined nationality, he thought, was the pace imparted to a film's story. "That rhythm changes with the race [sic] of each director," he observed in 1928. "The mental work of the American involves trepidation, while that of the European demands movement infinitely calmer." The cinema had brought movement to actions and emotions, he said. "That acceleration should not be external, as in American movies, but internal," he cautioned. National traits were indeed fundamental to the industry, and not simply to the films themselves was the point one reviewer made in explaining the popularity of Adolphe Menjou with French audiences. The basic reason was his "markedly French qualities." What were they? The reviewer could think of one: his "distinctive and impulsive originality." That did not advance understanding much – perhaps it did for French readers – but Veber, in a review of a French film in his regular column for *Le Matin*, added a piece or two to the puzzle. He liked the "lively and colorful" movie because it was "tremendously light-hearted, and not one of those flat [American] vaudevilles" that "too often" appeared on Parisian screens. "The French spirit . . . fully triumphs here," he exclaimed. "It gives the whole work a charming lightness, a heady flavor to which no foreign film could aspire."²³

Renouard, in a series of articles in 1928, took up the subject he first had broached a decade earlier. Avoid trying to make films according to any international formula – and he clearly meant the American model – was his admonition to French

²³ Vuillermoz, "Claudine et le poussin," "Polikouchka," "Rythmes," *Le Temps*, 29 March 1924, 4, 7 July 1924, 5, 10 March 1928, 4; [Veber], "Les Nouveaux Films," *Le Matin*, 7 May 1926, 4.

directors and producers, because that would spell a loss of personality. Instead, they should direct their creative gaze toward what he obviously thought were national traits or instincts: “life and simplicity,” which did not exclude “dreams and poetry,” as well as “beauty, character, and charm.” And he agreed with Vuillermoz about the central importance of rhythm, which determined “beauty” and gave to the film “its national character.” Culture, he said, imposed different gestures and expressions. “A Frenchman does not march, or salute, like a German; he thinks and acts according to his rhythm.” Some French producers were forgetting that, he lamented, and were attempting to open up foreign markets for their films by making “banality” the keynote of their films, when they should be preserving the French qualities of “finesse, moderation, sobriety and taste.” A fellow critic subsequently echoed Renouard’s call for preservation of national characteristics in French movies, singling out “taste, moderation, tact, [and] spirit” as essential elements.²⁴

American movies, then, were guilty of several transgressions. They were showy, glitzy, vulgar, too fast-paced, sometimes violent, unrealistic, typically infantile, and they played on the baser emotions of audiences rather than challenging their intellects. Had Hollywood’s sins ended there, the cultural clash would have been less intense. But American filmmakers committed the ultimate sin: they misrepresented France and things French on world screens – and that not only sharpened the attacks by Paris-based cultural nationalists, but led to French official involvement as well. The frequency of French settings or characters in Hollywood’s movies of the pre-sound, post-war era was striking. The films set in France, wholly or in part, or portraying French characters

²⁴ Renouard, “La Semaine au Cinéma,” *Journal Diplomatique, Politique et Littéraire*, 14 April, 28 April, 4 Aug. 1928, 4; Gaston Ravel, “Films historiques,” *Le Figaro*, 16 Feb. 1930, 6.

and institutions, included *The Road to France* (1919), *If I Were King* (1920), *Poisoned Paradise: The Forbidden Story of Monte Carlo* (1920), *A Parisian Scandal* (1921), *The Three Musketeers* (1921), *While Paris Sleeps* (1923), *Woman of Paris* (1923), *Monsieur Beauclaire* (1924), *He Who Gets Slapped* (1924), *Mademoiselle Midnight* (1924), *The Rose of Paris* (1924), *Shadows of Paris* (1924), *Parisian Love* (1925), *Madame Sans-Gêne* (1925), *The Big Parade* (1925), *Parisian Nights* (1925), *Her Sister from Paris* (1925), *Little French Girl* (1925), *Kiki* (1926), *Beau Geste* (1926), *Paris* (1926), *The Girl from Montmartre* (1926), *Stranded in Paris* (1926), *Mademoiselle Modiste* (1926), *That Model from Paris* (1926), *Paris at Midnight* (1926), *So This is Paris* (1926), *The Beloved Rogue* (1927), *That Girl from Gay Paree* (1927), *On Ze Boulevard* (1927), *A Gentleman of Paris* (1927), *Plastered in Paris* (1928), *The Foreign Legion* (1928), *Marianne* (1929), *They Had to See Paris* (1929) and *Montmartre Rose* (1929).²⁵

Since movie-making was a commercial enterprise, the recurrence of French themes and characters obviously reflected popularity with American audiences.

Hollywood's interest in French themes was, in a way, flattering, but French critics were wary from the outset. They were especially protective of Paris. In the spring of 1924 audiences there saw an American movie in which the protagonist visits several cities around the world, including the French capital. Critics winced at what they saw. "The essence of Paris, as seen in American movies, is the cabaret of *apaches*," one critic grouched, referring to the low criminal elements, usually pimps and thieves, denizens of cheap, back-alley bars, who had once been a significant presence in Parisian life, but who now lived on mostly in the imagination of foreign filmmakers. "They won't let go of it." As popular as Chaplin was, he did not escape criticism with *A*

²⁵ Lebrun, 20-119, 164. See also, Florey, *Hollywood d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*.

Woman of Paris (1923), his directorial debut for the new United Artists organization he had helped form. The film, which reached Paris theaters in 1924, tells the story of a young couple, Marie and Jean, from *la province* who are separated by a cruel twist of fate, only to end up, according to one of the screen messages, in “the magic city of Paris, where fortune is fickle and a woman gambles with life.” Although a melodrama, the film focuses on the life in Paris led by the superficial, carefree, boisterous crowd of which Marie becomes a part; furthermore, the main male character, Pierre Revel, is an amoral carouser.²⁶ As one biographer wrote, “If the real-life model for Pierre Revel had not been a Parisian, Chaplin would have had to make him one,” for in 1923 “American audiences expected adulterers to suffer for their sins, but an occasional exception might be made for a Frenchman.” In fact, when Chaplin’s script adviser explained to Adolphe Menjou, who played Revel, what his character would be, she said, according to the actor, “This guy is a millionaire, a *boulevardier*, a typical Frenchman. He is living in sin with [lead actress] Edna Purviance. . . ,” she continued. “He is the best-dressed man in Paris, a connoisseur of fine wines, race horses, and beautiful dames.”²⁷ *A Woman of Paris* probably reinforced for American movie-goers the image of Paris as a city of romance, music, and frivolity and of Frenchmen as unruly skirt-chasers, a perception that grated on French nerves. Significantly, French exhibitors did not want simply to translate the film’s original title – it played in France as *L’Opinion Publique* – some reviewers did not mention its French connection, and others, such as René Jeanne, rebuked him for having used Paris as a setting and “slipped into the recreation of the atmosphere of Paris some details that shock us Frenchmen.” *Le Figaro*’s critic noted

²⁶ David Jacobs, *Chaplin, the Movies, & Charlie*, 74; *A Woman of Paris* (1923), author’s copy.

²⁷ Joyce Milton, *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin*, 212; Adolphe Menjou, *It Took Nine Tailors*.

somewhat philosophically in mid-1925 that audiences either laughed or protested when they saw American movies that mangled French literary works or misrepresented “a corner of Paris.”²⁸

He contained his resentment better than others. The image of their beloved city and their country was dear to the cultural elite and they became increasingly incensed at Hollywood’s apparent indifference to their sensitivity. French films portrayed Americans as “generally sympathetic” figures, Veber declared in 1925, but there was no reciprocation. Tournier of *L’Écho de Paris* had made that point earlier – “the Americans reserve exclusively for French characters the roles of traitors, dishonest gentlemen and unscrupulous fiancés,” he fumed – and Veber now complained that American filmmakers were creating the impression the world over that Paris was populated with “libertines” because they frequently presented the “lowest, most vile and most vicious” picture of the city. “One too often sees Paris through vulgar clichés of a false Montmartre and two or three night shady night clubs,” he railed. “[American] script writers and directors cannot get it into their heads or scenes that . . . a seducer of a young woman may not be French,” he exclaimed in a second article. Universal’s *Parisian Love* (1926), directed by Louis Gasnier (head of Pathé), starred Clara Bow, Hollywood’s original “It” girl, as Marie, the girlfriend of an *apache*. The movie opens with Marie and her lover, Armand, staging an ugly fight in a seedy tavern, the Café de la Mort, to frighten (and entertain) rich American tourists – “We gave the American tourists their money’s worth tonight!” reads an on-screen message – before going off to break into a wealthy patron’s mansion. “A Parisian moon was meant for romance – not

²⁸ Jacques Vivien, “Critique Cinématographique,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 19 April 1924, 4; Jeanne, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 25 April 1924, 4; Robert Spa., “Figaro-Cinéma,” *Le Figaro*, 26 June 1925, 4.

robbery,” says another message, furthering the idea that Paris was the place for a romantic getaway, with perhaps a frisson of danger as well. The movie even introduces a forger’s place of work with an on-screen message saying “The Department of State of Apache Headquarters – where passports, credentials and references are made to order.” Bow, pretending to be a maid so she can gain access to a wealthy man’s home, no more than makes an appearance to serve the guests than two males leave the room, separately, to paw at her, one going so far as to grab her leg as she tries to run up the stairs. It was precisely the kind of film to which the cultural nationalists objected, as it gave foreigners what they expected of Paris, a scenario that seemingly vindicated Veber’s conclusion about the city’s image being projected abroad.²⁹

French observers found no amusement in Hollywood’s continuing offense. The 1926 film *The Girl from Montmartre* provoked complaints because it showed Paris as a dirty, gritty, impoverished city.³⁰ Vuillermoz certainly could not remain silent in the face of the “detestable propaganda” being fostered by what he saw as a “strongly disparaging tradition” on the part of American movie-makers. They were wont to depict the Parisian as “a little narrow-minded man with a moustache and beard in the employ of libertines and the debauched,” he complained in 1926. Veber weighed in again the following year, angered by the Hollywood’s imagined “seedy parts” of present-day Paris inhabited typically by “a young woman dressed in black velour, a tough guy with sideburns wearing a pre-war hat and surrounded by friends who Toulouse-Lautrec would have disowned 35 years ago.” A Hollywood movie then might round out the setting by showing “caverns and low-class bars, and knife fights taking place by the light

²⁹ *Parisian Love* (1925), author’s copy.

³⁰ Strauss, *Menace in the West*, 149-150; *New York Times*, 12 December 1927, 5; Ruth Vasey, *The World According to Hollywood, 1918-1939*, 57-58.

of oil lamps hanging in medieval alleyways.” What that “detestable propaganda” – he liked his colleague’s expression – did was embed in people’s minds the notion that “the capital of France is infested with dangerous criminals, that from Montmartre to the grand boulevards the gentlemen of the sidewalks, every night, fight it out to the end.” How long will Hollywood continue to depict “Paris and Parisians” in such an unreal way? René Jeanne wondered in exasperation. A movie trade publication at this time published, under the title “Paris Made in USA,” a mocking two-page photo spread of scenes from American movies that distorted the reality of Paris locales and inhabitants. And as he studied the situation, a *New York Times* reporter saw the same “deliberate and persistent representation of Frenchmen as libertines” and so sympathized with the critics.

Every one [sic] knows the movie Frenchman. He is represented as a man whose entire life is spent in pursuing pleasure in gilded cafés and blatant drawing rooms, this pleasure consisting uniquely in making love to women of doubtful reputation. Just that; nothing more. No hint of the intellectual pursuits that are the common heritage of Frenchmen of average education; none, either, of those qualities that have placed France in the peculiar position that she had held for centuries as the supreme arbiter of all the arts.

If the Hollywood film community read “a little French history and French biography,” he suggested, it might “work wonders” for cultural relations.³¹

Florey’s experiences are illustrative of the general problem of cultural misrepresentation. As an assistant art director, he got a rude awakening when he proposed changes to a set to achieve historical accuracy. Horrified to see furniture from another century being used to decorate a bedroom supposedly that of Louis XIII, he

³¹ Tournier, “Vers une censure internationale,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 13 Oct. 1923, 7; Pierre-Gilles [Veber], “Dernier Appel,” “Suborneur,” *Le Matin*, 14 Aug., 10 July 1925, 4; Vuillermoz, “Courrier Cinématographique,” *Le Temps*, 16 Oct. 1926, 4; [Veber], “Les Bas-Fonds,” *Le Matin*, 13 Sept. 1927, 4; Jeanne, “En Marge de l’Écran,” *Le Petit Journal*, 10 June 1927, 4; “Paris Made in U.S.A.,” *Cinéa*, 1 Sep. 1927, 18-19; R. LeClerc Phillips, “French Flirts and English Fops,” *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 1927, 2:7.

urged replacement of the pieces. King Vidor, the director, “was indifferent to the anachronisms that cropped up every minute,” Florey recalled, and the producer was exasperated. After all, he told Florey, the story took place in France and the furniture was French! “I’ll bet you twenty dollars,” he added, “that if I ask the first thirty people who come by on the street what period that furniture is from, nobody will be able to say.” The moral of the episode was clear: in American film production, historical accuracy and artistic purity were not in the budget, but tight shooting schedules were – and the average movie-goer in America would not be able to tell the difference anyway. Florey had similar experiences through the period. On another occasion he was asked to check over a Parisian café: to his stupefaction, he found workers putting senseless expressions, in misspelled, broken French mixed with Spanish, all over the walls. The director, while he did allow Florey to correct the problem, saw no real point in making changes. “It doesn’t matter at all,” he said, “as long as it has the ‘feel’ of being French.” On yet another occasion a director was to shoot a wedding in Brittany. When Florey reached the set, he saw dozens of extras dressed as Mexican toreadors and other participants in a typical bullfight, plus women in Mexican dress, including mantillas. He thought he was at the wrong set, until he heard the director’s voice saying, “What do you think of the Bretons?”³²

The question of distortions of the country’s history by American filmmakers was an especially sensitive one to the defenders of France’s national patrimony.

Championing other countries’ right to not be caricaturized was one way of defending their own, so French observers took Hollywood to task on principle, as it were.

Although *The Sheik*, which made Valentino an international star, earned his reluctant

³² Florey, *Hollywood d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, 134, 299-300.

approval, one critic in 1922 noted the potential for cultural distortion when the Americans, “a practical people . . . [and] rich,” recreated in the Southern Californian desert other nation’s cities and locales. Vuillermoz months later castigated Hollywood for its frequently unflattering depiction of Latin American culture and suggested that French exhibitors stop importing offending American product. Occasionally Hollywood attempted to project authenticity, as Vuillermoz acknowledged that it had in the case of a film with John Barrymore based on a Tolstoy novel. “But it is curious to see just how much the Americans are incapable of understanding the customs of other peoples and capturing the imponderables that constitute their mentality,” he commented. The film overall was a good one, he said, but American movie-makers simply could not capture the essence of other cultures. “That’s the great lesson . . . of all American film production: our friends from the New World are radically incapable of assimilating the psychology of Europe.”³³

“Hands Off France” – that would have been the order to Hollywood that French cultural nationalists preferred, but the matter was beyond their control, so they stood vigilant watch. D. W. Griffith’s *Orphans of the Storm* galvanized them. Set in the period of the French Revolution, the film, starring Lillian Gish, traces the adventures of two young orphans during that tumultuous era. Veber had attended a preview arranged for the press and, a week before the film’s debut at the Cinéma Max Linder in September 1922, he wrote an article bemoaning Griffin’s version of the past. The “vandals” had taken everything France had, he said, even the “stones from our châteaux had been carried away to shore up the homes of American millionaires” and the works of French

³³ Tournier, “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Écho de Paris*, 1 Dec. 1922, 5; Vuillermoz, “Courrier Cinématographique,” *Le Temps*, 13 Oct. 1923, 4; 2 July 1927, 4, 5.

composers had been “adopted – what a horror! – by discordant jazz bands.” The result? “The only thing we had left was our history of France, our beautiful history, written in the blood of our ancestors,” he exclaimed. And now Griffith was attempting to take that away by egregiously distorting the people and events of the era of the Revolution. The sets were ridiculous, the costumes were laughable, and the American actors inappropriate, thus creating “a totally false idea of what France of the ancient regime was like.” Among other things, he wailed, the film showed a marquis willfully running over a small child, crushing him beneath the wheels. Opening night members of the right-wing party *Action Française* and a royalist organization noisily disrupted the session and two people were arrested. “It is scandalous that a man who is not French is allowed to come to our country to tell us that our forefathers were either sadists or base villains or miserable slaves,” the party’s newspaper cried the following day. Even larger groups of demonstrators interrupted both matinee and evening performances over the next two days, drowning out the orchestra and throwing copies of Veber’s article from the balcony. More moderate newspapers, such as *L’Écho de Paris*, agreed that Griffith had “deformed the history of France in a ridiculous way.” René Jeanne politely told his readers that, if they wanted to see the movie, it would be best to overlook the “countless errors of historical fact.” Boisyvon took Griffith to task with cold politeness. “Of course, a director . . . can take liberties with History,” he declared, “but we certainly do not like receiving lessons about our History.” In the face of the criticism, the manager of the Max Linder cut some of the offending passages from the film, but renewed demonstrations forced him to cut all those demanded by *Action Française*. When *The New York Times* contacted Griffith about the uproar, he said that the

protesters were “royalist or Bolshevik sympathizers” and pointed out that French authorities had given permission for distribution of the film. “No one has more love and respect for the French people than I,” he declared.³⁴

After the furor abated, Raymond Berner, writing in *La Presse* a few weeks later, said that he even experienced “malaise” when he saw American actors *play* Frenchmen and he mentioned *Orphans of the Storm* as an example of the problem. Make the film in France, with a French director, but retain the American cast, and the result would still lack authenticity, he maintained. “The factory label,” he concluded, “is right on the faces of the actors.” Veber’s resentment continued to simmer in the months following the screening of *Les Deux Orphelines*, but the fact was, as he realized, that the French film industry could not compete with Hollywood, so he appealed for greater understanding, suggesting in November 1923 the creation of a center for preparing screenplays in Paris, with agents abroad, who could assist in foreign productions. To dramatize French sensitivity, he offered his readers an imaginary scenario in which a French film company decided to make a movie, with a French director, crew, and cast, based on some far-fetched story involving Abraham Lincoln. What would be the reaction of the American public to such a project? he asked rhetorically. Early in 1924 he wrote that he had received numerous letters from readers protesting the “brazen mutilations that unscrupulous [American] directors were inflicting on our national epic.” Theater owners rebutted such complaints by pointing out that their patrons generally liked American movies, but Veber found the “methodical pillaging” of French history intolerable. And he

³⁴ [Veber], “N’Y Touchez Pas!,” *Le Matin*, 8 Sept. 1922, 5; *L’Action Française*, 16 Sept. 1922, 1-2; “L’Histoire de France diffamée par un étranger,” 17 Sept. 1922, 1-2; 18 Sept. 1922, 1; *L’Écho de Paris*, 16 Sept. 1922, 3; 17 Sept. 1922, 3; Jeanne, “La Révolution Française au Cinéma,” *Le Petit Journal*, 15 Sept. 1922, 4; Boisyvon, “Le Cinéma,” *L’Intransigeant*, 20 Sept. 1922, 2; “Griffith Film Stirs Anger of Parisians,” *New York Times*, 17 Sept. 1922.

did not forget Griffith's offense – in 1927 he used his column as an open letter to the director, chiding him for his mishandling of the Revolution and urging him to take greater steps to ensure authenticity in any future projects involving France.³⁵ The Griffith episode revealed the strong undercurrent of growing antagonism and resentment in France toward Hollywood's depiction of things French and served notice that any part of French history was sensitive terrain and intrusions would be challenged.

When, on the heels of the brouhaha over *Orphans of the Storm*, the news broke that French Interests planned to produce a movie based on Marie Antoinette and had asked Norma Talmadge to play the queen, the outcry from the French film community was choleric. "And emotion is so keen in these circles," Vuillermoz reported, "that the French syndicate of film directors has just announced its formal intention to refuse the hospitality of our screens to that film." The project apparently did not see light, although Talmadge, who was popular in France, did play a French shop girl in the 1925 release *Kiki*. National nerve ends, insofar as film critics spoke for broader segments of French opinion, lay fully exposed by now. When an unidentified French director working in Hollywood had the idea of holding a contest for French authors of screenplays that would depict French women, "mundane dramas" set in upscale sites, and realistic stories about the "Paris underworld," Vuillermoz was outraged. The very idea of the contest was a "profound humiliation," it was "injurious and wounding" to imply that French womanhood needed a Hollywood movie for its defense, and "truly absurd" to expect French writers to collaborate in presenting to the whole world an image of the French middle and upper classes as hedonists and Paris as a "modern Babylon." He

³⁵ Berner, "Écrans et Studios: la Nationalité des Films," *La Presse*, 30 March 1923, 2; [Veber], "Notre Pensée," "La Tabatière," *Le Matin*, 3, 30 Nov. 1923, 5, "Déprédations," 1 Feb. 1924, 5; 4 April 1924, 5; "Lettre à D. W. Griffith," 20 Oct. 1927, 5.

ended by calling on the press and trade publications to reject, as a writer for *Comœdia* already had, this “undignified gesture on the part of a Frenchman who is too Americanized.”³⁶

Sometime during this period the idea surfaced, presumably in the United States, of making a film about Joan of Arc with Bebe Daniels in the lead role. Daniels had starred opposite Valentino in *Monsieur Beauclaire* (1924) and played an American salesgirl *Stranded in Paris* (1926), but if she had appeared on the screen as France’s national heroine, it would have sent tidal waves throughout France. Fortunately, the project never materialized and *Le Figaro*’s film critic congratulated Daniels at the end of the decade for having stuck to roles that suited her. “That’s why we want to forget your error,” he commented snidely, “of wanting to play our Jeanne from Lorraine.” It is not clear, in light of the collapse of the Talmadge project and general hostility toward American cinematic incursions into the French past why the project for *Madame Sans-Gêne* went forward with Gloria Swanson in the female lead. Perhaps it was because the producers cleared everything with French authorities beforehand and received permission to do some filming at historical sites. Publicity surrounding the film’s release, moreover, emphasized one message: “C’est un film français!”³⁷ and that probably helped. But in the mid-1920s, it was an exception and other films dealing with the French past continued to feel the wrath of French critics. United Artists and the actor John Barrymore, universally admired in France for his acting skills, came in for sharp criticism when the film *The Beloved Rogue* (*Le Poète Vagabond*), based on the life of François Villon, reached Paris screens in 1927. René Jeanne excoriated the film.

³⁶ Vuillermoz, “Courrier Cinématographique,” *Le Temps*, 17, 10 Nov. 1923, 4.

³⁷ *Cinémato*, 10 April 1925, 8.

“The screenplay, to start with, is worthless and so loaded with ignorance and fantasy that it becomes unbearable . . . ,” he exclaimed; the characters, moreover, were so uninspiring that viewers did not care what happened to them. Barrymore and the actor who played Louis XI were simply “ducks out of water.” Just because a film was popular in the United States did not mean that it would necessarily be so in France – and, Jeanne concluded, he wished Hollywood would realize that and stop ignoring French tastes and objections. Over at *Le Figaro*, the film editor, while recognizing Barrymore’s talent, echoed Jeanne’s complaint, bemoaning the fact that “the Americans, once more, have seasoned the history of France according to their taste.”³⁸

Hollywood could argue that it did endeavor, sort of, more or less, in a way, sometimes at least, to meet French objections, to avoid historical error in its films, to give scenes and settings greater authenticity. Norma Talmadge in the early 1920s sought to avoid criticism in France by developing an unusual project for a movie to be titled *L’Affaire du Collier* (The Affair of the Necklace), based on the infamous story of Marie Antoinette’s missing necklace. Talmadge was wealthy and married to film mogul Joseph Schenck, so she reportedly offered a huge sum to two French writers for a screenplay, and agreed to shoot in French studios under a French director, with a cast of French actors. She would play Marie Antoinette – and she wanted to shoot some scenes at the Palace of Versailles. In addition, she offered to donate all the box office receipts from exhibition in French territory, including the colonies, to French national museums. For reasons not entirely clear, but apparently because of her insistence on

³⁸ R[ichard].P[ierre]. B[odin], “Chronique des Cinémas de Paris,” *Le Figaro*, 5 May 1927; René Jeanne, “Les Films de La Semaine,” *Le Petit Journal*, 15 April 1927, 4; R[obert].S[pa.], “Critique et Informations,” *Le Figaro*, 22 April 1927, 6.

using Versailles as a set, the project did not bear fruit.³⁹ Perhaps she floated the idea too soon after the uproar over Griffith's controversial film about the Revolution. In any case, Paramount could point to an unusual effort to assuage French feelings when it engineered the first Franco-American co-production, a project actually similar to Talmadge's: *Madame Sans-Gêne*, a 1925 Famous Players-Lasky/Paramount production starring Gloria Swanson and French stars Émile Drain, Madeleine Guitty, and Arlette Marchal. Based on a play by French playwright Victorien Sardou, the movie was a remake of a French film with the same title, a risky undertaking for that fact alone. Swanson traveled to Paris to meet with Adolphe Osso, the head of Paramount's European division, and film critic for *L'Aurore*, André Daven. Since the film was to be shot in France by a French director (Léonce Perret), the actress wanted assurance that the French film community and public opinion in general not object to her playing a role "so utterly and so significantly French." That Swanson took such matters into consideration suggests a more sophisticated understanding of the often delicate issues that could arise in mounting an international production. Daven was confident that the French public would be "thrilled because [Swanson] would be bringing American capital to Paris to employ French talent and give it a chance to be seen all over the world."⁴⁰ Shot on location in France at such important historical locations as the Château de Fontainebleau, the film tells the story of a poor laundress in the time of Napoléon who rose in society to the rank of duchess. Swanson was "charming, graceful, and beautiful," in the movie, but one reviewer could not help but gripe that perhaps she had too recently become a *marquise* to fully understand the immensity of the role with which

³⁹ Maurice Bourgeois, "L'Amitié artistique franco-américaine," *Le Figaro*, 30 Nov. 1923, 6.

⁴⁰ Gloria Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 216.

she had been “entrusted.”⁴¹ Though the film is now lost, the movie was a success both in France and in the United States when it was released in the spring of 1925 and even more appreciated by the French thanks in no small measure to the fact that it was about a real-life historical French woman, it was directed by a Frenchman, and it starred several French actors. The film was so well-publicized in France that when Swanson went to visit Fontainebleau one last time after shooting had wrapped, her translator told her that a tour guide had just pointed out to his group of tourists a carriage belonging to Napoléon that “was used by Gloria Swanson in her last cinema, *Madame Sans-Gêne*.”⁴²

MGM, too, took an occasional stab at greater authenticity. In 1925, for example, it brought over a prominent “French” fashion and costume designer, Russian-born Romain de Tiroff, to design the set and costumes for two films with stories set in France, *Paris* and *Monte Carlo*. Tiroff had built his career in Paris, where the French claimed him as one of their own and affectionately called him “Erté,” after their pronunciation of his initials. The Hollywood studios seemed to constitute a “world of fantasy in themselves,” he discovered when he arrived that spring with a six-month contract in hand. “There were royal façades without palaces; sumptuous interiors without walls; kings and queens in full regalia eating sandwiches in the cafeteria with beggars in rags.” Erté soon chafed at the regimented work atmosphere imposed upon him by the studio system. Although the scripts for both films had not yet been completed, studio chiefs “nonetheless” asked him to begin work on the décors for *Paris*. “When I asked how I could possibly be expected to do designs without having read the

⁴¹ Robert Spa., “Les Cinémas: Madame Sans-Gêne,” *Le Figaro*, 18 Dec. 1925, 6.

⁴² Gloria Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 243; Diamant-Berger, *Il était une fois le cinéma*, 44.

script,” he later recalled, “the answer was simple: ‘Never mind. We’ll adapt the script to your décor.’” Erté commenced sketching for the movie but when the script was still not complete six months later, he was asked to extend his contract for three months, during which time he was coaxed into working on other films, including *Ben Hur*, for which he designed the costumes for Carmel Myers’s character Iras, and *The Mystic*, for which he was responsible for Aileen Pringle’s wardrobe. During work on the latter film, Erté recalled being “extremely displeased with the studio costumiers” whose “clothes lacked allure.” Studio head Louis B. Mayer, in an uncharacteristic move, heeded the designer’s concerns, setting up a “special workshop in which only [Erté’s] costumes would be sewn.” The atelier was run by a “Madame Van Horn” who was “thoroughly French” for “everything she touched emerged incredibly chic.”⁴³

In the end, Erté’s contract was extended for an additional three months (the script for *Paris* still not completed), and the designer would spend a year in Hollywood, completing work on such various films, including *La Bohème*, for which he designed costumes for Lillian Gish and Renée Adorée. He was a bit hesitant to sign the second prolongation of his contract for he “was beginning to tire of Hollywood” since “life was really very monotonous there, despite appearances to the contrary.” When he finally received the final script for *Paris*, his “hair was standing on end” by the time he finished reading it. “It was indescribably absurd. The hero of the story was the darling of the people of Paris and indeed of all France. He was a couturier named Morand and he lived in the only place worthy of him – the Louvre! All my designs had been incorporated as promised,” he remembered, “but my extravagant, ultra-modern interiors had been set down in the palace of the Kings of France! My open-air theatre was

⁴³ Erté [Romain de Tiroff], *Things I Remember: An Autobiography*, 80-83.

transferred to the Place du Carrousel. I need hardly say that I refused to have anything to do with a film which would caricature Paris in such a manner.” He proposed some changes to the script but only a few “insignificant” scenes were modified,⁴⁴ so Erté made the abrupt decision to end his contract (and consequently his career in Hollywood) and return to Paris.

Douglas Fairbanks was always receptive to working with French artists. He offered to bring Diamant-Berger to Hollywood as director and co-producer of one of his major films; he liked the work of the actor Léon Bary, whom he met in the early 1920s, and gave him parts in several of his movies with French settings. While working *The Iron Mask*, he told Bary that he would like to contract a French artist to design authentic costumes and help make certain that other details of the filming were correct. Bary introduced him to Maurice Leloir, a renowned historical illustrator, designer, and expert in the history of costumes. Leloir, who had been the illustrator for later novels of Alexandre Dumas, accepted a short-term contract and spent several months in California in 1928 at the United Artists studio to help Fairbanks with *The Iron Mask*. Nearly seventy at the time, Leloir was well aware of the general problem: in the field of historical reconstruction in theater and cinema, the Americans simply lacked both experience and knowledge. Still, he marveled at what he saw there. “When they want to reconstruct a European town,” he said, “they allow ridiculous inaccuracies that a simple postcard would avoid.” Watching work on a reconstruction of Paris, he ticked off numerous errors, such things as having a famous statue facing a building instead of turning away from it, or locating Notre Dame Cathedral on the wrong street. When he went to the multi-storied central warehouse for props, he stood in awe at the abundance

⁴⁴ Ibid., 87.

and variety of chariots, cannon, stuffed animals, furniture, religious objects, clothing, cars – and books. “Within the vast rooms [stood] a beautiful library of special works and documents,” he learned, “that lacked only one thing: readers who know how to understand and utilize what they find there.” The result was that all that lavish supply of objects and costumes was “almost totally of a childlike inaccuracy.” Fairbanks did not want him to actually help make things, but to supervise the sets and wardrobes to ensure accuracy. There were practical problems in this regard – he did not speak or understand English – but the main difficulty was overcoming the smug self-assuredness of the designers under his authority. Aghast at some of the costumes, he made accurate drawings, but discovered that initially the designers would not even show the drawings to the seamstresses. By the end of his stay, Leloir had reached a basic conclusion. “The bad thing about [studios in] America,” he said, “is that they want to depict past eras.”⁴⁵

Jean de Limur, *Count* Limur, went to the United States right after the war and wrangled a job as an extra at Hollywood studio. He happened to be watching Fairbanks one day during the filming of *The Three Musketeers* and the actor, apparently always receptive to French ideas, hired him as a “technical director.” In that same capacity Limur worked with Chaplin on *A Woman in Paris* and with various other top directors, including DeMille on *King of Kings*. When Jesse Lasky, during production of an aviation film, learned that Limur had been a pilot, he hired him as a script writer and Limur was able to carve out a new niche for himself in the industry. Robert Florey, when he could, monitored Hollywood sets and costumes for historical inaccuracies, although the extent of his success in that regard remains unknown. His memoir of the period tells of

⁴⁵ Diamant-Berger; Maurice Leloir, *Cinq Mois à Hollywood avec Douglas Fairbanks*, 69-74.

resistance by director King Vidor to some of his suggestions for change, but perhaps Vidor mellowed. Florey, in any case, apparently did a commendably effective job on the film *La Bohème*, a Vidor (MGM) film released in 1926 and starring Lillian Gish and John Gilbert. Vidor told Florey that he wanted him to help “create French atmosphere” for the film, which is set in early 19th-century France, so Florey gathered numerous books, designs, newspaper drawings, and engravings related to the period, which the director perused, while Florey himself, a talented artist, made sketches for set decorators and the wardrobe department. “I worked night and day to ensure that the actors were correctly dressed,” Florey recalled, “and so that the film’s furniture and accessories would not make people laugh when it was released in France.” In his recollection, Florey makes no mention of any objections by Vidor regarding that film.⁴⁶

Another way in which Hollywood sought to improve, and perhaps did improve, its representation of French scenes was through the use of photography. If full-scale overseas location shooting, such as occurred with *Madame Sans-Gêne*, was ruled out, then one avenue to at least glimpses of “reality” or a more authentic “feel” would be to use newsreel clips – and movie-makers did so. But newsreel footage affected the visual flow of a film and they had to use it sparingly. Sending a cameraman abroad to shoot precise exteriors *in situ* was another means of gaining authenticity, but this was not a widespread practice in the 1920s. Commercial and fashion photography provided a way to improve the visual representation of a specific or typical locale – and that was an area of activity that expanded enormously in France at that time. A company in Paris that developed a significant relationship with Hollywood was Séebergers Frères,

⁴⁶ Robert Vernay, “En bavardant avec Jean de Limur,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (10 May 1929), 240; Florey, *Hollywood d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*, 132-133.

which started work in 1923 on commission for a Hollywood agency that supplied photographs to movie studios for use in designing sets. Over the next several years the company assembled a collection of hundreds of photos of the most diverse scenes of the French capital. “Month after month, they shipped the look of Paris to the United States by boat.” The requests from the Hollywood agency were interesting, given the complaints by French cultural guardians about the Parisian focus of a typical American studio: “by far” most of the photographs contained scenes of cabarets, bars, and dance or music halls,⁴⁷ which may say something about Hollywood’s refusal to abandon certain themes or representations of Paris and France that it found useful in the American domestic market.

In the broader scheme of things, such gestures were anemic in scope and probably did little, except in an isolated case of two, to smooth ruffled feathers in France. In fact, they may have backfired because the experiences of Erté and Leloir in particular easily could have reinforced prevailing impressions in French critical circles. In any case, criticism in that regard did not abate. And if critics could be so aroused by what they saw as distortions of their beloved capital and the nation’s distant past by Americans – and probably just by the mere intrusion of Americans into their history – any mishandling of the *recent* past, such as the experience of World War I, was bound to trigger an angry reaction as well. Vuillermoz, for example, objected stridently in 1926 to an American film that seemed to suggest American troops had won the war by themselves. An inserted newsreel clip featuring scenes of only units of the American Expeditionary Force marching down the Champs-Élysées was particularly offensive. It

⁴⁷ Natasa Durovicova, “France: An Alien Ally,” 47; Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture*, 249-251.

was bad enough that “the Americans write History in this way in America,” he said bitterly, but to “impose that view inside a small Parisian movie house” was intolerable. King Vidor’s *The Big Parade*, which opened a few months later, inevitably ran into difficulty for similar reasons. The film became even more controversial, briefly, when the charge was made in a French court that the studio had produced two versions, one for France and one shown to American audiences that “presented French womanhood in an extremely unfavorable light and showed a French officer at the battlefield trembling with fear and [as] an object of scorn to American soldiers.” That accusation was baseless,⁴⁸ but a French veterans’ association, after seeing a special screening, did object to the impression given by the film that the United States had fought the war alone, so the French army made available clips of its own wartime footage that were spliced into the movie before its release to French theaters. Still, said René Jeanne grumpily, *The Big Parade* was “purely American propaganda” and its implicit message was, “Don’t talk to us anymore about your 1,800,000 dead. We ourselves had dead, too. And pay us what you owe us!,”⁴⁹ an obvious reference to the war debt issue.

French authorities in the 1920s shared the critics’ concern over the negative influence that Hollywood might have on the country’s national image abroad and showed themselves disposed to act. One initiative it announced late in 1924 was that it intended to create a special film department, with sections in its embassies in film-producing countries, that would provide information and materials that would help local producers to create a more faithful representation of French reality. Veber could not resist the opportunity when he heard the news. So, “Messieurs of Los Angeles, you will

⁴⁸ Vuillermoz, “Courrier Cinématographique,” *Le Temps*, 12 June 1926, 4.

⁴⁹ Jeanne, “La grande parade (film américain),” *Le Petit Journal*, 10 Dec. 1926, 4.

not place on the cheeks of the actors portraying *grands seigneurs* of the 18th century geometric moles resembling a convict's tattoo," he said with mordant sarcasm, "and, as soon as you have constructed, out of cardboard in your studios, the Petit Trianon ..., our entire diplomatic corps will cry out: 'Messieurs, attention, the elevator did not exist yet in that blessed epoch . . . [sic].'"⁵⁰

If a film was offensive enough, especially if it painted an unflattering portrait of a national institution, French authorities could take strong action. The film *Beau Geste*, released by Paramount in 1926, is a case in point. Starring Ronald Colman and Noah Beery, the movie tells the story of three brothers who enlist in the French Foreign Legion and face murder and dishonesty on the part of superiors. American reviewers described Beery's character, a sergeant, as "bestial," "despicable," and an "evil genius" – and therein lay the rub. According to Vuillermoz, who may have seen the film abroad, Beery inflicted the "most atrocious tortures" on the brothers, all part of an effort by the film's producers to convey the idea that "French military authority tolerates in Algeria atrocities that would shame a civilized country." The French government banned exhibition of the film in France and French territories, lodged a diplomatic protest in Washington, and persuaded Berlin to pull the film from German screens. "But frankly, gentlemen of American cinematography, how do you expect us to take seriously your protestations of friendship," Vuillermoz wrote, "when we see the manner in which you treat us outside our borders?" The Quai d'Orsay was sufficiently aroused by the trend in Hollywood's apparent indifference to French dignity that the French ambassador in Washington in November 1927 expressed his displeasure to the State Department in that regard and chastised American film producers for giving the American people a

⁵⁰ Veber, "Une Heureuse Idée," *Le Matin*, 7 Nov. 1924, 4.

false image of his country. At the same time, the main French exhibitors' association passed a tart resolution accusing American studios of "deliberately and wantonly" propagating a false view of France and her citizens. "Frenchmen are always shown as villains and French women as vamps," said the resolution. "Furthermore, it is considered false to give the idea that the French people, the French army and French colonial troops are made up of heartless adventurers and escaped convicts and that in the noble Foreign Legion discipline is unknown."⁵¹ The following month Vuillermoz announced that a film producers' committee, at the behest of the French parliament, was drafting a statute that included a proviso making it compulsory for foreign distributors to submit to French censorship the same version of a movie that had been released in the United States.⁵²

Somewhat surprisingly, but because *Beau Geste* had been such a profitable film, American studios decided to exploit further the subject of the Foreign Legion in North Africa. In 1928, therefore, *Plastered in Paris*, a spoof of the Legion, was released – much to the dismay of Fred Herron, director of the foreign department of the Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), the studios' cartel set up at the beginning of the decade. With his eye on the inevitable French reaction, he sharply remonstrated that the Legion was something "you cannot burlesque under any circumstances." To make matters worse, Universal Studios that same year finished production of *The Foreign Legion*, which was in the same vein as *Beau Geste*. Herron was astonished when he saw a pre-release cut. "I don't think it is necessary to tell you

⁵¹ Review of *Beau Geste*, *Variety*, 1 Sept. 1926; Review of *Beau Geste*, *Moving Picture World*, 4 Sept. 1926, both in <http://stanford.edu/~gdegroat/AJ/reviews/bg.htm>; Vuillermoz, "Courrier Cinématographique: Propaganda antifrçais," *Le Matin*, 11 Dec. 1926, 4; *New York Times*, 18 Nov. 1927, 8.

⁵² Vuillermoz, "Courrier Cinématographique: Version Spéciale," *Le Matin*, 9 Dec. 1927, 4.

that if this film is issued with this material in it that you will not only hurt your own company in France,” he wrote to Paramount, “but will hurt the whole American industry throughout the world as a result of the agitation which will follow this.” In this case, the studio bowed to the threat of a backlash and reshot offensive scenes before releasing the film for general and overseas distribution. When Will Hays, head of the MPPDA, traveled to Paris in 1928 to try to head off pressures for the establishment of a quota system for foreign films, “he specifically offered as a bargaining chip the assurance that the American industry would make no films presenting the French in a derogatory light.”⁵³

Cultural nationalists welcomed government intervention in the matter of defending French dignity and national reputation against Hollywood’s distortions and misrepresentations, but what about the area of commercial competition? Why could the government take steps to protect the French film industry from Hollywood’s unfair practices? In posing these questions throughout the decade, critics were arguing that the popularity of films alone was not the reason for American dominance of French screens. Indeed, the structural inadequacies of the French film industry, combined with American trade practices, seemed to doom French production eternally to a position of naked inferiority. The American studio system was a vertically integrated industry, the third most important in the United States. The major studios – a list that ultimately included Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Warner Brothers, Paramount, 20th Century Fox, RKO, Columbia, and Universal – controlled all aspects of production, from the raw materials (directors, actors, scriptwriters, sets) to the assembly line (sound stages and technicians). They also controlled much of the marketing of their product through

⁵³ Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*, 57-58.

publicity departments and ownership of chains of theaters. The initial product (the movie) was extremely costly but duplication (making prints) was inexpensive; since the studios operated in a truly mass-market created by a population that was predominantly urban, they were able to recover in the domestic market their production costs and usually make a profit, all of which meant they could sell or lease prints to overseas exhibitors, say in France, at a price substantially below what a local filmmakers had to demand. By the late 1920s, there were perhaps 4,000 cinemas in France, nearly 70 percent of which were “small, impoverished provincial” establishments that could afford “only the cheapest films,” which meant that they were the “typical customers” for Hollywood products.⁵⁴ American companies, furthermore, by that time owned some of the best theaters in the major urban areas of France. Those houses, of course, would give preference to American films. The French film “industry,” by contrast, never reached the sophisticated stage of development that American studios did. In France there were numerous companies, many of them constituting little more than a cottage industry, and many devoted primarily to the distribution and exhibition of American movies rather than film production itself, and all of them in precarious financial condition.⁵⁵ American studios also enjoyed strong support from the State Department and worked in an atmosphere free of government control in any significant regulation or taxation. French filmmakers, on the other hand, operated in a quasi-mercantilistic atmosphere of archaic laws, governmental censorship, and onerous taxes, all of which proved stifling. Certain trade practices – and here was a bitter grievance – adopted by Hollywood further weakened French competition. The most effective of them was

⁵⁴ Thomas H. Guback, “Hollywood’s International Market,” 463-465; Ulf-Møller, 4-38.

⁵⁵ Rémi Fournier Lanzoni, *French Cinema*, 45.

block-booking, a central feature of domestic distribution in the United States. Producers pressured an exhibitor to lease or rent a block (set number) of films at a fixed price; this meant that the theater owner, in order to secure a major production, or “A” film, had to rent several “B” films as well. For the studio, the advantages were two-fold: the system ensured a market for more cheaply produced films, making them profitable, and those same films occupied screen time and thus hindered competitors.⁵⁶ But in this regard, what weakened the argument of French production companies seeking protective measures from the government was the fact that their output was so numerically limited that French exhibitors needed American films in any case.

Constant discussion of their plight and appeals for official support vis-à-vis the American “invasion” finally led then-Minister of Public Instruction and the Fine Arts, Édouard Herriot, to support the producers in creating the Cinema Control Commission (CCC) in 1927. That body, consisting of thirty-two members, had “autocratic” authority to ban foreign movies deemed unsuitable for showing in France and to enforce a quota system, implanted in March 1928, that mandated that only four foreign films could be imported for every French film exported. Will Hays, head of the MPPDA, embarked for Paris to lead the counter-attack. After prolonged discussions involving the French government, the State Department, the MPPDA, and French producers, the MPPDA, knowing that it had French exhibitors on its side and also that member companies employed several thousand French citizens and were linked to the welfare of thousands more, opted to freeze the sale of films in the French market. With French exhibitors clamoring for film, Herriot and Hays signed an agreement in May that eviscerated the

⁵⁶ Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood's Film Wars with France*, 35-40. On the evolving intimate relationship between Hollywood and the State Department in the 1920s, see John Trumbour, *Selling Hollywood to the World*, 63-71.

quota system insofar as the United States was concerned. France would now issue licenses for the importation of seven foreign films for each French film *produced*, grant to American companies licenses for 60 percent of their sales in 1927 free of any restriction, and cancel the requirement that French films be purchased. Hays, in return, pledged that the MPPDA would ensure that Hollywood's films contained no scenes disrespectful of France or its institutions, and for that purpose the MPPDA would impose self-censorship (the "Hays Code") and would encourage the importation of French films into the United States.⁵⁷

Hollywood had won the battle, temporarily at least because the new arrangement would be renegotiated after one year; but the restrictions on the importation of American films was more than ample for Hollywood to export all it wanted to, especially since the sound era had undermined the marketability of silent features. Furthermore, the two-month debate in Paris had revealed that the MPDDA had a powerful negotiating weapon in the deep cleavage between French producers and exhibitors momentarily reduced sales of silent features. The 1928 clash was but a warm-up for the battle that ensued the following year. As the expiration date drew near and the French producers' syndicate demanded a reduction of imported American films to three for every French film produced, the MPPDA, with the full moral and diplomatic support of the State Department, announced on April 10, 1929, that all American film companies once more were suspending operations in France. Basically, Hollywood had decided to let French exhibitors serve as its shock troops. Some 2,000 exhibitors descended on Nice to debate the crisis and then sent a petition to Paris urging abandonment of import restrictions on American movies. A similar conference at Bordeaux in June produced

⁵⁷ Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood's Film Wars with France*, 85-104.

the same initiative, except that Bordeaux petition went to all members of both house of parliament and declared that 100,000 employees faced unemployment because of a small number of French film producers. In September the government conceded defeat again by extending the Hay-Herriot agreement of 1928 until October 1, 1930, and stipulating that if a mutually satisfactory agreement between the MPPDA and the CCC on issues of contention were not reached before May 1, 1930, the arrangement would be extended for another year.⁵⁸

For all practical purposes, the notion of restricting imports from Hollywood through a quota system was now dead. French film producers remained as badly fragmented and capital-starved as ever, the government obviously would not give them meaningful support – and Hollywood continued to prevail in French movie houses. Cultural nationalists were in anguish. Their own ambassador in Washington would shortly hint at what expanding American influence spelled. “Silent . . . films have so thoroughly familiarized the French mind with American methods and manners that every aspect of social and economic life in the United States is excitedly discussed, even in the most provincial cities,” said Ambassador Paul Claudel. “American gasoline and American ideas circulate all over France. . . .”⁵⁹ And meanwhile the sound era, like spring, was breaking out all over.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, 108-112.

⁵⁹ Ambassador Paul Claudel, speech, *Le Journal* (Paris), 17 Feb. 1930, in John E. Harley, *World-Wide Influences of the Cinema*, 2.

CHAPTER 4: SOUND AND FURY

The advent of sound in the motion picture industry – the so-called “talkies” – more or less coincided with the onset of the global economic crisis and made the competition for screen time all the more intense. Not only was Hollywood facing declining domestic revenues as unemployment spread across the United States – by 1934 both Paramount and RKO had been forced into receivership – but English spoken on the screen threatened to raise perhaps insurmountable difficulties in foreign markets. Hollywood initially sought to resolve the problem by making its own foreign language versions of films, a decision that resulted, in the case of France, in production both in California and Paris. In practice this meant many times that, as soon as a scene was shot with American actors, a new cast consisting of native speakers of the foreign language would perform the same scene. The studios now scrambled to find French professionals, using some already under contract or recruiting new ones, which set in motion another small trans-Atlantic migration of migration of French movie personnel to the United States. Sound threw film production everywhere into confusion; Hollywood recovered quickly and launched an almost overnight across-the-board conversion program. The disorganized, under-capitalized French system responded with less speed and confidence and, as it moved unsteadily forward with little cohesion, French intellectuals warned of the even more dire threat to national culture posed by the English language. Sound, however, turned out to be, if not the salvation of the French

film industry,¹ at least an innovation that created greater and permanent space for it, even though it remained mired in financial difficulties throughout the 1930s. As French culture managed to survive the “talkies” scare and improve France’s relative position vis-à-vis Hollywood in the domestic market, critics in Paris, while not abandoning their core views of the content of American movies, smoothed the edges of their criticism somewhat. Hollywood remained a symbol of a way of life they could not embrace fully, but the activities of American studios no longer seemed to cause bitter resentment. They welcomed, moreover, a systematic improvement in the technical quality of Hollywood’s product, encouraged with their publicity the trans-Atlantic exchange of personalities, and monitored carefully the situation of new French film personnel in the United States – frontline warriors in the ongoing clash of culture.

The sound era hit the French film community with hurricane force. Warner Brothers’s epoch-making *The Jazz Singer* did not play in Paris until January 1928 – and after it did, life was never the same. The film itself enjoyed an exclusive eleven-month run at the Aubert-Palace, one of the city’s first sound-equipped houses, breaking all attendance records there. In a broader sense, the arrival of sound, which coincided with the onset of the Great Depression, unleashed confusion within the French film community. While some intellectuals debated sagely whether sound was a fad or wave of the future, or if a hybrid sound-silent system might emerge in which theaters would specialize in one or the other, fly-by-night production units hastily slapped together a “sound film,” which were usually silent films to which they added a few seconds of sound, and rushed them into theaters to meet the sudden demand. All of this

¹ Jacques Choukroun, *Comment le parlant a sauvé le cinéma français, passim*.

undermined the credibility of the national product, as film critics often lamented, and enhanced the prestige of American movies. It was not until November 1929 that the first bona fide French-produced all-talkie was ready for exhibition and, although the French film industry had finally reached the conclusion that the era of silent movies had passed, production would remain limited. Indeed, the ensuing years would be difficult ones for the industry as internal conditions, especially the increasing shortage of credit, militated against the kind of financial stability necessary to put French film production on a sound, self-sustaining basis. Scores of under-capitalized new companies continued to spring up in the early 1930s, hoping to capitalize on the sound craze, but just as quickly most of them disappeared. Some 136 new firms were set up in 1933, only nine of which had an operating capital of over Fr\$100,000.00; almost 65 percent had less than Fr\$50,000 on hand with which to start production.² Renovation and wiring for sound of one theater alone, the Gaumont-Palace, admittedly an upscale establishment, cost Fr\$41 million. Facing extraordinary expense in converting to sound exhibition and unable to get sufficient or publicly tolerable product, movie houses closed by the hundreds – 435 in 1933-34.³ France had never been able to develop an integrated film industry or studio system; its equivalent of a Hollywood was a handful of companies that endeavored to expand into production, distribution, and exhibition, acquiring such debt in the process that it crushed them during the early sound era. The two largest, Gaumont and Natan-Pathé, were semi-vertically integrated corporations, without the financial stamina to survive. Bernard Natan was the closest thing France had to a Louis B. Mayer, the legendary head of MGM. Natan personally tried to play the role, his

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studio was the most productive, it attracted top French directors, and hired France's leading actors and actresses, but none were under long-term contract *à l'américaine*. Gaumont folded completely in 1934 and Natan-Pathé followed suit the next year, with Natan facing several years in prison for embezzlement.⁴ France would continue to make films, a handful of them critically acclaimed, but box-office failure was common and almost all of them would be produced by small units that faced often grave financial difficulties. Louise Brooks's experience at the outset of the sound era offers revealing insight in that regard. Armed with a signed contract, she showed up in Paris in 1929 expecting to star in a film directed by René Clair, who was on his way to becoming internationally acclaimed. The very first time she talked to Clair, he recommended that she return immediately to the United States. The production company did not even have the money to *start* the film, much less complete it, he explained, and he himself was abandoning the project.⁵

The overall structural strength of the American film industry was so superior in every way that it still could maintain a profitable overseas business in almost any circumstances, although there was a broad decline in the 1930s as a result of foreign governmental intervention. The inability of the French film industry to compete effectively on its own, in the sense at least of ever replacing Hollywood as the major supplier to the national market, remained patent. The fundamental reality was that, still essentially artisanal and consisting of many small production companies, it lacked the funds to produce the kinds of technically sophisticated motion pictures needed to compete with American studios. French films thus had "a general air of clumsiness and

⁴ Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema, 1930-1960*, 26-32.

⁵ Barry Paris, *Louise Brooks*, 316-317.

amateurishness” that only enhanced the appeal of more technically sophisticated American films.⁶ Overall, the United States supplied half of the films shown in French theaters during the 1930s.

Film producers, joined by cultural nationalists in general, blamed the weaknesses of the French film industry on Hollywood’s domineering practices and appealed for State intervention to save domestic production by restricting imports of American movies – in other words, they wanted the Government to force exhibitors to show French films, whether good or bad, whether they pleased popular audiences or not. The French government, however, did not provide the protection sought. The issue therefore lingered on through the decade, generating continual debate within the French film community between producers and exhibitors, between it and Hollywood spokesmen, and at the diplomatic level. The result was a perpetual state of uneasiness and uncertainty, on both sides of the argument, during which Hollywood continued to dominate French screens, while French producers maneuvered and improvised as best they could in order to turn out movies.⁷ The one area in which they scored a triumph, a culturally symbolic one, was in the area of the dubbing of foreign-language films. The reaction of French cultural nationalists to the reinvigorated challenge from Hollywood in the 1930s remained part of the elite’s response to American society in general. Indeed, the broad trans-Atlantic cultural debate of the 1920s continued in full force as the new decade opened. In fact, an opinion survey conducted by *Le Figaro* at the end of 1930 contributed to the ongoing discussion. Beginning in mid-November, that daily ran a series of articles over a period of weeks in the form of responses to a

⁶ Crisp, *Classic French Cinema*, 2-5, 40-41.

⁷ Jens Ulf-Møller, *Hollywood’s Film Wars with France*, 116-113.

questionnaire under the title: “For or Against American Civilization.” The wording of the first question it posed to numerous intellectuals indicated how the paper expected the discussion to go: “Does American civilization constitute, for *true culture* [italics added], a dangerous menace and does it not risk leading the world toward bankruptcy of the high thought and generous sentiments that would end up . . . in a failure of man himself?”

The fifth and final question was equally as loaded: “To resist that political and intellectual imperialism, what remedies do you suggest that will fit in with Europe’s present conditions?” The replies varied, but there were the expected ones. American culture? a member of the Académie Française scoffed. “I abhor it because I am Latin, an individualist, a free man” The United States could point to the “practical advantages of Fordism and Taylorism,” another writer commented, but the “narcotic effects” of those phenomena could be overlooked, so it had “little chance of converting us to a gospel that corresponds neither to our possibilities or our intrinsic mentality.” Another saw a “contradiction” in the term “Yankee civilization” because the United States lacked, he thought, the spiritual and moral attributes of a civilized country. “I call a civilized people one that drinks wine,” he explained. “Because it communicates in that way with the primary forces of the earth [. . .] and *cultivates* them. By knowing how to recognize, discriminate [among] and savor the delicate or sublime thoughts they inspire. Art and nature unite harmoniously and sensibly in it [i.e., such a people].” A fourth respondent agreed fully. “I see only one way of escaping . . . ‘American civilization’ [and] that is by reinforcing our national spirit,” he affirmed. “We are not the number, the quantity, the assembly-line; we are individuality, [and] quality.” Others seemed equally as resistant and skeptical. “I have not been to America, I am not at all tempted to go,”

said a novelist-historian. “The idea of a twenty-story building and, even more, the tendency to judge people by how much money they earn, horrify me.” It was, of course, in the United States that “industrial civilization has developed without moderation,” another observer wrote months later, and the result of that “reign of machines in America has produced, without doubt, flawed moral equilibrium, without doubt, a lack of social harmony, without doubt a desensitization of man. . . .”⁸

Exactly, said the film critics. All of that and more – shallowness, a mechanical nature, standardized behavior, crowd mentality, lack of creativity and refinement – was precisely what was reflected in Hollywood movies, America’s most influential cultural export. Since the studio system reached its final form in the 1930s, the chorus of complaints and criticisms heard in the previous decade continued unabated. France fortunately did not have a “factory of ideas,” such as Hollywood possessed, said Boisyvon, the critic for *L’Intransigeant*, nor did it have a self-censorship such as that of the Hays Office, which intended to impose a standardized morality on movie producers, eliminating more challenging, mature, adult themes. “I personally fear only one thing,” he wrote sarcastically, “and it’s that we become too virtuous.” Well, American movies remain aimed at the masses, a recently returned traveler noted in a front-page article for *Le Matin* in 1931. “That fact explains . . . the gross naïveté of many American films Their action must seduce immediately the simplest of souls” A writer for *Pour Vous* in 1932 watched a Chester Morris film about a football player who gets involved a series of misadventures. “If such a story were shown us without art or ambition,” he

⁸ René Puaux, Jean Cassou, Jacques Boulenger, Émile Baumann, quoted in *Le Figaro*, 30 Nov. 1930, 3 Dec. 1930, 21 Dec. 1930, 31 Jan. 1931, all p. 5; Eugène Marsan, “Le Règne des Machines et l’Humanisme,” *Le Figaro*, 5 April 1931, 5.

said, “it would be a question of saving oneself after hanging the director or smashing everything in the theater.” The pace of the film, however, was good and that held the audience’s attention. Reviewing the film *Frankenstein*, another critic marveled at the disturbing impact of the scenes, which somehow had escaped the “Puritanism” of American censors. Audiences in the United States accepted the “most childish stories,” whereas in France, he implied, “even a child would rail at the lack of believability.”⁹ Words such as *idiotic*, *imbecilic*, *ridiculous*, *infantile*, *silliness*, *puerile*, *banality*, or variations of them, pepper reviews of other Hollywood films in the early 1930s.

Vuillermoz started the sound era where he left off: contrasting Hollywood’s “terribly commercialized” films and screenplays “born in the standardized imagination of the proud industrialists of Hollywood” with the “sensitivity and intelligence” of a good French film.¹⁰ Reviewing *The Jazz Singer*, he said that film was full of “Americanisms that make us smile” – among them, the “childishness of the psychology [and] the simplification of feelings.” In a column the following year, titled “The Demagogic Esthetic,” he described watching an American film in an upscale boulevard theater. The audience accompanied with interest the “absurd incidents” and “violent episodes,” but then suddenly there was a tender, romantic, moonlight scene that interrupted the action for no logical purpose. Stunned by the incongruity, the audience grew indignant and then began whistling loudly, the time-honored Parisian gesture of disapproval. A film

⁹ Boisyvon, “La discussion qui sert à quelque chose,” “M.Hays établit un code de la moralité,” *L’Intransigeant*, 11 Jan., 26 April 1930, 4, 8; Robert Spa., “Parmi les nouveaux films de la semaine: *Corsair*,” *Pour Vous*, 194 (4 Aug. 1932), 8; Paul Brach, “À propos de *Frankenstein*,” *Le Petit Journal*, 21 June 1935, 6; André Long, “Au Cinéma,” *La Femme de France*, 23 March, 2 June 1930, 22; Jacques Vivien, “Critique Cinématographique,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 25 April 1930, 5; F. [sic], “Les Films de la Semaine,” *L’Intransigeant*, 22 Aug. 1931, 5; J. M., “À propos de ‘Cœurs Brûlés’ . . .,” *L’Intransigeant*, 29 Aug. 1931, 6; A[line]. B[ourgoin]., “On a présenté . . . [sic]: *Hors du Gouffre*,” *L’Intransigeant*, 12 Sep. 1931, 5; A. R. M. [sic], “Les Films de la Semaine: *The Last Parade*,” *L’Intransigeant*, 26 Dec. 1931, 6.

¹⁰ Vuillermoz, “Chronique Cinématographique: Prospection,” *Le Temps*, 7 Dec. 1929, 6.

with Clark Gable and Joan Crawford that he saw in 1932, one based on a script of “disarming puerility,” attempted greater character development than usual, something other recent films had also sought – and the critic was irate. “They try to make a psychological film!” he exclaimed. “But what psychological films! Their total lack of a critical sense leads them to commit new stupidities” – and then, he said in astonishment, they have the “audacity to export it to the Old World!” One of his most interesting columns, because of what it reveals about his deep-rooted anti-American bias, appeared in 1933 in which he discussed gangster films. “How is it possible that in 1933 a nation, which has the pretension of wanting to impose its convictions and customs on the entire world, confesses so ingenuously its intellectual mediocrity and its silliness?” he asked. The gangster genre, he thought, merely showed the excesses to which America’s “cult of brutality” and “respect for the law of the stronger” could lead. The Paul Muni film *Scarface*, he continued, reflected the “stupefying naiveté” of the United States in revealing the “instability of its morals, the disorder in its legislation, . . . and the monstrous ferocity of its penitentiary administration.” What seems to have been a visceral antagonism toward the United States thus led him to overlook the fundamental point: in Hollywood films, the criminal always ended up being punished, which thus reinforced the fundamental sense of morality underlying them. Vuillermoz, however, saw in mere *depiction* of underworld characters on the screen an endorsement of their behavior by American society. One of the fundamental criticisms that he made of the gangster films was, of course, the familiar one that Hollywood repeated themes over and over, with little regard for originality, so long as they produced a profit. “America is speaking to us,” he said with sarcasm in a 1934 review.

“She always has the same language and the same style, the same qualities and the same defects.”¹¹ His colleague, Veber of *Le Matin*, stood side by side with Vuillermoz throughout the decade, echoing his criticisms and those of other French observers: “The American mentality is not similar to ours;” Hollywood “standardized” everything, including female beauty; American studios loved genre ruts and stayed in them; producers dictated the creative process in Hollywood; a scriptwriter there “works in a factory” because “according to American logic” even imagination “should be standardized” – and the average Hollywood producer or director was single-mindedly focused on the box office and ignorant regarding art, poetry, or literature. In a column in August 1937, he told readers, insisting that the story was true, that a Hollywood studio had written to the publishers of a “recent” book by William Makepeace Thackeray (who had died in the mid-19th century) asking them to relay congratulations to the author and to tell him that the studio was interested in purchasing the screen rights to the story.¹² It represented the kind of story that French critics clearly wanted to believe about Hollywood movie-makers, not only, presumably, because it reinforced their sense of cultural superiority, but because it jibed with Hollywood’s casual disregard for strict accuracy in basing scripts on literary works.

The theme of an American threat to French culture took on new life with the advent of sound because that technological breakthrough raised the vital issue of language. It was one thing to dominate screen time and to present themes and

¹¹ Vuillermoz, “Chronique Cinématographique: Une expérience,” *Le Temps*, 2 Feb. 1929, 6; “Le Cinéma: L’esthétique démagogique,” 9 Aug. 1930, 4; “Le Cinéma: Programme américain,” 30 July 1932, 4; “Scénarios américains,” 25 Feb. 1933, 5; “Le Cinéma: ‘Serenade’ . . .,” 20 July 1935, 6.

¹² “True or not,” Pierre Gilles-Veber, “Grosse Caisse,” *Le Matin*, 14 Aug. 1931, 4, “Les trois blondes,” 2 Nov. 1934, 4; “Une série nouvelle,” 11 Sept. 1936, 4, “Le directeur de production,” 12 Feb. 1937, 4; “Brain Trust,” 26 March 1937, 4; “Convoquez Shakespeare!,” 20 Aug. 1937, 4.

customs that might influence French audiences; the careful use of subtitles in French might counteract some of the impact in that regard. But it was quite another thing to contemplate a situation in which the French public might be bombarded by spoken English. Language lies at the very core of nationhood, French cultural nationalists therefore understandably were disconcerted, and many couched their warnings in almost cataclysmic terms. A critic initially might jest – “Now we’ve got to learn English as soon as possible,” wrote one after seeing his first talkie in July 1929 – but most saw at least a long-range threat, others saw a more immediate one. The sudden interest in English-language phonograph records, especially the songs from recent movies, represented the handwriting on the wall, in their eyes. In October *Ciné-Magazine*, a leading trade publication, announced that it was starting a section on recorded music from films and that records of the songs that Maurice Chevalier had sung in his first Hollywood film were already available; Columbia Records, moreover, had songs from other films available. A few weeks later the publication told readers that they could purchase recordings of songs from *Broadway Melody* and that Al Jolson’s from *The Jazz Singer* were also in stores.¹³

The government and film industry must act now – that was the conclusion of the ardent defenders of French cultural identity. The editor of *L’Intransigeant*, who normally would not concern himself with the cinema, made the perceived threat the subject of a front-page editorial in October 1929. The nation must insist that talkies be spoken in French, he declared. “It’s a question of defending the French mentality and French thought against a true invasion.” As French filmmakers hesitantly moved into the

¹³ Maurice Huet, “Mon premier 100/100 . . . [sic],” *Le Petit Parisien*, 25 Oct. 1929, 5; Cecil C. Blay, “Phono-Magazine,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (25 Oct. 1929), 145; Maurice Hex, “Phonomagazine,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (Dec. 1929), 378-79.

production of *films parlants*, other observers urged them on. “The American film, dangerous when silent, has become a great deal more dangerous since it was endowed with the spoken word . . . ,” said one in 1930. “It is not a matter of saving an industry, it is a matter of . . . safeguarding our national mentality, which is threatened within our own country.” Even as things settled down a bit and some counter-measures were in place, Vuillermoz continued to sound the alarm about the renewed menace posed by the Americans. “They are a race of an animality that is both splendid and frightening,” he exclaimed. “They would present no danger if they contented themselves with bounding about in their native jungle. But their ambition is to conquer the Old World . . . ,” he cautioned. “In these conditions, all the intellectual forces of Europe must join together to fight against this invasion.”¹⁴

The California studios at first confronted the language issue in an apparently confused way, adopting whatever expedient seemed likely to keep products on the store shelves in France. To clear out inventories of silent films, they hastily attached some recorded sounds to them and shipped them; they sent complete, original English-language talkies to which subtitles were added, as they had been in the era of the silents; they supplied versions with all spoken English suppressed, but other sounds retained; and in the case of musicals, they sold versions with songs, but not dialogue, audible. None of these were satisfactory or could be a viable long-term solution, and studio heads knew that. The matter was crucial because obviously not only the French market was involved; Hollywood operated globally and derived about 40 percent of its profits from overseas sales. Cultural nationalists everywhere, not just in France, were

¹⁴ Leon Bailby, “Les Films Parlants,” *L’Intransigeant*, 24 Oct. 1929, 1; Jean Benoit-Levy, “Le film de chez-nous,” *Ciné-Magazine* 10 Oct. 1930, 19; Vuillermoz, “Scénarios américains,” *Le Temps*, 25 Feb. 1933, 5.

rebelling against the perceived threat to national culture posed by the English-language talkies. There seemed to be only two ways of solving the problem: production of movies in the major foreign languages or the subtitling of all American movies.

What appealed most to the studios at first was the possibility of producing their own talkies in French and other languages. That required an effort to sell the idea abroad that American movies had universal appeal, an effort that Hollywood officials and publicists made, and it required a studio-within-a-studio, so to speak, a foreign-language unit within an American studio. This, in turn, required the recruitment of actors and directors in various foreign countries, and Hollywood had already begun that process years earlier. Paramount took the lead in this program, followed closely by MGM and Universal. In Paramount's case, the productive focus was two-fold: the United States (New York and Hollywood) and France itself, where the corporation acquired and modernized the existing studio at Joinville, outside Paris.¹⁵ The procedure adopted for shooting films was simple, but arduous for many of the actors involved. A director would shoot a scene with American actors, and a different cast consisting of native speakers stood in the wings, as it were, waiting its turn. A satisfactory take in English completed, the American actors (and sometimes the director) would file off and the "native" actors, those playing speaking parts, would go before the cameras. That process would be repeated as often as the number of foreign-language versions required. At the beginning the same film was typically shot in French, Spanish, German, and Swedish, if not additional languages. The plan adopted, the studios now scrambled to find French professionals, using some already under contract or recruiting

¹⁵ See Natasa Durovicova, "Translating America: The Hollywood Multilinguals, 1929-1933"; Harry Waldman, *Paramount in Paris*.

new ones, which set in motion another small trans-Atlantic migration of French directors, writers, and actors to the United States. The new wave of French movie people would face multiple problems in the United States. They were being brought over to make films in their own language, so proficiency in English was not absolutely indispensable. For those hoping to extend their stay, however, especially after Hollywood abandoned the goal of making its own foreign-language films, knowledge of English was essential. And to weather the culture shock successfully, they would have to clear a perhaps even more formidable barrier: the markedly different behavior required by the Hollywood studio system. The careers of some would flourish; those of others would never reach the take-off stage.

The two most successful French actors among the new generation of transplants were Maurice Chevalier and Charles Boyer. Paramount's first big target was Maurice Chevalier, France's most popular song-and-dance man and headliner at the Casino de Paris, as well as a minor "star" of a handful of French films. Jesse Lasky went to Paris in the fall of 1928 to sign him, apparently intending to use him in just French-language films, but discovered that his English was probably good enough to use in a regular movie. The contract called for Chevalier, who was nearing forty years of age, to make one film, subsequently named *Innocents of Paris*, for a salary of \$3,000.00 a week for one month, plus supplementary payments raising the total to \$27,000.00; one clause gave Paramount the option to use him in a second film. "It's a door opening for me that can lead to the absolute top of the sky," he exclaimed to his wife on showing her the contract.¹⁶ The reception he received in the United States seemingly confirmed that

¹⁶ Unsigned memo, "Summary of Estimated Costs," *Innocents of Paris* General Files, Paramount Studio Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; Maurice Chevalier,

promise. Telegrams of congratulations and welcome, from Douglas Fairbanks among others, reached him at sea, and the Paramount publicity agents gave him the fullest possible promotion when he reached New York. They sent a tender loaded with “more than fifty” newspapermen and photographers out to meet his ship before it docked in New York harbor – “I felt I had been captured in the midst of a combat assault,” he later wrote of that “spinning melee” aboard his ship as he met the reporters, while “photographers grabbed my arms and legs” – arranged further interviews and an appearance at the Ziegfeld Follies over the next few days, and the studio had Robert Florey make a short talkie, *Un dimanche à New-York (A Sunday in New York)*, showing Chevalier sightseeing and addressing the French public. The festival continued when his train pulled into Pasadena after a five-day trip across country: Paramount executives, Hollywood stars, French émigrés, French consular representatives, and city officials awaited him and, as he stepped off the train, a band burst into *La Marseillaise*. “With the French national anthem blaring in my ears, as if I were a war hero approaching the Arc de Triomphe,” he remembered, “I stepped onto the station platform to face Hollywood.” Adolph Zukor, the Paramount chairman, subsequently gave a banquet for 200 people in Chevalier’s honor; Fairbanks and Chaplin spoke, and, to everybody’s delight, Chevalier entertained them with song.¹⁷

A week into filming of *Innocents of Paris*, studio executives liked the first rushes so much that they told Chevalier that they were picking up the option on his contract. Chevalier was comfortable with the character he played since he was of modest origins

With Love, 225. See Martine Danan, “The Studio, the Star and International Audiences: Paramount and Chevalier,” 53-56 for further information on Chevalier’s experiences at Paramount in the early 1930s.

¹⁷ Chevalier, *With Love*, 230-231; Robert Florey, *Hollywood d’hier et d’aujourd’hui*; “Echos – Accueil,” *Le Matin*, 16 Nov. 1928, 4.

himself and his professional career in France had been based on a “common man” image and good-humored nonchalance. In the low-budget film, he plays a junkman with a singing voice who saves a baby from drowning, falls in love with the infant’s aunt (“Louise”), and subsequently gives up an entertainment career to live happily ever after with her as a working man. One of the songs he sang in the film was titled *Louise* and, at a preview of the movie in downtown Los Angeles, the audience broke into applause when he finished singing it. Adolphe Menjou attended the screening and was enthusiastic. “You are going to be the greatest French success America will ever see!,” he told Chevalier. As the actor prepared to leave for New York on a month-long combined publicity tour and personal-appearance show at the Ziegfeld Roof with Paul Whiteman’s band, famed director Ernst Lubitsch stopped him at the studio and told him that he would be playing a prince in his second film, which he, Lubitsch, would direct. The movie was not a particularly good one, but Chevalier met with almost universal applause when it opened in the spring of 1929. Film critic Mordaunt Hall of the *New York Times* attended the premiere in New York and then wrote that the Frenchman was an “excellent actor” who had “a delightful sense of humor,” was the “whole show” of what was a mediocre movie, and that he had “won the hearts” of the audience at its premiere there. The reaction in France to *La Chanson de Paris*, as *Innocents* was titled there, was extraordinary: it broke all records during its exclusive run at the Paramount theater in Paris, playing to a packed house for eight weeks; the Gaumont Palace, now remodeled for sound, picked *Chanson* up for its inaugural program. The movie did solid business in other countries as well, the song *Louise* became an international hit, and Chevalier went home on vacation to a national hero’s welcome. As he prepared one

evening to give a stage performance in Paris, a telegram reached his dressing room.

“You are sitting on top of the world, Maurice” read Lubitsch’s message.¹⁸

Chevalier’s second film, *Love Parade*, was a step up in every way: he received a salary increase of \$500.00 a week for five weeks and made a total of \$31,500.00; the director was Lubitsch; his co-star, a young redhead named Jeanette MacDonald, although a newcomer to movies, enhanced the level of acting and would go on to become an international star herself; and he played a nobleman. The movie opens with somebody leafing through a Paris magazine showing scantily clad women as the credits roll over the screen; then can-can dancers are shown dancing between two giant champagne bottles as “Paris” flashes several times at the top of the screen. Count Stéphane Renard, Chevalier’s character, is the military attaché of Sylvania in Paris, where he leads the life of a romantic freebooter, a playboy *par excellence*, who is even having an affair with his ambassador’s wife; that situation sets the stage for his recall to Sylvania, where he will end up marrying the queen. The dialogue is full of sexual innuendo and representation – when the husband of his married lover in the opening scenes cannot zip up her dress, she flounces over to Chevalier who does it expertly, the kind of scene that, had the movie been made after enactment of the 1934 Code by the MPPDA, would not have passed censorship. Hall, the *New York Times* film critic, had good-naturedly referred to Chevalier’s English in his review of *Innocents of Paris*. “His pronunciation of English is fascinating,” Hall had written, “and sometimes his utterances are almost confusing.” The same held true for *Love Parade*: when Chevalier sings a

¹⁸ Chevalier, *With Love*, 234-242; Charles Rearick, *The French in Love and War*, 132-134; Mordaunt Hall, review of *Innocents of Paris*, *New York Times*, 27 April 1929, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9507E0DB1530E33ABC4F51DFB2668382639EDE>; Jean de Mirbel, “Maurice Chevalier et *La Chanson de Paris*,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (11 Oct. 1929), 47.

farewell song to Paris a few minutes into the film, he is practically unintelligible. The movie, nonetheless, was such a smash hit that Paramount, he said, “tore up my contract and tripled my salary” – the studio raised it to \$100,000.00, to be exact – and Chevalier was now a major leaguer in every sense. “We traveled constantly back and forth between Hollywood, New York, and the Continent,” he wrote of those heady days. “Everywhere we went it was the same thing: ovations, receptions, crowds, and autograph hunters.”¹⁹

Chevalier starred in one other feature film that year, *The Big Pond*, which Paramount made as a dual-language film. Lily Chaucoin, known to American audiences as Claudette Colbert, had been born in Paris, but moved to the United States as a child. She was fluent in French and formed a bilingual duo with Chevalier to make both versions of *The Big Pond* (*La grande mare*) and of a second film the following year, *The Smiling Lieutenant* (*Le lieutenant souriant*). The two actors shot the English-language versions and then stayed on the set for the French ones. Chevalier’s stock continued to soar: not only was he popular with audiences everywhere, but when the Academy Award nominations for 1930 were announced, his name was on the list for Best Actor for not one film, but two – *Love Parade* and *The Big Pond*. Although he did not realize it then, however, Chevalier’s days in Hollywood were numbered. He had not gotten along all that well with Jeanette MacDonald during filming of *Love Parade*, although they were friendly. Rumor had it that she had resisted his advances, but whatever the reason, when Paramount insisted that he play an urbane Parisian

¹⁹ *Love Parade* General Files, Paramount Studio Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; *The Love Parade* (1929), author’s copy; Edward B. Turk, *Hollywood Diva: A Biography of Jeanette MacDonald*, 78-83; Maurice Chevalier, *Man in the Straw Hat*, 199 (see, too, *With Love*, 243).

physician opposite her in *One Hour With You* in 1931, he had no choice but to agree, but was not pleased. The film was a success, the *New York Times* put it on its Top Ten list for the year, and it received an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture, so Chevalier's career seemingly only benefited from his screen association with MacDonald.²⁰ But his decision to leave Paramount and sign a long-term contract with MGM undoubtedly stemmed in part from his disgruntlement at having his objections ignored.

It was, consequently, a major disappointment when, after agreeing that his first film for the studio would be the operetta *The Merry Widow*, which Lubitsch would direct on loan from Paramount, he urged that his friend Grace Allen be given the female lead only to have both the director and producer Irving Thalberg reject his suggestion and impose MacDonald. The matter did not end quietly behind closed doors. When the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Chevalier was bitterly opposed to co-starring with MacDonald, Lubitsch was outraged and gave an intemperate interview taking Chevalier to task, which prompted a public rebuke from Thalberg. Chevalier was gentlemanly and professional in his response to the quarrel, the matter was laid to rest – but the actor did not forget it. The musical, the most expensive that MGM had ever made to that point, was a costume period piece, expectedly saucy enough, with Lubitsch in the director's chair, to have problems with the Production Code, and it brought acclaim to the stars. All of this occurred during a broad period in which Chevalier's beloved mother died, he and his wife divorced, and life in Hollywood was taking a personal toll. One of the positive results to come out of the period was a close friendship with fellow actor Charles Boyer, who was himself carving out an extraordinary career in Hollywood.

²⁰ Chevalier, *With Love*, 249-250; Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 83-88; Emanuel Levy, *And the Winner Is*, 16.

Boyer's background had been in theater before he embarked on a film career, he was cultured, well-read, and a thoroughly decent person. He took Chevalier under his wing, introducing him to the world of books, a development that Chevalier exploited in the best sense of the word. As a consequence of his personal turmoil and his dissatisfaction with being subservient at the studio and having to play repeatedly in the same kind of film, he dug in his heels. When Thalberg told him that on his next project, the female lead on loan from Columbia needed to have top billing, which would violate his own contract, Chevalier refused and walked away from his Hollywood career. That was in 1935. On his last evening in Hollywood, he had dinner with friends, among them the actress Kay Francis. "You'll never come back, Maurice," she said to him. "I know it," he replied.²¹ As it turned out, both were wrong; but the star did not return for twenty-three years.

Boyer's screen presence, talent, professional dedication – and romance with Hollywood – opened up the possibility of a long-term career, although neither he nor American movie producers knew that at first. When he arrived in 1930, he later said, he knew enough English to play tennis and drive a car. But he plunged systematically into studying English, even hiring an instructor who accompanied him throughout the day to force him to speak it. His fellow expatriates were impressed and one, André Berley, told a reporter in France that Boyer in just a few weeks was speaking English with "stupefying ease." The Americans, he predicted, were going to make him a star. Boyer's initial stay under contract with Fox lasted seven months; during that time, he made two French-language films and MGM, struck by his screen personality and his work ethic, also gave him a small role in a regular production, *The Magnificent Lie*,

²¹ Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 140-150; Chevalier, *With Love*, 266-269.

which starred Ruth Chatterton, and wanted him back for additional projects. Returning to Paris for vacation and to make a film in Germany, he impressed an interviewer as an “English-learning machine.” His wife-to-be was English and he planned to spend a month there, he said, and would take along an English instructor whose assignment was to prevent him from speaking any French at all. “Returning to America, I want to be ready to make English-language films,” he explained. “Artistically and financially, that is extremely interesting.” He went on to say that he “loved” living in California.

“Hollywood, it’s the well-organized work, it’s the technicians who know how to film, the directors who know how to direct a scene,” he said. “It’s the sun that is never lacking on an outing. What else? Men who are all handsome (what competition!), charming women, among whom one meets from time to time a beautiful creature like Joan Crawford or Greta Garbo. It’s a country where one makes money, where luxury cars are purchased for bread crumbs”²² The actor obviously had been smitten and intended to pursue the affair. “Boyer entered the game, accepted its rules, stayed at the table, and found a way to come out on top year after year,” a prominent film historian recently has written.²³ He returned to Hollywood and resumed making movies, not only “French talkies,” but, as a welcome member of the broader film community, increasingly English-language ones. Language remained a problem for a while, but it was not a barrier to assignments. An experience while making *Private Lives* with Colbert in 1935 helped him clear a fundamental hurdle. Friction with director Gregory La Cava, who irritated Boyer by continually mispronouncing his name, boiled over one day when La

²² Larry Swindell, *Charles Boyer: The Reluctant Lover*, 38-41; Dominique Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 105; Claude Doré, “Hollywood ne m’a pas fait maigrir, déclare André Berley,” *Ciné-Miroir*, 8 May 1931, 303; Doré, “Un acteur étonnant, un ami délicieux,” *Ciné-Miroir*, 21 Aug. 1931, 540.

²³ Jeanine Basinger, *The Star Machine*, 377.

Cava, after reshooting a scene several times, stopped and asked Boyer what language he *thought* in. “But I must think in French . . . [sic] because I *am* French,” the puzzled actor replied. The director then told him that it was “asinine” to think in French while trying to speak English. ““Miss Colbert is also French and can speak it very well, but ask her how she *thinks*,”” he told Boyer. “The actor reflected a moment and realized that La Cava might have something.” He would often cite it as his most important breakthrough, without which he could not have met the competition in English-speaking films. Boyer’s pronunciation improved, but he spoke English with a strong accent that became his “trademark” and ultimately a professional advantage in Hollywood, although, according to a French film historian, it made informed French audiences “snigger” to hear him speak English.²⁴

The whole question of casting, nationality, and language skills created anomalous situations. Boyer and Colbert were teamed up again on the light comedy *Tovarich* in 1937, an experience that reflected Hollywood’s penchant for well-intentioned, casual disregard for national sensitivities. They played exiled Russian nobility working as servants for a French family. As the family, the studio cast Basil Rathbone and two other British actors who used “impeccable English speech” in the film. Boyer at first was incredulous when offered the role. “He is a Russian, and I am French!” he exclaimed. “Furthermore, they are in Paris. It would be idiotic for me to play a Russian around people who are supposed to be French.” He relented and made the film. “But there was the Frenchman Boyer passing off his accent as Russian,”

²⁴ Swindell, *Charles Boyer*, 73-75.

writes a biographer, “while the Frenchwoman Colbert’s Russian accent sounded one hundred percent American.”²⁵

Hollywood ended its production of French-language versions in 1935, after producing only thirty-odd such pictures in California.²⁶ As an option to importing foreign professionals, the major studios early on had experimented simultaneously with production abroad. Paramount undertook the most ambitious project, setting up in 1930 a major studio at Joinville, near Paris, that turned out nearly seventy feature films during its initial year of operation, “including some movies made in twelve different languages.” The rate of production declined abruptly by 50 percent the following year, however, and in 1932 “it was barely managing to produce two French films a month.” Rival studios, among them MGM, by then either had closed their smaller-scale operations in France or were adapting them for the less costly process of dubbing.²⁷ Basically, after an initial flurry of opposition abroad, American studios had discovered that their foreign markets really had not been affected all that much by sound and that the problem of making their films comprehensible to local audiences could be more much more cheaply resolved by subtitling or, once technical problems had been overcome by the mid-1930s, dubbing.

Termination of the multilingual film program led to a return exodus of French film personnel, but Hollywood still sought talent and a handful of France’s leading actresses or rising starlets came to the United States in the mid-1930s to attempt their luck. Language, for some, was an enormous problem. Simone Simon, a young actress, signed a contract with Fox and embarked with what seemed to be realistic expectations. She said her aims were modest and acknowledged that she had not studied English

²⁵ Swindell, *Charles Boyer*, 103-104.

²⁶ See the list in Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 105.

²⁷ Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*, 92, 96.

since school. The language handicap delayed her entry into films, but she debuted in a 1935 “B” film, *Girl’s Dormitory*, that also marked the first film for a young American actor named Tyrone Power. She made three or four additional “B” films over the next three years, including her first starring role in *Seventh Heaven* (1938), but language remained an impediment – *Variety*, the leading American trade publication, said of her last film, *Josette*, which was released in 1938, that she was “attractive in her pouting, ingénue manner,” but that her “slurred enunciation . . . makes her difficult to understand and demands strained attention both in speaking and singing.” She seemed increasingly maladjusted and was prone to making statements to the press about how much she disliked Hollywood, and lost what would have been her most important role to Colbert. Her return to France and apparent abandonment of her career in the United States came as little surprise to anyone.²⁸ Lily Pons was older than Simon and an internationally known opera singer when RKO contracted her to make three films, none of them “A” pictures: *I Dream Too Much* (1935) co-starring a young Henry Fonda, *That Girl from Paris* (1936), and the 1937 release *Hitting a New High*. She also had a contract to sing weekly on the radio while in America. Pons did not possess the beauty usually necessary in a leading Hollywood actress, and her real passion, in any case, was music. It surely was her renown in opera that led to her invitation to dine at the White House in 1938; she married composer André Kostelanetz that year and abandoned film.²⁹ Danielle Darrieux, on the other hand, although only twenty-one, had

²⁸ “Simone Simon Nous Dit,” *Le Matin*, 24 May 1935, 4; Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 124-125; *Variety*, 24 May 1939, clipping in *Josette*, 20th Century Fox, 1937 file, Production Code Administration Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; *Josette* (1938), author’s copy.

²⁹ “Le premier film de Lily Pons,” *Le Matin*, 8 March 1935, 4; “Lily Pons part aujourd’hui pour Hollywood . . .,” *L’Intransigeant*, 9 June 1935, 9; “Courrier de l’Écran,” *Le Temps*, 15 June 1935, 6; Lucien Wahl, “Nul est prophète en son pays,” *L’Intransigeant*, 15 Feb. 1936, 11; “Le Président Roosevelt a donné un dîner en l’honneur de Lily Pons,” *Le Figaro*, 10 April 1938.

already made twenty-six films and was one of France's most sought-after leading ladies when, apparently more at the urging of her husband, director Henry Decoin, than out of any greater ambition, she accepted a long-term contract with Universal in 1938 that required her to make films in Hollywood, but allowed her to make films in France as well. Decoin accompanied her to the United States, where the only movie she would make was *The Rage of Paris*, a romantic comedy co-starring Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. Her experience in California was not a happy one. She hated the initial scripts offered her and waited months for what she considered an acceptable one, admitting to frequent bouts of weeping. Her English in the film was passable but frequently difficult to understand, and she and Decoin returned to France as soon as shooting ended, eight months after her arrival. Symbolically, the film ends with the heroine, Darrieux, who played a French woman transplanted to the United States, sailing back to France, although there was the happy ending in the form of a last-minute wedding at sea. Decoin boasted to the press back home that his wife was "the only actress who was able to preserve her personality in Hollywood . . . [and] she has remained one hundred percent French!" Darrieux reneged on her contract with Universal and would not appear in a second American film until the early 1950s.³⁰ Another experienced young actress, Suzanne Charpentier, whose professional name was simply "Annabella," came to the United States in the late 1930s under contract to Fox; she did not possess the on-screen glow or verve that American movie-goers liked in their actresses and she made only three films in 1938-1939. One, *Suez*, starred Tyrone Power, whose career was skyrocketing. The two began dating, fell in love, and married in April 1939, triggering a

³⁰ Geneviève Sellier, "Danielle Darrieux, Michèle Morgan et Micheline Presle à Hollywood: l'identité française en péril," 128-129; Danielle Darrieux, "Huit Mois à Hollywood," parts 1 and 9, *L'Intransigeant*, 27 May, 5 June 1938, 1; *The Rage of Paris* (1938), author's copy.

backlash from outraged fans and forcing Fox to mount, successfully, a publicity campaign to preserve the box-office appeal of their most popular male actor.³¹

Language problems were only part of the cultural jolt that the new generation of émigrés, like the post-World War I contingent, faced in Hollywood – and some adapted, while others did not. In the 1930s the studio system reached its apex and producers were more dictatorial than ever. Sound had undercut the director's freedom by making him dependent on the script, while the Depression made studio moguls all the more cost-conscious and, hence, determined to stick to production plans. An analyst of the independent Samuel Goldwyn Company put it well: "With scripts detailing every camera angle and vocal inflection, and Goldwyn overseeing every piece of costume, construction, and casting, directors on his sets were reduced to technicians." Blaise Cendrars, who had been marginally involved in filmmaking in the 1920s, visited Hollywood in 1936 and, with Boyer's assistance, gained entrée to a sound stage. He was struck by its factory-like atmosphere where tight shooting schedules imposed a frantic pace. Such work, he wrote, "no longer has anything artistic about it, but is simply mass-production . . . [that] discourages artists with personality and talent who see their gifts restricted by a task that remains the same throughout the year" Having survived in Hollywood only by adapting to the American system, Robert Florey clearly would have preferred some room for maneuver as a director. "Everything runs like a machine," he commented. "We manufacture a *B* film in 1938 exactly like an automobile." There was the rare "prestige film," he pointed out, but the vast majority of films released annually were merely "cinematographic merchandise" fashioned by

³¹ Lebrun, *Paris-Hollywood*, 132; Basinger, *Star Machine*, 152-154; "Annabella et son Mari . . .," *Pour Vous*, 558 (26 July 1939), 6.

directors with “an almost complete lack of freedom.” In this system, actors in general remained assembly-line components, as Boyer discovered while filming *Garden of Allah* with Marlene Dietrich for Selznick International in 1936. Her career in steep decline, she was unhappy with the film from the beginning, especially the script; he apparently agreed with at least some of her objections and they decided, on their own, to depart from the scenes or dialogue as planned. The details of their transgressions are not known, but David O. Selznick, studio head and executive producer, became choleric. “It is high time for a showdown . . . because I am not going to face, or have you face, six or seven weeks of this nonsense . . . ,” he wrote to the director of the project, who was on location in the Arizona desert. “I wish you would make it clear to them just as firmly and even violently as you can that you have put up with enough difficulties . . . [and] that the scenes will be shot as I prepare them I am going to make pictures according to my own judgment and not theirs,” he concluded.³² Boyer’s reaction is unknown, but no record has surfaced of any strong resistance on his part to the rigors of the studio assembly-line; on the contrary, he by then had decided to make his life in Hollywood and long ago had made the necessary mental and psychological adjustment.

One French personality who chafed under the restrictions placed on creative freedom under the studio system was Coco Chanel, or “Mademoiselle Chanel,” as the never-married designer preferred to be called. After meeting her in Monaco in 1929, the “tsar of Hollywood” Samuel Goldwyn invited Chanel to Hollywood in two years later to see if she could give movie costumes a more up-to-date look.³³ In a press release from

³² A. Scott Berg, *Goldwyn: A Biography*, 192; Cendrars, *Hollywood*, 113-115; Florey, *Hollywood*, 304-306; David O. Selznick to Richard Boleslawski, 28 April 1936, Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Inside Warner Bros. (1935-1951)*, 112.

³³ Charles-Roux, *The World of Coco Chanel*, 278.

Paris in January 1931, Goldwyn announced the task ahead for the designer: “She will reorganize the dressmaking department of the United Artists Studios . . . and endeavor to anticipate fashions by six months in order to solve the eternal problem of keeping gowns up to date, since films often do not appear before the public until eight months after they have been taken [sic] and in the interim fashions may entirely change.”³⁴ In other words, his secretary explained, Chanel would help clothe American stars according to “tomorrow’s fashion rather than today’s fashion.” Goldwyn later told French journalists that, with the hiring of Chanel, he had “not only solved the problem of how to keep clothes from being dated, but also that there is a definite service rendered American women in being able to see in our pictures the newest Paris fashions – sometimes even before Paris sees them.”³⁵ Chanel’s visit to America aroused keen interest in informed circles; a *New York Times* report told readers that the “Parisian fashion dictator” was on the way; arriving on the steamer *Europa* in March 1931, she met with the press in her suite at the Hotel Pierre; one journalist described her as a “slight and charming brunette, whose genius has probably made you and you and you the belle of the ball at one time or another.”³⁶ Having not yet signed a contract with United Artists, she told journalists she was merely visiting. “I will see what the pictures have to offer me and what I have to offer the pictures,” she said. “I will make not one dress. I have not brought my scissors with me.”³⁷ When she arrived at Union Station in Los Angeles in mid-March, Greta Garbo was waiting to greet her – “Two Queens

³⁴ Michel Verdier, “Samuel Goldwyn à Paris,” *Ciné-Miroir*, 5 Feb. 1931, 102; “Mme. Chanel to Aid Films,” *New York Times*, 20 Jan. 1931.

³⁵ “Projection Jottings: Mme. Chanel to Design Fashions for Films – Bound for Hollywood,” *New York Times*, 25 Jan. 1931.

³⁶ “Mme. Chanel to Aid Films,” *New York Times*, 20 Jan. 1931; “Chanel Visits America: Famous Designer, Here for First Time, Says Fashion Is Not for Any One Group,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1931.

³⁷ “Mlle. Chanel Here, Hollywood-Bound,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1931.

Meet!,” cheered newspaper headlines.³⁸ Chanel eventually accepted an offer from Goldwyn, signing a contract for which she would be paid a whopping \$1 million. She designed costumes for three Hollywood features: *Palmy Days*, a United Artists production in which the two main female performers wore her designs, Lowell Sherman’s *The Greeks Had a Word for Them*, both from 1932, and finally, Gloria Swanson’s first talkie, the Christmas 1932 release *Tonight or Never*. The Sherman film, for which Chanel dressed the three lead actresses – Ina Claire, Joan Blondell, and Madge Evans – was a box-office success. American *Vogue* later declared that Coco Chanel had “revolutionized” Hollywood by clothing Claire (who had previously worn a Chanel suit in the 1930 Paramount feature *The Royal Family of Broadway*), in simple white satin pajamas in *The Greeks Had a Word for Them*.³⁹ Chanel was dictatorial in her demands, apparently without regard to the status of her screen models – as Gloria Swanson’s experience with the designer showed. Chanel “glared furiously” at her when she did not fit into the dress made six weeks earlier for her role in *Tonight or Never* and peremptorily ordered her to “lose five pounds” overnight. “No less!” the temperamental designer exclaimed.⁴⁰

Chanel’s time in Hollywood proved short-lived. Not impressed by the machinations of the studio system – she later called Hollywood “the Mont St. Michel of tit and tail” – the designer quickly became disillusioned with studio life.⁴¹ After hearing from studio executives that “her dresses weren’t sensational enough,” she left

³⁸ Justine Picardie, *Coco Chanel*, 210.

³⁹ *Vogue* (U. S.), 1 May 1936, cited in Axel Madsen, *Chanel: A Woman of Her Own*, 195.

⁴⁰ Swanson, *Swanson on Swanson*, 414-415. Swanson was actually concealing a pregnancy that had resulted from a brief summer affair with an Irish playboy named Michael Farmer. When the star was unable to lose the requested weight, Chanel designed an elastic undergarment over which Swanson would wear her couture gowns. The trick worked: “Every one of Coco’s seams held,” said the actress.

⁴¹ Picardie, *Coco Chanel*, 213.

Hollywood abruptly. “She made a lady look like a lady,” was the explanation one observer gave for the rupture. “Hollywood wants a lady to look like two ladies.”⁴² She later defended her independent stance. “[The] Americans wanted to tie me down, you see, because I out-fashion fashion,” she explained snippily. “But I’m not for sale and hire.”⁴³ Decades later the experience apparently still rankled and she scoffed at the idea that New York or Hollywood had replaced Paris in creative status. “New York will invent it, Hollywood will diffuse it, and Paris will submit to it,” was what people were saying, she commented. “I don’t agree [and] . . . am still waiting for the studios to impose a line, a color, a form to clothing.” Hollywood might succeed in painting an overall pleasing picture, paying attention to details such as impeccably polished nails and hairstyles, but it failed to produce anything truly original or launch a new mode. “The Americans asked me a hundred times to go launch *la mode* in California [i. e., Hollywood],” she told biographer and friend Paul Morand. “I refused, knowing the result would be artificial, thus negative.”⁴⁴

The fashion diva may have gotten caught up in the tensions created by a movement in Hollywood to create a studio-based “domestic” fashion supremacy. As the French fashion industry became increasingly influential on an international scale in the early part of the twentieth century, thanks in no small part to Mlle. Chanel and her compatriots such as Jeanne Lanvin and Elsa Schiaparelli, American movie producers unabashedly had borrowed that expertise, whether by having Parisian styles essentially reproduced in their own wardrobe departments or by importing designers, much as they were doing with French film personnel. But just as the presence of French actors in

⁴² *The New Yorker*, 22 Dec. 1931, quoted in Madsen, *Chanel*, 194.

⁴³ Claude Delay, *Chanel solitaire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), quoted in Picardie, *Coco Chanel*, 213.

⁴⁴ Paul Morand, *L’Allure de Chanel*, 178-179.

Hollywood did not mean that American acting was inferior, neither did the influence of Parisian designs or presence of French fashion experts in California mean that American designers could not rival or surpass them, at least collectively. The studio moguls in California, therefore, supposedly decided to make a concerted effort to “establish Hollywood, not Paris, as the fashion trendsetter.” Costume designers would be forced to create original garments rather than buying them from a French *maison de couture*. “The studios were determined never again to be at the mercy of a small group of fey French designers.”⁴⁵ And substantial progress in that sense may have been made by the end of the 1920s. When Louise Brooks returned from a trip to Paris late in 1930 with trunks full of gowns and sportswear she had purchased there, a reporter chuckled at her alleged ingenuousness in buying last-season models. “A little investigation showed her that the creators of fashions in the studios were actually setting the Parisian styles,” the writer maintained. “Over in the frog metropolis the costumers copy the designs from the Hollywood pictures and they become the ‘latest Parisian fashions.’”⁴⁶ Even if that report was exaggerated, it is not difficult to envision a studio working environment in the early 1930s that was more tense and restrictive than Chanel had anticipated – or would tolerate. She undoubtedly would have resisted anything, certainly a design-by-committee approach, that she considered an infringement on her creative liberty. And if, in fact, a conscious movement had developed to assert Hollywood’s creative fashion excellence vis-à-vis Paris, Chanel would have felt its influence.

Qualitative evidence of Hollywood’s effort to promote itself as the pinnacle of

⁴⁵ Edith Head and Paddy Calistro, *Edith Head’s Hollywood*, 19.

⁴⁶ *Film Daily*, 30 Oct. 1930, quoted in Barry Paris, *Louise Brooks*, 351-352.

fashion came from French designer Marcel Rochas, who arrived from Paris in 1934, to see if the rumors of fashion magic there were true. He visited the wardrobe departments at Warner, MGM, Fox, and Paramount studios, talked to fashion heads – and came away a bit disillusioned. They spent a lot of money on wardrobes, he told a reporter upon his return to France, but “I would say simply that they are excellent ‘costume-makers,’ but not dress-designers.” A fashion critic for *L’Intransigeant*, Gisèle Bienville, agreed whole-heartedly in a review of the 1935 film *Roberta*, in the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers series. The story takes place in Paris and involves an *haute couture* studio – at least the Americans, in producing a movie linked to high fashion, had the “good sense” to set the story in Paris, she said. “What does it matter that the Paris they imagine has only a remote connection with the real one, ours!” More importantly, she unraveled the screen dresses of Rogers and particularly Irene Dunne thread by thread, judging Dunne’s wardrobe “doubly ridiculous” because her character was supposed to be “one of the most adroit creators of Parisian fashion.” All in all, she said, “I can hardly believe that truly elegant American women might take these fantasies seriously.”

The picture of Chanel’s conflict with Hollywood and the broader setting of a campaign by American studios to replace Paris as a creative force remains muddled. On the one hand, there is the fact that Chanel *had* been hired and there are the opinions of Rochas and Bienville, all of which suggest that Hollywood was not up to Parisian standards and attempted to do something about with perhaps dubious results. On the other, there is the example of another prominent Paris-based designer, Elsa Schiaparelli, who answered a call from Paramount to design and make costumes for

Mae West for her role in *Every Day's a Holiday* – and flubbed the assignment. She worked off a “a life-size plaster replica” of West’s buxom form and, accustomed to the more slender silhouettes of Parisian fashion models, she found the actress’s measurements so “shocking” that she not only later named her signature perfume “Shocking” after West but apparently could not bring herself to make dresses that large. The costumes sewn for the actress arrived in California, but did not fit and had to be reconstructed. The Schiaparelli experiment ended and years would pass before Paramount again showed interest in the services of Parisian designers.⁴⁷ The studio – Hollywood – may well have reached the conclusion that it could not work with French fashion experts and did not need them anyway. In this regard, the comments of a French fashion reporter in 1937 are interesting. Paris used to be the undisputed center of fashion, the reporter said. “But now Hollywood, thanks to the prestige of its screen, the elegance and beauty of its stars, for whom models especially adapted for photogenic effect are created, is competing seriously with our production.”⁴⁸

If the star of Parisian fashion, in fact, had waned by the late 1930s, prestige dies hard and the case of MGM’s main costume designer from 1928 to 1942, “Adrian,” is suggestive in that regard. His real name was Adolph Greenburg, but he decided that it was to his professional advantage to become French, so he affected a French accent and adapted a Gallic name, which suggests that the common perception in Hollywood was that Paris was the epitome of chicness and style. He worked as MGM’s lead costume designer from 1928 to 1942, all the while maintaining a “French” accent.⁴⁹ Françoise Rosay praised the designer in an article for *Le Figaro* at that time, attributing

⁴⁷ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁸ M. R. [sic], “La mode à l’écran,” *Le Matin*, 8 Jan. 1937, 4.

⁴⁹ Regine and Peter W. Engelmeier, eds., *Fashion in Film*, 22.

to him a Midas touch for “making the stars more beautiful than they are.” She played the music that French readers loved to hear, noting that Adrian from time to time escapes “to Paris, to renew his inspiration, and returns [to America] enriched and prodigious.”⁵⁰ Adrian remained as head designer at Hollywood’s premier studio for eleven years after that article appeared, so refurbishing his credentials with an occasional trip “home” obviously was a professional boon.

French writer Henri Malherbe in February 1939, through the good offices of the French consulate, visited Hollywood was able to take a close look at the facilities of MGM and other studios. He was struck by the absence of French actors and directors, noting that among the former only Boyer and Annabella seemed to be active in any filming. Why was that the case, he asked an unidentified “head of an important American film company”? The answer was direct. “Your compatriots do not adapt themselves here,” the official said. “They do not adapt to our methods of working, nor to our customs. They always find fault with what we do, they publicly mock our ideas, and they seem to be constantly in bad humor.” Why have studios prolonged their arrangements with Boyer and Annabella? Malherbe asked. “Because they adapt to our habits and do not criticize our ideas at every turn” was the reply.⁵¹ Of all the French actors and actresses who had gone to the United States in the late 1920s and early 1930s, it was thus difficult at the end of the decade to find many still active. The rigors of the studio system and the industrialized approach to movie-making that French critics long had derided had indeed exacted a severe toll.

To begin with, there was the systematic, disciplined work pace, something that a

⁵⁰ Françoise Rosay, “Monsieur Adrien [sic],” *Le Figaro*, 28 June 1931, 6.

⁵¹ Henri Malherbe, “Hollywood 39,” *Pour Vous*, 575 (22 Nov. 1939), 9.

French actor would have experienced only rarely, if at all. Lily Damita (future wife of Errol Flynn) was an early recruit, arriving in 1928; on vacation in Paris in mid-1930, she told a reporter that, on a typical shoot, she would start her day at 4:00 a.m. and normally not finish until mid-afternoon, a schedule, “with never any rest,” that would last two to three months for one picture. In between films stars might, as she did, take dancing lessons, willingly or unwillingly. As the studios committed, briefly, more vigorously to the production of multilinguals, the pace of work apparently intensified. After another year in Hollywood, she again described her life within the studio framework. “The residents of Hollywood are relentless workers,” she declared. “It takes about ten weeks to finish a talkie and during that time one works from eight in the morning to eleven at night. It is enough to exhaust artists, especially the star,” she continued. “The sole desire one has is to get some sleep.” In a subsequent interview, she said that she had made seven films in ten months, one of them taking only twelve days to shoot. During that period, she maintained that she had gotten only two hours of sleep some nights.⁵² André Luguet, a supporting actor, went over early in 1930 with practically the first wave to work on MGM’s French-language films. In July, while finishing his third film in four months, he hastily wrote to Boisyvon at *L’Intransigeant* while awaiting the director’s call. “I tell you, I don’t have a minute [to spare],” he said. “I am writing from a corner of the studio, between takes, because it is at the studio that I spend most of my time,” he said.

⁵² “En causant avec Lily Damita,” *Le Matin*, 27 June 1930, 4; “La carrière de Lily Damita,” *L’Intransigeant*, 4 April 1931, 6; “Lily Damita vient se reposer . . . [sic],” *Le Matin*, 24 July 1931, 4. For further comments by Damita on her experience with the Hollywood studio system, see Martin Barnier, “La communauté française de Hollywood vue de France (1929-1935),” 108-114.

“I come here regularly from 8:00 in the morning to 7:00 at night and sometimes we stay until 11:00.”⁵³

A young actress, Jeanne Helbling, who arrived in Hollywood under contract to Warner Brothers had a similar experience. She found everybody friendly enough, but the workload was unexpectedly tense. “The old European education went out the door right away . . . ,” she wrote, also between takes, after her first month at the studio. “It is almost 5 o’clock in the morning. We work at night. Every day we start at 7 in the evening and it goes on until 6 or 7 in the morning.” She wrote again six months later that she was working on her seventh film – in seven months. “At times I feel so very far from France and Paris,” she commented, “but the studio absorbs me so much that I don’t have time to dream or get depressed.” Another actress, borrowed from the theater, Huguette Duflos, was part of the new migration and she emphasized the same theme on her return. “Over there one works intensely, in agreeable conditions, but under iron discipline,” she told a reporter on her return. “I was really surprised by Metro-Goldwyn’s [sic] truly military organization. Everything there is structured as it is in the military.”⁵⁴

A second problem was the restrictions on artistic freedom that Hollywood’s assembly-line techniques imposed. Veteran actress Tania Fedor returned to France after seven months in California at the beginning of the decade apparently resolved to stay at home. So were there problems in Hollywood? a reporter asked. “And how! And

⁵³ Boisyvon, “Ceux qui tournent aux États-Unis,” *L’Intransigeant*, 5 July 1930, 6; Claude Doré, “André Luguet retour d’Hollywood,” *Ciné-Miroir*, 22 May 1931, 334.

⁵⁴ “Jeanne Helbling nous écrit d’Hollywood,” *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (Oct. 1930), 22; J[eanne]. H[elbling]., “Lettre d’Hollywood,” *Ciné-Miroir* (17 April 1931), 250; Jean Portail, “Huguette nous conte d’amusantes aventures,” *Pour Vous* 124 (2 April 1931), 7; Barnier, “La communauté française de Hollywood vue de France (1929-1935),” 105.

that's why, after having been delighted to go, I have returned to France with joy.

Hollywood's organization has its reverse side," she explained, "and that is an absolute lack of independence. When a performer has a little personality, it becomes very painful to yield to following a script that she judges a poor one, to wearing costumes that she has not chosen, to allowing a fantasized and uncalled for publicity about her." Life in Hollywood, she concluded, would require "a fierce struggle against quite incomprehensible people." Chevalier apparently never complained about the work pace, and became increasingly famous and wealthy because of Hollywood – but he found his dissatisfaction keeping pace. In his case, the problem was typecasting, the repetitiveness of roles, the lack of opportunity for creative expression, the same old screenplays. "When I returned to Hollywood [from vacation] it was to do still another film in the same genre with me in uniform, smiles and cute winks of the eye," he recalled. This rankled because he was a long-time professional and believed that performers had to push themselves, expand, explore new possibilities. "To win the public on the stage in France, I had been forced to be more than a glib fellow with no real depth of emotion," he said. "Knowing this, I wanted to show Hollywood that I could do more than be a cute lady-killer." But when he would bring the matter up with Paramount officials, they would tell him to look at the box-office receipts. "So I went on singing in the key they demanded," he remembered, "unhappy that Hollywood and I didn't really understand each other." As time passed, his resentment grew. "Paramount and I were still miles apart . . . I was still asking their top people why every picture I made must be in the same mold, why every character I played must be debonair and cute and devoid of emotional depth," he recalled, "and I was still receiving the same

answer – that my films were making too much money to risk a change of pattern.” And when he shifted to MGM, the early experience threatened to perpetuate that situation.⁵⁵

Directors could have a particularly difficult time in Hollywood because they had enjoyed such artistic freedom in France. Jacques Feyder, the Belgian-born husband of French actress Françoise Rosay, who had emigrated to France as a youth and whom the French claimed as one of their own, faced an enormous and ultimately insurmountable problem of adjustment when the couple arrived in Hollywood in 1928, he under contract to MGM to make one film with an option for more. “He was happy to be there to see everything at first hand,” she wrote in her memoirs, “but he was far from happy with the studio’s method of work [which was] so different from ours.” In France he had enjoyed full control over multiple aspects of film production, she explained, but in Hollywood it was another story: “The producer did everything, he was master of all choices.”⁵⁶ Feyder in a memoir written a decade later himself described the culture shock, recalling how the European director would embark for the United States “full of projects and enthusiasm” only to find himself enmeshed in the machinery of the studio system that gradually, without his realizing it, would erode his individuality. It started, he explained, with a group meeting in which the producer, the director, script writers, film editor, and various other specialists would debate “for weeks, sometimes months, and passionately,” the merits and defects of the story line. “And the poor director, forced to use a foreign language, submerged, engulfed, lost,” Feyder said, “the poor European director says nothing, despairs, curses the day he crossed the ocean.” Feyder was

⁵⁵ Claude Doré, “Une reception chez Tania Fédor,” *Ciné-Miroir*, 5 Feb. 1931, 94; Chevalier, *With Love*, 250, 261.

⁵⁶ Françoise Rosay, *La traversée d’une vie*, 130-131; *ibid.*, 64; Marcel Carné, “Une Heure avec Madame Jacques Feyder,” *Ciné-Magazine* 9 (6 Sept. 1929), 333-335.

writing autobiographically because, at the time, during a trip home on vacation in the fall of 1929, a reporter had asked Rosay about the considerable delay that her husband had experienced in being assigned a project at MGM. In reply she pointed to the script-by-committee process. “We are peoples of such different mentalities,” she pondered, “that what pleases us, displeases them, and vice-versa.” Finally, to break the deadlock, her husband had written his own script and Irving Thalberg, the studio’s head of production, had approved it; the film (*The Kiss*) would star Greta Garbo and would be the last silent film that MGM would make. On completion of script approval, Feyder’s narrative continued, the director discovered that he had been forced to cede more than anyone else, but was relieved to be able to start work. Because of the material advantages not available in Europe, the task itself was not difficult, but as the days passed, the director learned that it was difficult to deviate from the production plan, even to eliminate a line from the script. “That is hard sometimes,” he recalled euphemistically. “The sudden inspiration, the genius, . . . abdicated all their rights.” The final product was not what the director had expected. He had “dreamed of great things” and, while forced to make concessions on so many apparently small things, had convinced himself that they would not affect the originality of the film, which would reflect his creative force. What he ended up making, however, was just one more packaged, standardized, formulaic Hollywood film. “The European had defended himself as best he could, resisted, battled,” Feyder remembered, but “little by little he had effaced from his work that *personality* . . . for which he had received an excellent salary.” His film looked like all the others coming off the studio’s assembly line. “That’s why so few Europeans have managed to stay there.”⁵⁷ MGM liked Feyder’s first film, so

⁵⁷ Jacques Feyder and Françoise Rosay, *Le Cinéma: Notre métier*, 30-36.

the studio picked up the option and the director went on to complete two more, as well as a few of the foreign-language films, and then returned to France in 1931 for the balance of his career.

While their compatriots waged a cultural battle within the studios of Hollywood, French audiences continued to enjoy American films. Comedies remained a favorite. At the start of the decade, French critics were praising Hollywood's comic products and bemoaning the absence of French producers in any meaningful way from the genre – and at the end of the decade, if they themselves were not overly impressed by American comedies, they had to admit that audiences delighted in them.⁵⁸ The French tended to regard as most typically American the musical comedy, of which there was an abundance in the 1930s – even Veber praised them!⁵⁹ This genre of film, with its long-legged starlets and dashing playboys, helped perpetuate the idea of the United States as a magical place, where everyone was wealthy and carefree. Movie-goers in Paris, if not in smaller rural areas of France, also liked “light, sophisticated comedies . . . ,” reported the *New York Times* correspondent in Paris in November 1935, “and bewail the inability of their own producers to duplicate them.” The following month he noted local enthusiasm for another hallmark of American films. “The way the French have taken to Hollywood's sentimentality,” he observed, “is a strange and wonderful thing.” Among the more recent films popular in that regard he mentioned *Little Women*, *Treasure Island*, *Imitation of Life*, “and above all *Anne of Green Gables*.” The latter film

⁵⁸ Veber, “L'Equipée des Gens d'Esprit,” *Le Matin*, 2 May 1930, 4; Claude Vermorel, “Des films comiques français?” *Pour Vous*, 131 (21 May 1931), 2; François Carco, “Les Mystères du Rire,” *Le Figaro*, 6 April 1938, 4.

⁵⁹ Veber, “La Grande Machine,” *Le Matin*, 21 Feb. 1936, 4.

had struck a particular chord. “It is one of those ravishing successes with which the Americans surprise us every now and then,” wrote the film critic of *Le Matin*. French audiences also welcomed horror movies, gangster flicks, children’s films, and, of course, westerns, fare that seemed to heighten an apparent fascination with the United States during this period. It was America’s uniqueness, indeed its very “otherness,” that seemed to captivate the French public. “While that otherness was in part due to the longstanding antagonism between Anglo-Saxon and Gallic cultures, the antagonism is tempered in the thirties by a reluctant admiration for the Americans’ apparently effortless wealth and for the narrative ease, industry dominance, and unrivaled glamour of the American cinema.”⁶⁰ The big films, popular if not always artistic, that rolled out of the Hollywood studios before 1939 – the *Tarzan* series, *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (“dazzling” battle scenes and “the most perfect directing,” said Vuillermoz⁶¹), *The Great Waltz*, *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, *Gunga Din*, and countless others – all played well in French theaters.

One American genre that came of age in the 1930s and that provoked universal applause in France was the cartoon, especially Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse and Silly Symphonies series, along with the creations of Dave Fleischer. The love affair had started with the first regular appearance of American cartoons in France in the late 1920s. Critics immediately intellectualized the phenomenon. “There is one thing that the Americans do better than anybody else,” the critic Boisyvon of *L’Intransigeant* wrote in mid-1928, “it’s the cartoon.” Mentioning the clown Koko and Felix the Cat, he

⁶⁰ Ibid., 2-37; Herbert L. Matthews, “The Screen in Paris,” *New York Times* (17 Nov. 1935), IX: 4; Matthews, “How Goes It in the Paris Cinema,” *New York Times*, 5 Dec. 1935, 10:4; Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema*, 284.

⁶¹ Vuillermoz, “Le Cinéma,” *Le Temps*, 16 March 1935, 5.

remarked that there had never been a “more astonishing humoristic invention.” Yes, some French companies marketed cartoon figures, he said, but none possessed the “poetry” of American products, which moved toward “a fairy-tale ideal” of the heroic figure, who defies gravity and all physical laws to triumph over adversaries. “Perhaps one day we will be able to do the same, perhaps we never will,” he concluded. “It doesn’t matter much: the main thing is that we have these American cartoons, which are perhaps the most spiritual invention of cinematography.” That was the year that Disney introduced Mickey Mouse in *Steamboat Willie*, and the French movie-going experience apparently was never the same. Critics and audiences alike were simply enthralled by Mickey and, in large part because of him, increasingly with the genre itself. Early in 1930 one writer said flatly that, “quite frequently,” the cartoons were the main attraction of a program for audiences. The feature film could be mediocre, but the cartoons saved the occasion for many spectators. “Mickey is in his glory,” he concluded. Indeed, “Mickey is the idol of the hour,” another observer said. Go see the latest Mickey Mouse cartoon because it is “irresistible,” a film reviewer for a women’s magazine urged readers. Mickey’s adventures have transformed the entire genre, added a writer for *Ciné-Magazine*. “He is the one, in effect, who best reveals the original and captivating poetry of cartoons.”⁶²

Even Émile Vuillermoz and Pierre-Gilles Veber, who had stood shoulder to shoulder in the 1920s using their columns in *Le Temps* and *Le Matin* as swords to slash

⁶² Boisyvon, “Dessins animés: La plus spirituelle invention du cinéma,” *L’Intransigeant*, 23 June 1928, 6; “Les impressions de Mickey, Koko et Félix,” *L’Intransigeant*, 15 Feb. 1930, 6; Guy L. Herpin, “Le Cinéma,” *Journal Diplomatique et Littéraire*, 9 March 1930, 4; André Lang, “Au cinéma,” *La Femme de France* (2 Feb. 30), 22; Maurice M. Bessy, “Dessins Animés: Koko, Mickey, Felix and Co.,” *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (Feb. 1930): 28-30; Vuillermoz, “Chronique Cinématographique: Expériences,” “Chronique Cinématographique: Le secret,” *Le Temps*, 2, 9 Nov. 1929, 4-5; “Une victoire européenne,” *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (Jan. 1930), 12; Veber, “Une plume, de l’encre et du papier,” *Le Matin*, 11 April 1930, 4.

away at Hollywood's products, succumbed totally once sound arrived. Significantly, when Vuillermoz attended the premiere of the first French all-talking picture in November 1929, an "American cartoon," which he lauded enthusiastically, was part of the bill. And he freely acknowledged the Americans' untouchable excellence in the genre. "Today sound cartoons are arriving from America that are truly small masterpieces . . .," he wrote later that month. "We have to recognize, moreover, that the Americans, whose larger screenplays discourage us by their intellectual poverty, show in this regard a freshness of imagination and an inventive power that humiliates Europeans." Two months later he again saluted the supremacy of the Americans. "[T]hey have proved with their sound cartoons," he wrote in January 1930, "that the old French mirth was decidedly quite insufficient alongside the free whimsy of a young people with fresh and spontaneous imagination." Veber made no effort to disguise his enthusiasm. "After New York, all of Paris, even that intellectual elite so difficult and snobbish, has been conquered by Mickey and his colleagues," he commented in April. "There is, in these small films, truly remarkable humor and fantasy. It is difficult to imagine anything better." When Mickey Mouse cartoons were on a screen, he added, he had heard audiences "literally erupt with laughter."⁶³

As cartoons found increasing space in theater programming and their characters gained voice in the early 1930s, French film critics, delighting in the novelty, wondered why France did not enter the field in a serious way. Commenting on the "stunning" impact of the first Mickey Mouse sonorized cartoon he had just seen, Boisyvon in November 1929 posed that question with a touch of melancholy. The cartoons with a

⁶³ Vuillermoz, "Chronique Cinématographique: Expériences," "Chronique Cinématographique: Le secret," *Le Temps*, 2, 9 Nov. 1929, 4,5, "Une victoire européenne," *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (Jan. 1930), 12; Veber, "Une plume, de l'encre et du papier," *Le Matin*, 11 April 1930, 4.

sound track had opened a new era – one film writer “interviewed” Mickey himself that following February about that subject – so it was all the more puzzling why French artists did not seize the opportunity. When two French artists a few months later did put together a run of four cartoons with a main character named “Sam Pick” – was that to make audiences think that they were American-made? – and wrote to Boisyvon late that year to say that they hoped that “the French spirit could give battle to American humor,” he applauded their effort, but stressed the need “above all” to retain the Americans’ techniques, which gave “marvelous suppleness and extraordinary gaiety” to their cartoon figures. But it was clear that the producers in Hollywood had vanquished all challengers and French observers remained perplexed. To produce a cartoon indeed required a poet, one commented in 1931 – Mickey Mouse was an example. Why could French poets and designers not join forces to produce something similar? he asked. Yes, why are there no French cartoons on the screen alongside the American ones? Marcel Huet of *Le Petit Parisien* wondered. Perhaps it was because the American companies had “standardized in some way their production”? A French poet had a different explanation. Asked by *Pour Vous*, a leading trade publication, why France was not producing cartoons, he linked it to national character. Obviously enthusiastic about cartoons – he noted that a Mickey Mouse short had the effect of “explosive rounds from a machine-gun placed against the spleen” – he opined that France would never be able to achieve much in that field. “We are Latin,” he said, “and thus our fantasy will always be ‘corseted’ in some way by our respect for logic.” Whatever the case, there was certainly a demand for that “cinematographic marvel,” a reporter assigned to the

Hollywood watch noted in September 1931. “That manly mouse and his companion Minnie Mouse remain the premier stars of talking movies.”⁶⁴

When *Pour Vous* conducted an “interview” with Mickey in August 1932, the little star mentioned three things that could endear him all the more to French readers. He said that Walt had spent a year in France as an ambulance driver during World War I, that his, Mickey’s, personality owed much to Chaplin, in that they both constantly struggled against the odds, and he loved being able to move, say, from Venice to “the top of the Eiffel Tower” in a matter of seconds. The popularity of Disney’s creation was such that in 1931 Hachette started publication of a series of “small albums” featuring Mickey, and regular *Mickey et Minnie* comic books appeared as well; *Le Petit Parisien*, moreover, began carrying a daily Mickey cartoon strip. All of this was preparatory to the launching in 1934 of a small newspaper, the *Journal de Mickey*, the first number of which sold 300,000 copies.⁶⁵ Because of the enormous popularity of the cartoons, and given the absence of local production, French regulations concerning foreign films permitted their unrestricted importation.⁶⁶

As the Disney and Fleischer characters began moving up to the next rung of the technological ladder, experimenting with color and then appearing in versions dubbed in French, audiences and critics alike hailed the new vistas for enjoyment. Veber saw a “gleam of genius” in every Mickey Mouse cartoon – and the expression was not

⁶⁴ Boisvyon, “Des dessins animés français,” *L’Intransigeant*, 1 Nov. 1930, 6; Marcel Sauvage, “Les dessins animés et les poètes,” *L’Intransigeant*, 25 April 1931, 6; Maurice Huet, “Pourquoi le dessin animé . . .,” *Le Petit Parisien*, 1 May 1931, 5; R. Thomazeau, “Aurons-nous bientôt nos Flip e nos Mickey?”, *Pour Vous*, 127 (23 April 1931), 4; H[arold]. J. S[alemson]., “L’ascension de Mickey Mouse,” *L’Intransigeant*, 12 Sept. 1931, 5.

⁶⁵ Jean Vincent-Bréchignac, “Mickey Mouse nous parle de Walt Disney . . .,” *Pour Vous* 197 (25 Aug. 1932), 3; Michel Pierre, “Le journal de Mickey,” 119-122.

⁶⁶ U.S. Embassy (Paris) to State Department, 10 July 1934, Record Group (hereafter RG) 59, 851.4061 Motion Pictures, doc. 189 (hereafter MP/189, for example), U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

“bombast,” he told his readers in September 1932. “It seems that medieval fantasies are reaching us from America, enhanced by that Anglo-Saxon humor that Latins cannot equal,” he pondered. “It’s prodigious. No public can resist those little marvels because men are big children” In March 1933 he took a retrospective look at the preceding year and proclaimed that the first American experiments in color cartoons had been “the joy of the year” – even though they had been an “already perfect” product, color transformed them into “a child’s dream of miracles that entertained [even] adults.” But there was one shadow on the screen, he lamented: the cartoons came from the United States, which meant that French cartoonists had not attempted to “pick up the gauntlet.” A few months later he singled out Mickey Mouse for praise. “Without doubt,” he said, “these films, overflowing with fantasy, imagination, and humor, are the best thing that cinematography has produced since its birth.” Instead of good conduct points, schools should show children a cartoon,” he suggested. “We regret once again,” he said, “that these masterpieces are specifically American.” In January 1934 he hailed cartoons dubbed in French, noting the unrestrained joy of French children as they watched them. One movie house, he reported with approval, was devoting sessions for birthdays exclusively to Mickey Mouse cartoons. Later that year he reminded his readers that Disney and Fleischer cartoons were “pure masterpieces” and from now on, he exulted, they would be in color. Vuillermoz echoed the argument that they were “true little masterpieces” and made a striking acknowledgment. “I do not believe that, in any other domain, American intelligence has achieved over the art of the Old World so complete and so distinguished a victory,” he wrote regarding the cartoons. “There is in them such an abundance of youth and insouciance, such a freshness of imagination,

such a superabundance of verve, observation and irony, that one is humiliated not only because we did not invent, but because we cannot even produce here at home, a vocabulary so rare and precious.”⁶⁷

By this juncture, Vuillermoz actually had been smitten by a new character that he placed alongside “the marvelous Mickey” in the cinematic pantheon. Have you seen the new coquettish girl character, with “big eyes, long eyelashes,”? he asked readers. “The play of her eyes, the batting of her eyelids, the pouting of her small heart-shaped mouth and above all,” he wrote in an almost trembling tone, “the undulations of her voluptuous body are absolutely new developments that open up unlimited possibilities for the designer of life-like fantasies.” The love-struck critic could not bring himself to pronounce her name. And when he dared bring the subject up again weeks later, he still was shy, referring only to “the unforgettable little *girl* with porcelain eyes and a heart-shaped mouth.” Émile, her name is Betty Boop, Veber wrote helpfully in 1935, and now we also have another human figure, Popeye, the “Yankee sailor with the solid biceps,” to join Betty and “Mickey, the miraculous mouse,” he said.⁶⁸ Together the two critics continued to use their weekly columns to sing the praise of American cartoons. Veber was ecstatic after seeing Disney’s *The Turtle and the Hare*, a “masterpiece of humor” that added new touches of “irony and technique” to the genre. Parisian audiences rarely clapped during the screening of a film, he pointed out, but “they applaud almost all the sound cartoons.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Veber, “Fabliaux Américains,” “Féerie,” “Caricature mobiles,” *Le Matin*, 22 March 1932; 3 March, 11 Aug. 1933; 28 Sept. 1934, 4; Vuillermoz, “Chronique Cinématographique: Une formule nouvelle de dessin animé . . .,” *Le Temps*, 27 Oct. 1934, 5.

⁶⁸ Vuillermoz, “Le Cinema: Chronique,” *Le Temps*, 10 Sept. 1932, 14 Jan. 1933, 4, 6; Veber, “Types Immortels,” *Le Matin*, 19 April 1935, 4.

⁶⁹ Veber, “La Fontaine nous voilà!” *Le Matin*, 17 May 1935, 4.

The fascination with the cartoon pervaded all spheres of Paris. When the European representative of the MPPDA, Harold Smith, arranged a cinema evening at the American embassy for Foreign Minister Pierre Laval in March 1935, he made sure to include “a new Walt Disney Silly Symphonies” as part of the entertainment. An interesting example of how much France’s film elite admired the Disney productions came when director René Clair, back from a stay in London, went to a private projection room on New Year’s night in 1936 to watch Silly Symphonies cartoons that he had missed viewing in London. “The cinema of today depends really on only two men: Chaplin and Walt Disney!” he commented as the first cartoon appeared on the screen. “What can one want to do after that?” Days later, a critic for *L’Intransigeant* reviewed the program available at one theater and pointed out to readers that it included “a good Popeye from Dave Fleischer’s series.” Another sign of the surging popularity of the genre was an increase in the number of theaters “springing up all over Paris” that showed only newsreels and cartoons – “Mickey Mouse, Silly Symphonies,” said the American trade commissioner’s office – and tended to charge a lower admission fee. Small wonder, then, that Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1938 met with an exuberant reception, breaking all box office records in France to that point.

The obsession of the French public with Hollywood stars remained undiminished in the 1930s, as the mainstream press and trade publications offered readers a steady diet of tidbits about the everyday lives of American entertainment personalities. Fans thus learned such crucial matters as the habit, in Hollywood studio canteens, of naming dishes on the menus after the studio’s biggest stars, such as the Wallace Beery ham and eggs because of the actor’s favorite breakfast foods and a meatless dish named

after vegetarian star Ramon Novarro. The latter also made news when he was voted the most photogenic foreign actor in the aforementioned *Pour Vous* poll (Gary Cooper came in second).⁷⁰ A marvelous qualitative insight into French fascination with American film stars comes from the personal experience of a young French girl named Simone Roussel, who was born in 1920 and lived in Dieppe. Growing up she dreamed constantly of becoming an actress. As she entered adolescence in the early 1930s she began frequenting the two movie houses in the coastal town, which increased her “intoxication” with Hollywood. She bought all the fan magazines and trade publications she could, avidly following the lives and activities of her favorite stars. To increase her chances of making it to Hollywood, she studied English. She imitated Joan Crawford and Katherine Hepburn in front of her bedroom mirror, and played out a love scene there with Clark Gable, giving him “a kiss on the mouth, a kiss whose secrets I hardly understood,” she would later write. She fell in love with Gary Cooper and then, at age fifteen, she ran away from home, briefly, determined to become a movie star – and, as “Michèle Morgan” she would sign a Hollywood contract before she was twenty.⁷¹

The French press longed for the old stars – Chaplin was less active than ever in view of the coming of sound; Fairbanks and Pickford left the movies, and each other; the Talmadge sisters passed the torch to a younger generation; Clara Bow was soon gone; William Hart had retired; Lon Chaney was dead. Gloria Swanson faded away, but, out of fondness for France, lent her name to a “Gloria Swanson contest,” sponsored by the newspaper *Paris-Midi* and United Artists, to select a young woman for a one-week, all-expenses paid trip to the United States. What about Tom Mix? Well, he

⁷⁰ A[rlette]. J[azarin]., “Ce qu’ils aiment,” *L’Intransigeant*, 16 May 1931, 6; “Le Jeu de la Vedette la plus photogénique,” *Pour Vous* 170 (18 Feb. 1932), 2.

⁷¹ Michèle Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 23-24.

unfortunately had abandoned the screen for the circus. But wait! “Mix is back!” exclaimed one reviewer in September 1931. “It was truly a necessity.” After all, in these trying times, “we need his simplicity, his freshness, his good humor and his swift solutions” for tight situations. It was important to keep up with the fading, the ascending, and those who had not faded, but would not ascend much further. When actor Louis Wolheim, who had played a supporting role in the 1930 film *All Quiet on the Western Front*, died unexpectedly after a bout with stomach cancer, *Le Matin* made it front-page news. *L’Intransigeant* printed a lengthy spread (including a photograph) on Philip Holmes, a young actor who starred in Josef von Sternberg’s 1931 picture *An American Tragedy*⁷² – and would not star in much else. The real excitement came with tracking those who stayed in the game – the Crawfords, Gaynors, Shearers, Garbos, Dietrichs, McLaglens and others – and the new generation, the Gables, Harlows, Taylors, Stanwycks, Colberts, Arthurs, Hepburns, Garlands, Rooneys, Durbins, and little Shirley Temple. There were so many glamorous men and women to read about, to watch on the screen, to dream about.

The continued flow of Hollywood stars to France carried that glamour to the hotels and streets of Paris. Even stars such as Adolphe Menjou and Buster Keaton whose careers started to sag at the outset of the Depression, benefited from sojourns in France where both of them made movies at “Hollywood-in-Joinville.” When leading man Robert Taylor visited the French capital in 1937, newspapers reported on his night out in Montmartre visiting the city’s famed cancan revues and that he capped the night

⁷² “Ce qu’on a fait [. . .],” *L’Intransigeant*, 25 Oct. 1930, 6; A[line]. B[ourgeois], “La resurrection de Tom Mix,” *L’Intransigeant*, 26 Sept. 1931, 6; “Kat’ est mort de faim à Hollywood,” *Le Matin*, 20 Feb. 1931, 1; Harold J. Salemsen, “Sur Philip Holmes,” *L’Intransigeant*, 5 Sept. 1931, 6.

off by partaking of onion soup at the Les Halles market.⁷³ That same year, radio comedian Jack Benny passed through Paris before making his way with his wife to Cannes, the glamorous beach town on the French Riviera. Stars such as Marion Davies, Norma Shearer, Novarro, Colbert, Gable, Cooper, Ina Claire, Ruth Chatterton, Robert Montgomery, William Powell, and Laurel and Hardy all paid homage in person to the French capital, arousing popular enthusiasm. Claire, for her part, gamely spoke French with reporters, who noted she spoke “with just enough of an accent to please [her French fans].” Newlyweds Joan Crawford and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., spent several days in Paris in August 1931. “Unfortunately, I know only two phrases in French!” she told an interviewer. What are they? “*Comment allez-vous* and *c’est la vie*,” she said laughingly and reminded the reporter that her husband spoke the language fluently. The couple came back the following year and a reporter, Jean Barois, talked to them while they posed for portraits at the studio of a famous artist. “Douglas lit a cigarette and chattered away in a French that astonished me,” wrote Barois. “But he is too modest to agree that he speaks our language almost without an accent.” Fairbanks then explained. “Well, you see, I am an old Parisian,” he said. “The first time I came to Paris I was nine months old and I became good friends with a little Parisian girl who was six months old . . . [sic]. We used to promenade in the Bois [de Boulogne] . . . [sic]. She was quite pretty!”⁷⁴

⁷³ *Paris Herald Tribune*, 30 Aug. 1937, quoted in Levenstein, *We’ll Always Have Paris*, 24.

⁷⁴ Wambly Bald, “Ah Paris,” *Lost Generation Journal* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1983): 11, quoted in Levenstein, *We’ll Always Have Paris*, 24; N[ino]. F[rank]., “Quand Gary Cooper n’était pas encore le ‘gosse,’” *L’Intransigeant*, 22 Aug. 1932, 5; André R. Maugé, “Ina Claire, enfant de Broadway, est à Paris,” *Pour Vous*, 17 March 1932, 4; Raymond Lange, “Les grands yeux noirs de Joan Crawford,” *Pour Vous* 114 (22 Jan. 1931), 11; Jean Barois, “Les deux visages de Doug Jr.,” *Pour Vous* 197 (25 Aug. 1932): 4.

Perhaps the two most exciting visitors in Paris during the 1930s were Jeanette MacDonald and Walt Disney. In 1931 Chaplin showed up again, but he had no glamour, his films were so rare, he stuck to silent movies, which allowed the elite to wax eloquent about the deeper philosophic significance of that attitude, but did not generate much popular enthusiasm – and he insisted this time, understandably wanting to avoid confusion, that the press leave him alone, which it did. One paper did report that Charlot enjoyed visiting his old friend Maurice Chevalier at Ma Louque, the French star's villa in Provence, where the two basked in the relative impenetrability of their remote surroundings and engaged in *boules* tournaments (a favorite French sport best described as outdoor bowling).⁷⁵ MacDonald's first visit, on the other hand, occurred in a different atmosphere. She had captured national enthusiasm with her appearance in *The Love Parade*. Wrote one reviewer on that occasion, "there is nothing to say except that she is perfection itself, whether she is playing her part, singing, or just being there." Indeed, said another, "Jeanette MacDonald has conquered Paris alongside Maurice Chevalier." She did not know French, he said, and sang songs in it with an accent, but that only added to her charm.⁷⁶

Her arrival in August 1931 to fulfill a two-week stage contract with the Empire Theater, the city's largest and located near the Arc de Triomphe, had the earmarks of a state visit and Second Coming. The crowd was so dense at the Gare Saint-Lazare that it took nearly a half-hour to clear passage for her from the train so that she could enter the awaiting car. People said it was the most sensational local event since Charles

⁷⁵ "Ce qu'on a fait, ce qu'on va faire," *L'Intransigeant*, 25 Oct. 1930, 6; "Maurice et Charlot jouent aux boules," *Ciné-Magazine*, 14 Aug. 1931, 531.

⁷⁶ "Les films du mois" review of *Parade d'Amour*, *Ciné-Magazine* 10 (March 1930), 81; "Jeanette MacDonald," *L'Intransigeant*, 15 March 1930, 6.

Lindbergh's epoch-making descent from the Parisian skies three years earlier. The day before her first performance, she invited press representatives for champagne and caviar at her hotel and had them eating out of her hand before the meeting ended. "All she had to do was appear, smile, flash her eyes," one reporter wrote afterward. "She conquered us all" Her biographer has provided a graphic description of her opening performance at the packed 3,000-seat music hall:

At the sight and sound of Mademoiselle Jeanette, the crowd melted As the curtain rose, the orchestra played strains of "Dream Lover." One by one, twenty-four dancing girls flitted into position before a black velvet drop. When MacDonald's first notes floated forth from a spot offstage the audience erupted into applause. When she stepped out from the left wing in a drifting Molyneux gown of orange crêpe de chine, she literally set the theater aglow. Artfully hesitant, she moved to stage center. Her song finished, the audience went into a frenzy She was theirs. MacDonald next sang *The Vagabond King's* "Some Day" in near-perfect French. The theater echoes with "Brava! Brava!!" As if to quash any doubt about her feelings for *la douce France*, she followed "Beyond the Blue Horizon" with "Reviens" ("Return"), a French-language torch song from the Belle Époque. For her closing number she appeared in blinding white military attire to intone, again in French, *The Love Parade's* "Marche des grenadiers." A specially built runway enabled many of the fans to touch their *adorée*. The demands for encores were deafening. Shrewdly MacDonald gave none. After five curtain calls, she made a little speech. "Merci, merci. Mille fois [A thousand times]. Vous êtes gentils [You are kind]. Vous êtes merveilleux. JE VOUS ADORE. The house went wild.

Her publicity people had prepared the right things for her to do the next day: she took the bouquets she had received the evening before to two local hospitals; she went riding in the Bois de Boulogne with her fiancé; and, to start the annual Grand Prix walking race, she placed herself at the head of dense columns of tens of thousands working-class Parisians at the Place de la Nation, led them in a March of the Grenadiers, and finally waved the starter flag so the event would start.

At her second performance at the Empire, there was a repetition of the first evening's events – and something else. Chevalier, in a grand gesture born, probably, of his own understanding of showmanship and performer-audience synergy, had not attended the first evening's performance so as not to distract attention from her. This time he was there, everyone noticing him in his box, and MacDonald turned directly to him and held his gaze as she sang "Reviens." Chevalier, sensing dramatic opportunity, did not need to be coaxed. "He leaped from his box to the stage, kissed MacDonald on the mouth, and then stood pensively for a moment, as if to assess the kiss." Feigning surprise, he announced to the audience, "Yes, this is *her!* *Mais oui, c'est elle!* Oh-oh-oh, this is DEFINITELY my pal Jeanette MacDonald!"⁷⁷ And the applause and cheering reached a crescendo.

One reporter who interviewed her during this period was Roger Régent, a well-known film critic. He described her as simple, direct, and a bit more. "She is a delicious woman," he told his reader. "She mixes French and American. Not English, American! She understands our language very well if we speak *slowly*." When *Pour Vous* surveyed readers to determine their opinion as to the most photogenic foreign stars, she came in second in the female category.⁷⁸ Her reception in Paris sealed her place in Parisian sentiment – and she returned at the end of 1932 to make certain of it. During her extended stay, she occupied herself with a well-publicized skiing trip at St. Moritz with Gloria Swanson and Clara Bow, and such fan-gratifying gestures as giving an impromptu concert for the patients at a veterans' hospital. The centerpiece of this second visit was a two-week program at the Rex Theater, which was even more

⁷⁷ The description of her stay in Paris is from Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 109-113.

⁷⁸ Roger Régent, "Portrait de Jeanette MacDonald," *L'Intransigeant*, 15 Aug. 1931, 5; "Le Jeu de la Vedette la plus photogénique," *Pour Vous* 170 (18 Feb. 1932), 2.

elaborate and intensive than her earlier performance. There were four performances a day for two weeks. Dancing girls, suggestive songs, favorites from her movies – the “Marche des Grenadiers” was mandatory – and alluring costumes had the same riveting effect as the 1931 show. One journalist said that there was nobody in the country who could resist the “sweetness and sensitivity” of her voice. “If it were not for that delicious accent, nothing would be less American than Jeanette MacDonald,” he offered. “Her charm, like her first name, is French.”⁷⁹

Disney’s cinema offspring made him an almost mythical figure. The public knew who he was – he was the “father of Mickey,” as the newspapers commonly labeled him – but did not have a sense of the man himself and he would not excite the same passions. But his visit to Paris in June 1935, part of a trip to various European cities, did generate widespread anticipation and excitement. He told one reporter after his arrival that he was eager to study “the reactions of the European public” to his productions, particularly the “synchronization of [his] films in French, that [he] would like to be as perfect as possible.” Comments such as these understandably endeared the animator-producer even more to the French. Had they known that he took back with him many books in French and ordered another 90 for subsequent shipping to his California studio, they would have been all the more touched.⁸⁰ The wife of the French president was the honorary hostess of a reception for Disney at the Hôtel Crillon, and *Le Figaro* organized a special program of Mickey Mouse and other Disney cartoons for children at the Gaumont-Palace under the patronage of the newspaper’s editor and president of the Syndicat de la Presse Parisienne Léon Bailby, and Jean Chataigner,

⁷⁹ Turk, *Hollywood Diva*, 125-126.

⁸⁰ Robin Allan, *Walt Disney and Europe*, 31.

president of the Fédération Internationale du Cinéma. Disney told a reporter, “Nothing could have pleased me more than to be greeted in Paris by children’s faces.” Another journalist described Disney as a “delicate poet who knows how to touch the hearts of international crowds,” while a colleague labeled him “the poet of children, the modern enchanter who has created a new universe.” When he visited a session of the French Chamber of Deputies, one deputy from Paris jokingly told him, “I hope you didn’t make any sketches!”⁸¹ After the artist’s departure, Veber asked why the French government had not decorated him. After all, Mickey Mouse “is better known today throughout the entire world than the greatest of conquerors and movie stars.” Furthermore, he said, “that sassy mouse will last through the centuries to come.” At the end of the year, Veber took pride in commenting that the government had awarded Disney the Legion of Honor, which was fitting because Mickey undoubtedly was emerging as the “greatest celebrity of the era.”⁸²

One cultural historian has noted that the “publicity surrounding celebrity visits to France inevitably portrayed [that country] as a destination for pleasure, rather than cultural uplift.” Rarely was it mentioned that “[flamboyant ex-mayor of New York Jimmy] Walker, [radio comedian Jack] Benny, [Robert] Taylor, [Wallace] Beery ever set foot in the Louvre, Notre-Dame, or any other serious cultural site. They all seemed to be going to France only, as Benny said, to have ‘a great time.’”⁸³ If not the origins of that perception, then certainly its greatest purveyor was the Hollywood movie. The pattern

⁸¹ R. de Thomasson, “Le père de Mickey voyage en Europe,” *Pour Vous* 344 (20 June 1935), 4; “Le père de Mickey Mouse à Paris,” *Le Figaro*, 22 June 1935, 1; “Pour les Enfants: le Gala Mickey Mouse,” *Le Figaro*, 1; “Paris fête Walt Disney,” *Le Matin*, 28 June 1935, 4; Le Wattman, “Nos Échos,” *L’Intransigeant*, 30 June 1935, 2.

⁸² Paul Brach, “Walt Disney et Mickey à Paris,” *Le Petit Journal*, 28 June 35, 6; Veber, “Disney,” “Le Ruban du Père de Mickey,” *Le Matin*, 5 July, 20 Dec. 1935, 4.

⁸³ Levenstein, *We’ll Always Have Paris*, 24.

was by now familiar. Indeed, a definite “formula” for representing France had emerged. Scenes of Paris, for example, were *de rigueur*; in fact, the films, or relevant segments of them, were almost invariably set in the French capital. Calais could appear in the early Jean Harlow and Spencer Tracy film *Goldie* (1931), two films set in Monte Carlo, Lubitsch’s *Monte Carlo* (1930) and *Monte Carlo Nights* (1934), were released, occasional films about World War I showed conditions in the trenches of northern France, and “historical” films such as *Voltaire* (1933), *Madame Du Barry* (1934), *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), and *Marie-Antoinette* (1938) presented scenes from different parts of France. But *They Had to See Paris* (1929), *Paris* (1929), *Innocents of Paris* (1929), *The Battle of Paris* (1929), *Hot for Paris* (1929), *The Playboy of Paris* (1930), *God’s Gift to Women* (1931), *The Phantom of Paris* (1931), *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), *Arsène Lupin* (1932), *A Parisian Romance* (1932), *Paris Interlude* (1934), *Moulin Rouge* (1934), *Paris in Spring* (1935), *Folies Bergère* (1935), Greta Garbo’s *Camille* (1936), *That Girl from Paris* (1936), *I Met Him in Paris* (1937), *The Rage of Paris* (1938), *Gold Diggers in Paris* (1938), *Paris Honeymoon* (1938) with cinematic newcomer Bob Hope, *Roberta* (1938), the MGM production *Ninotchka* (1939) with Garbo, *Say It in French* (1939), and *Charlie Chan in City of Darkness* (1939) were, along with numerous others, more typical in their setting in Paris.

The dominant symbol of not only the city, but the country, was, inevitably, the Eiffel Tower and its display immediately conjured up in the imagination of American movie-goers, or so the studios intended, the romantic, exotic allure of the famed city. And to leave no doubt in the mind of the more provincial viewer, producers could show the Tower with “Paris” written across it in large letters, as was the case of the initial

scene of *That Girl from Paris*.⁸⁴ And what was the meaning of Paris? According to Hollywood, the French capital possessed a special character: it was a city of life, of gaiety and frivolity, of sidewalk cafés and nightclubs, of romance, passion, and seduction. “In the cinema of Holly-wood [sic],” notes Alain Savel, “Paris is above all associated with places of pleasure”⁸⁵ In the 1934 feature *God’s Gift to Women*, the father of the heroine, a middle-aged American businessman visiting Paris with his daughter, snorts when asked what he thinks of the city. “Nothing but a lot of jazz bands, dancing, champagne, whoopee – that’s all the French think about,” he replies dismissively to a French associate having dinner with him. “The problem with you Americans,” the Frenchman muses, “is that all you know is work, work, work.”⁸⁶

Paris was such an aphrodisiac that even a dour Soviet commissar (Greta Garbo) could find love there with a French count (Melvyn Douglas) in Ernst Lubitsch’s 1939 film *Ninotchka*. Advertisements for the comedy boasted, “Garbo Laughs!”, a play on the ads for her first talkie (*Anna Christie*, 1930) that read, “Garbo Talks!” Released only a few months after the outbreak of war, the opening message on the screen reads “This picture takes place in Paris in those wonderful days when a siren was a brunette and not an alarm – and if a Frenchman turned out the light it was not on account of an air raid!” Further reinforcing the image of France as a sexualized country, Douglas’s character, Count Leon d’Algout, tells a visiting trio of Soviet government envoys that it is futile to attempt to win their case against a Russian duchess (played by Ina Claire) who claims the men stole her jewels. “Look, gentlemen, the judge will be French, the jury will be French, everybody in the courtroom will be French,” he points out. “Have you

⁸⁴ *That Girl from Paris* (1936), author’s copy.

⁸⁵ Alain Savel, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 16.

⁸⁶ *God’s Gift to Women* (1934), author’s copy.

ever seen a French courtroom when a beautiful woman sits in the witness stand and raises her skirt a little?" The screenplay, written by Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch, is full of witty repartee between the unlikely pair of Garbo's titular Ninotchka and Leon d'Algout. "Must you flirt?" she asks him in exasperation, to which he replies, "Well, I don't have to but I find it natural." Her response was a "Down, boy!" à la Kremlin: "Suppress it!", she tells him. When Ninotchka first arrives in Paris to check up on the progress of the three officials from Moscow, she looks in confusion at an oblong-shaped object in a store window. Upon being told that the curious item is in fact a woman's hat, she sneers, "How can such a civilization survive which permits their women to put things like that on their heads?" Leon is swept off his feet by the stern Russian beauty, despite her awkward attempts at compliments – "Your cornea is excellent," she tells him after he has declared his love for her – and austere appetite (she orders "raw beets and carrots" at a French bistro, which the owner refuses to bring her). Leon takes her dancing and introduces her to champagne, and after a long night of partying, the intoxicated couple joke that she should break from the Communist party and start a new political party with the slogan, "Lovers of the world, unite." And that Parisian hat she scorned upon her arrival? She buys it, tries it on, and admires herself in the mirror before leaving for a date with her Frenchman. *Ninotchka* went on to garner four Academy Award nominations (including Best Picture).⁸⁷

Of the stereotypical characters which seem to have been mandatory in films dealing with France and the French, perhaps the central one was the Casanova figure, the Paris playboy, or the Latin Lover, represented most prominently at first by Chevalier, although with a bouncy playfulness not usually associated with the term. His role in *The*

⁸⁷ *Ninotchka* (1939), author's copy.

Merry Widow, an MGM production released in 1934 and costarring Jeanette MacDonald, captured the essence of the characterization: the story, with action and dialogue “rife with sexual overtones,” treats the “sexual adventures of libertine Count Danilo” who goes off to Paris to seduce a wealthy widow into returning home but portrayed by other actors as well. The very title of *God’s Gift to Women* suggests its focus. When the Latin Lover makes his entrance with women clinging to both arms, the American businessman asks his French colleague who the man is. “Why, he’s one of the institutions of Paris, like the Eiffel Tower, the Champs-Élysées, the Folies-Bergère,” was the reply. “He’s a man of a million women. And I dare say no woman’s reputation is safe in his hands. I guess all women are alike to him – just another dish to taste.”⁸⁸

In the 1938 film *Gold Diggers in Paris*, a troupe of American dancers travels to France for an international ballet competition. One girl, enamored by the charming accent of a Frenchman, wonders aloud, “Why don’t they make a law or something to have every American man born in Paris?” The leader of the dance company sings a song of light-hearted warning about the “dangers” they might encounter in Paris: “It isn’t hard to stumble in Paris . . . / When a pair of lips *bonjour* you and two beautiful eyes *amour* you / You will wonder why / So did I If you’re lonely, you’re in danger / If you happen to be a stranger / in gay Paree.” One girl chimes in, “The Frenchmen are so charming, gallant and debonair / You’ll find that when you’re with them / They’ve got everything but rhythm / They do and dare / So girls, beware!” The song continues, “And so I fell for the [m]ademoiselle / And discovered that she was from New Rochelle / Her French was simply frightful / But her kisses were so delightful / How she fooled me / Ah

⁸⁸ Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*, 213; *God’s Gift to Women* (1934), author’s copy.

oui oui.”⁸⁹ In the final scene at the dance competition, the Americans put on a lavish spectacle, singing a number called “Ooh La La La!” about the charms of Parisian life and replete with the usual stereotypes, including flirtatious *Parisiennes*, beret-wearing, baguette-toting Frenchmen, and the pleasures of drinking wine. The chorus goes, “That’s how the Frenchmen sing / That’s how they have their fling / That’s how the Frenchmen swing the Latin Quarter / They’re fifty million strong / And they can’t all be wrong / Let’s all ooh la la la.” And then the group laments, “I want to go back to Paris / Where there ain’t such a word as ‘no’ / Where they hug and squeeze a girl they meet / It’s always *à propos*.” The crowded theater erupts into applause, with cries of “Bis!” and “Vive l’Amérique!” heard all around, and the Americans win first place in the competition.

Hollywood made sure that American men understood that they, too, could find love in the famed city. When Jack Oakie strums a romantic tune on his guitar in the 1936 film *That Girl from Paris*, Lily Pons, the female lead and internationally known opera singer, who was making only her second film in Hollywood, asks him where he learned it. “In Paris,” Oakie replies. “In the autumn. The leaves were falling and I fell right along with them – for a little French dame.” When she comments that she is from southern France, he asks: “Are the girls from the South as warm-blooded as the ones in Paris?”⁹⁰ The message to American movie-goers was thus clear: for fun, frivolity, and romance, head for Paris. The 1938 film *Roberta*, which stars Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, Irene Dunne, and Randolph Scott, reinforces that image. In one scene, Rogers, posing as a “countess,” who, although supposedly Polish, is, after all, in *Paris*

⁸⁹ *Gold Diggers in Paris* (WB, 1937) file, Motion Picture Association of America, Production Code Administration records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

⁹⁰ *Gold Diggers in Paris* (1938), *That Girl from Paris* (1936), author’s copies.

seated on a sofa in a couturier's shop – and that demands a certain kind of behavior. Scott, a member of a newly arrived American band led by Astaire, is standing in front of her and she looks him slowly up and down with a hint of lasciviousness. “You big beautiful American,” she says, rubbing both hands slightly together and looking at him with bedroom eyes. Moments later they are standing facing each other and she speaks harshly of another woman, whom Scott quickly defends. “What, are you her lover?” she asks. “I’ve never seen such a place!” he exclaims in exasperation. “No one thinks of anything but being somebody’s lover!” Says she: “Well, have *you* never thought of it?,” looking at him indolently and putting her hand on his chest. When the camera is back on them, after a scene switch, he is semi-seated on a table and she is running a comb through his hair. “I must show you Paris and I want you to love it,” she says in a sultry voice, to which Scott replies, “I’ve seen the Eiffel Tower.”⁹¹

It was Boyer who ultimately became the quintessential French Lover type. The box office results of his early American films were irregular and he more than once concluded that he would have no career in Hollywood. The difficulty with English lay at the heart of the problem, but what gave him second and third chances was the growing sense that he projected a magnetic charm. Walter Wanger, who produced *Private Lives*, was probably the first to recognize that his strong accent might be an advantage. The film did much better than the blasé initial reviews portended and audience analysis revealed why: “It was women who adored it, and Boyer was the object of their adoration.” When he made *Garden of Allah* with Marlene Dietrich, the picture flopped commercially, but it reinforced Boyer’s developing image as an actor with an extraordinary appeal to women. One of the top production supervisors at Warner

⁹¹ *Roberta* (1938), author’s copy.

Brothers, while acknowledging that Boyer “was adored by women,” wrote to the studio’s executive producer, Hal Wallis, in January 1937 saying that the actor was not right for the part of the Russian exile in *Tovarich*, and recommending that he not be used. Wallis ignored the advice. And then the release of *Algiers* in 1938, in which Hedy Lamarr made her American debut, ended all argument. That film forever made Boyer his generation’s symbol of male charm and suave seductiveness and the line “Come with me to the Casbah” acquired legendary dimensions. That it was not in the script and he never pronounced the words in the film did not matter; Boyer was *the* Latin Lover.⁹²

French critics kept a watchful for offenses against France – and they had the occasional support of French authorities and even of the Hays Office itself. Both the Hays Office and French authorities watched Hollywood attentively to prevent or minimize offensive misrepresentation. At the end of the 1920s the French government, through its Washington embassy, had indicated to the MPPDA that a Baron Valentin Mandelstamm, who was a friend of a member of the foreign minister’s staff, was authorized to speak for it in matters of censorship. “We simply must cultivate the French embassy and their [sic] hirelings if we ever expect to quiet that country down,” observed Herron of the MPPDA. Mandelstamm monitored carefully the script of a Goldwyn production, *Condemned*, which dealt with the political sensitive subject of the notorious French penal colony on Devil’s Island in French Guiana; he also urged extensive changes in the script of a United Artists project, *DuBarry, Woman of Passion*

⁹² Swindell, *Charles Boyer*, 104-122; Robert Lord to Hal Wallis, 29 Jan. 1937, Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Inside Warner Bros.*, 32-33.

(1930), which contained “fundamental errors” on virtually all aspects of French history, according to Mandelstamm. As it stood, the script told “an impossible story” that would elicit “formal protests” from the French government, he warned. United Artists pledged that he would exercise great caution and Herron agreed that it should do so. In the case of yet another film dealing with the Foreign Legion, Paramount’s *Morocco*, released in 1930 and starring Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich, and Adolph Menjou, Mandelstamm, to prevent what he said would be an insult to the honor of legionnaires, was able to secure a reshooting of a scene in which an officer of the Legion shoots an American in the back. Warner Brothers paid the price for not heeding Mandelstamm when he objected to the portrayal of French women in a 1931 film produced by Darryl F. Zanuck. In a memo to Zanuck, Jack Warner, and William Koenig at Warner Brothers, Mandelstamm decried “the unfortunate tendency throughout the story to picture French women as loose and as leading immoral lives, besides being forever trying to get money out of Americans. Not one of the French girls in the story escapes this stigma.” He pointed out that in the previous fall, an American film was released that also depicted Paris as “a gigantic brothel, and that this picture caused very strong French protests.”⁹³ Zanuck rather flippantly dismissed the cultural attaché’s objections. “In reference to Baron Mandelstamm: . . . he asked me not to use any French girls in *Fifty Million Frenchmen*, so I therefore used American girls,” he wrote. “They play all the parts.” Mandelstamm, in response, blasted the film in a communication to the Quai d’Orsay and French authorities responded by embargoing all Warner films, a ban lifted

⁹³ Mandelstamm to Darryl F. Zanuck, Jack Warner, and William Koenig, 18 Aug. 1930, *Fifty Million Frenchmen* (WB, 1931) file, Motion Picture Association of America (henceforth MPAA), Production Code Administration (henceforth PCA) Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Underlined for emphasis in the original.

only after studio executives had sent a humiliatingly contrite letter to Mandelstamm. It is not clear what other changes were made to the film, but “Colonel” Jason S. Joy of the Association of Motion Picture Producers wrote to Hays in February 1931 to warn him that the “French will seriously object to it,” and that it contained “one sequence that is about as raw as anything I have ever seen.”⁹⁴

Throughout the decade films occasionally ran into trouble either with Hollywood’s own censorship mechanism, which sought to avoid further problems, or French watchdogs. RKO in 1936, for example, wanted to make a film originally titled *Manhattan Street Girl*, but changed it to *Street Girl*, thinking that would mitigate the connotation, which it did not. Finally, the film became *That Girl from Paris*. French officials then objected to the depiction of Paris in the film, RKO made revisions, but the censors grumbled about representation of gendarmes – “The policeman shown us, if they appeared in a Paris street, even quietly, would themselves be immediately arrested,” a French censor or advisor noted – but did approve the film, in which Lily Pons, recently arrived from Paris, had her first starring role.⁹⁵ The latest entry in the popular musical series featuring the Goldiggers – this time they were on their way to Paris – was to feature a song with excessively suggestive lyrics. The offensive lines (in italics) were:

She was so chic and I was weak
And so I fell for the Mademoiselle
And forgot the way back to my own hotel
But how could I avoid it
And it’s funny but I enjoyed it

⁹⁴ Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*, 81-84; Jason S. Joy (Hollywood) to Hays, 18 Feb. 1931, *Fifty Million Frenchmen* file, MPAA, PCA Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

⁹⁵ *That Girl From Paris*, RKO, 1936 file, MPAA, PCA Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

And so did she
Ah oui oui

It is not clear whether it was the Hays Office censors or French monitors who caught the objectionable material, but the new version used in the film was:

She was so chic and I was weak
And so I fell for the Mademoiselle
And discovered that she was from New Rochelle.
Her French was simply frightful
But her kisses were so delightful
How she fooled me
Ah, oui oui.⁹⁶

The title of Columbia Pictures's *Good Girls Go To Paris* (1939) originally was *Good Girls Go To Paris Too*, which implied that it was *bad* girls who usually made the trip to have even more fun, so the studio eliminated the word *too*. A *New York Times* reporter noted that the title was now "thoroughly moral and inoffensive" and that the Hays Office was satisfied that it had "kept France from taking offense."

The production of French-language versions involved more than simply translating words because of the cultural implications of certain themes and situations. MGM, for example, ran into difficulties with its 1931 film *Bachelor Father*, which generated a policy debate within the filmmaking establishment. The Hays Office had forced the studio to add a scene that made clear that the protagonist had legally divorced the women who had borne him children, but MGM cut that scene from the version to be marketed in France. Hays initially objected, but relented when his agent in charge of monitoring foreign-language editions argued against a blanket requirement that *all* films conform to censorship standards for American audiences. "This would be dangerous," the agent wrote, "because many things innocent enough in our language

⁹⁶ *Golddiggers in Paris*, WB, 1937 file, MPAA, PCA Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

would be quite offensive to the French and because some of our moral standards are less moral to the French than standards which we consider immoral.” A Catholic public, he pointed out, would probably be more offended by the idea of divorce, especially multiple instances of it, than by the idea of casual liaisons. Herron agreed. “You can be more sophisticated in your foreign versions than you can in the domestic ones,” he wrote, “but the productions must be kept on a high level, even with this sophistication, and not allowed to drop into the mud at any time.” In the specific case of the new scene in *Bachelor Father*, Herron thought that it could be deleted from the French version. “In fact it makes it more spicy [sic], of course, not to have it in,” he pondered, “and on the Continent I think it will get by.”⁹⁷

A film that became a little too muddy for the Hays Office was Warner Brothers’s *Madame Du Barry* (1934), starring the Mexican actress Dolores del Rio as the famous French courtesan. When the Hays Office saw the script, it rejected it immediately, admonishing the studio that it was “filled with vulgarity, obscenity and blatant adultery” that inevitably would “involve the industry in serious controversy with France.” That very year saw the promulgation, by the MPPDA, of a new code for self-regulation designed to ward off a threatened boycott of movies by the Catholic Church. The code stipulated that “the history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of all nations shall be represented fairly” and admonished studios that the “just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment.” The MPPDA quickly set up a Production Code Administration (PCA) under Joseph Breen to handle censorship and his mission, assigned by the MPPDA itself, was to make the studios toe the moral line. Warner executives, however, surprisingly decided to fight the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 96.

censor's intrusion in the specific case of *Madame Du Barry*. They started shooting the film as scripted and demanded a face-to-face showdown with Breen. That meeting was acrimonious and resulted in a full-scale conference of MPPDA executive members, who had little choice but to back their own creation, the PCA. The studio bowed to the decision, but when the film was complete, Breen still refused to approve it because of suggestive costumes and bedroom scenes. Warner Brothers excised all the offensive material and added dialogue to give the film, which flopped at the box office, an overall moral message.⁹⁸

Paramount ran into trouble with the censors because of the original screenplay for *Say It in French*, a 1938 comedy starring Ray Milland and French newcomer Olympia Bradne. Joseph Breen, head of the Hays Office and relatively new censorship authority, flatly rejected the screenplay in July 1938 because of the "enormous amount of details dealing with suggestive sex situations." Scrutinizing the script, one Paramount official pointed out to director Andrew Stone that a reference to Joan of Arc's armor would be "fatal" overseas, i. e., in France; the next month he cautioned that the script still would result in a "bawdy French farce."⁹⁹

Despite Hollywood's effort to avoid ruffling French feathers unduly, problems inevitably arose. Vuillermoz and Veber were permanent sentinels and a commentary by each in the mid-1930s suggested the continuity in their dissatisfaction with basically any representation of Paris or France or Frenchmen in American movies. Vuillermoz in 1934 thought that Chevalier's latest film for Paramount was a solid film, but its

⁹⁸ Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Censored: Morality Codes, Catholics, and the Movies*, 176-178.

⁹⁹ Joseph I. Breen to Luigi Luraschi (Paramount), 14 July 1938; A. M. Botsford to Andrew Stone, 14 July, 17 Aug. 1938; *Say It In French*, 1938 Paramount File, MPAA, PCA Records, Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

“hallucinating” depiction of Paris dismayed him. Hollywood supposedly could put accurate scenes of any geographic area of the globe, from Central Africa to China, on the screen, he said. “Well, it seems now demonstrated that our capital is the only place on earth about which it is impossible to obtain accurate information in America,” he growled. Every time a Hollywood director attempted to depict a Parisian street or apartment, the results were “stupefying,” he continued. “One would think that Paris is not located on the same planet as New York.” And he was not finished. Any observatory probably had more accurate photographs of Mars than the “background and decors” shown in the Chevalier movie. Unfortunately, he concluded, Hollywood directors would only ignore any constructive criticism. “For the important thing is not to show the American public France as it is: the essential thing is to show it how they imagine it to be.” The Paris correspondent of the *New York Times* was a sympathetically. “When Hollywood gives the American public Hollywood’s version of Paris or some French literary classic it may satisfy the American public’s image of things French,” he wrote in June 1935, “but seen from the seat of a movie house on the Champs-Élysées, and particularly through Gallic eyes, it is only too liable to cause loud snickers, if not gnashing of teeth and tearing of hair.” The French, he explained, were “peeved and discouraged at seeing France depicted as a nation of naughty actresses, unfaithful wives and philandering husbands.” Veber, writing in 1937, endorsed what Vuillermoz had written two years earlier. “When the Americans send us a film set in Paris, the Parisians grouse and most of the time they are justified,” he commented. “They are shown men with goatees, top hats, and outlandish cafés, plywood streets that give the impression that every lane in the capital is cluttered with staircases, the taxis are

antediluvian and the palaces medieval.” And there were other grievances. The film critic of *Le Temps* expressed bewilderment at what he saw as the disparity in Hollywood’s portrayal of the French and the British. “For the American screen the Frenchman is an ugly, stupid little fellow, frivolous and debauched,” he complained, “whereas the Englishman is as superb and generous as a lion, with heroic traits too numerous to be counted.”¹⁰⁰

French authorities obviously welcomed Hollywood’s self-censorship, but remained alert themselves to perceived slights and distortions. They were especially sensitive about colonial administration in North Africa and France’s penal institutions – and Hollywood remained interested in both subjects. The French censorship board in March 1938 refused an import visa to a dubbed version of *Hurricane* because it depicted administrators of French Pacific islands in an objectionable way. After discussion between the American embassy in Paris and the censorship board, it granted the visa, but said that it wanted the deletion of all references to France, its flag, the “fall of the Bastille,” all words referring to French colonies, and all scenes depicting corporal punishment.¹⁰¹ Three other films, Columbia’s *Adventure in Sahara*, Paramount’s *Beau Geste*, and the Warner Brothers production *Devil’s Island* provoked sharp objections from the French government, which threatened a boycott of the studios’ products. Columbia submitted by agreeing not to market its film abroad and to limit its run in the United States itself; Paramount, which had used a former legionnaire as technical advisor during production precisely in order to avoid problems with French

¹⁰⁰ Vuillermoz, “Le Cinéma: *L’amour guide*,” *Le Temps*, 10 Feb. 1934, 6; Herbert L. Matthews, “Plaintive Cry from a Gay City,” *New York Times*, 30 June 1935, 10: 2; Veber, “Faire International,” *Le Matin*, 29 Oct.

¹⁰¹ U.S. Embassy (Paris) to State Dept., 8 March 1938, RG 59 851.4061 HURRICANE/1, NARA.

authorities, had to suspend exhibition of *Beau Geste* after only four weeks and make the changes they demanded; while Warner Brothers had a similar experience with *Devil's Island*, but suffered a sixty-day “punitive” suspension of its license to distribute movies in France.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Vasey, *World According to Hollywood*, 180-186.

CHAPTER 5: “ALLONS, ENFANTS DE LA PATRIE”

The Second World War marked a new era in Franco-American cultural and intellectual relations. French movie producers, thanks to the Wehrmacht, achieved one of their most ardently sought goals: the absence of American competition. Indeed, the German conquest of Western Europe all but closed the entire continent to new American films, forcing Hollywood to depend on the domestic market and sales to Latin America to a degree not known since the early stages of the film industry. France itself paid a heavy price for the circumstances that forced American competitors out of the country, but the French film industry, that part of it that opted to work under Nazi domination, actually benefited in fundamental ways from changes effected by the new collaborationist regime at Vichy. The ignominious defeat in June 1940, furthermore, created political and intellectual divisions in France that would give its cultural “war” with the United States even more bitter contours after Liberation. And those French writers, directors, actors, and other film craftsmen, some of them national cultural icons, who found Nazi rule intolerable and sought refuge in the United States not only symbolized and helped develop a stirring new theme for American movies, but found themselves thrust personally onto the cultural battlefield in Hollywood.

The German invasion of Poland brought the production side of the French movie industry to a standstill and, during the ensuing *drôle de guerre*, there was only an anemic resumption of activity as all sides were hesitant and uncertain. Financial markets were unsettled; actors, writers, directors, and technicians of various kinds had

been called up; theaters had been closed, permanently in some areas, such as those adjacent to the Franco-German border, for example, while those permitted to reopen saw their screening schedules reduced. Avoiding risk was the general ambition – there was risk enough on the eastern side of the Maginot Line. If only it were a movie, an anonymous French writer mused late in October 1939, Clark Gable and Marlene Dietrich could save the situation. Gable would pilot an aircraft, while Marlene served as machine-gunner and together they would drive attacking enemy formations away. Back on the ground, the two would embrace and engage in a long kiss. “And now,” Gable would remark, “what if we find a more comfortable place?” Dietrich would look at him, light a cigarette, exhale slowly, and reply, “O.k.”¹ Real-life circumstances looked more problematical. At the end of 1939, movie attendance was only half of what it had been in peacetime, and theater owners could not calculate with any certainty the future availability of films. New domestically made movies practically disappeared, so exhibitor houses welcomed what American distributors could provide. But the supply of American product decline sharply once the fighting started, in part because of rigorous application of French censorship regulations. Authorities had taken a reasonably “liberal” approach prior to September 1939, but quickly began strict enforcement once the country went to war. Some films had to have scenes cut before release, while others faced the censorial guillotine. Of nearly seventy films banned outright after September, 30 percent were American and included *The Big Parade*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and various other war and gangster films. The French government did not want audiences to see anything critical of authority or disrespectful of national

¹ L'Ilot du Village, “Si c'était au Cinéma: Une Alerte avec Marlene Dietrich et Clark Gable,” *Pour Vous* 571, 25 Oct. 1939, 7.

institutions or traditions – and that made both French and American studios more cautious in submitting films for screening permits. American films, moreover, encountered another unexpected impediment: dubbing, which local law required be performed in France, virtually ground to a halt and resumed only on a vastly more reduced scale in the early weeks of 1940.²

And then there was the all-important question of the uncertainty about profit remittances generated by more stringent French exchange controls. If American firms could not get paid for their films, there would be no new business with France. In that regard, wrote Harold Smith, representative of the Hays Office in Paris, late in January, “the situation appears to be very black to me.”³ The new head of the Motion Picture Section of the government’s Information Bureau, described by Smith as “more or less the Head of the film industry in France,” was cordial in listening to American concerns and showed himself to be a “strong admirer” of American films. The Robert Donat film *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and James Stewart’s *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* were “two of the best” that he had seen in a long time, said the French official. And maybe Hollywood could assist France by making films that would show neutral countries how the Hitler regime oppressed other peoples? James Cagney, he pondered, might play the Austrian chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss,⁴ who had been assassinated by local Nazis in 1934. But a sympathetic ear did not resolve the problem and, in ensuing weeks, as spring arrived and Hitler unleashed his forces against Denmark and Norway, all American representatives could do was continue to appeal and hope in vain. The last

² Chargé d’Affaires Robert Murphy (Paris) to DS, 13 Feb. 1940, RG 59, 851.4061MP/346, NARA.

³ Harold L. Smith (Paris) to F. L. Herron (N. Y.), 26 Jan. 1940, RG 59, 851.4061 Motion Pictures/344, NARA.

⁴ U.S. Commercial Attaché (Paris), memorandum of conversation, 1 Feb. 1940, enclosure to US Embassy (Paris) to DS, 20 Feb. 1940, RG 59, 851.4061MP/347, NARA.

full year before the war France had imported 239 American films; in 1940 that number plummeted to eighty.⁵ And all that French exhibitors, for their part, could do was exploit the small trickle of new product and recycle old films – and recycle they did. One *aficionada* in Paris, at first glance perhaps an unlikely one, who occasionally went to movies was Simone de Beauvoir, who would later gain fame as one of the *enfants terribles* of the Existentialist movement (and as Jean-Paul Sartre’s longtime paramour). Although she was able to see some more recent films – *Test Pilot*, a 1938 release with Clark Gable and *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, made in 1939 – she frequently had to content herself with dated products, among them a five-year old Gary Cooper film in which he fortunately was “as entertaining as he could be” and an even older Warner Baxter vehicle, which she thought “a good cowboy movie.”⁶

The greatest irony brought by the German conquest was that, in its wake, came a new organizational and institutional structure under which the French film industry would thrive. Conditions at first seemed to foreshadow only ruin. The feeble resumption of filmmaking during early 1940 collapsed with the Armistice in June that divided France into Occupied and Unoccupied Zones. The outlook for cultural life in general and the film sector in particular seemed grim. The enemy’s invasion had led to widespread closing of theaters and the physical destruction of some in northern areas. Transportation and communications had been disrupted. Like the nation itself, the film industry was divided geographically: key personnel had been part of *l’Exode* – the mass flight to the South to avoid German troops – but production facilities were concentrated

⁵ François Garçon, *La distribution cinématographique en France, 1907-1957*, 171.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *Wartime Diary*, 101, 250, 180, 105. For further references to specific American films she watched during the “Phony War,” see 62, 112, 180, 200, 235.

largely in the North.⁷ Those who gave thought to the future of French cinema could only be overwhelmed by the logistical difficulties – and by political uncertainty – and, as the guns fell quiet, theater after theater began converting to music halls.

Initial measures taken by German military authorities confirmed the worst fears. They restricted the work of studios in the Paris region to dubbing German movies, banned from the Occupied Zone any films produced in the South (thirty-five were made there during 1940-42), and rounded up all French films released before the war, destroying those made by persons judged racially or politically undesirable.⁸ Nonetheless, despite the seemingly insurmountable problems the film industry would recover and, in structural ways, be better off. The regime of Marshal Henri-Philippe Pétain installed at Vichy and in control of the Unoccupied Zone insisted on a “National Revolution,” a program of moral regeneration that would rest not on the Third Republic’s cherished “Equality, Fraternity, and Liberty,” but on “Fatherland, Work, and Family.”⁹ To achieve that goal, the Pétain government mobilized all institutions in French society, including the movie industry, which it saw as a valuable instrument of propaganda and education. More surprisingly, a resuscitation of French filmmaking apparently fit into the plans of the conqueror. Minister of Propaganda Josef Goebbels, who controlled the German film industry, scorned the French as morally degenerate and privately opined that French audiences should be fed a steady diet of pap. “What the French need are frivolous films, empty, and even a little stupid, and it’s our job to they get them,” he wrote in his diary. But Goebbels dreamed of the day when German film would replace Hollywood on the continent. “We must proceed in our movie policies as the Americans

⁷ Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*, 247-48.

⁸ Ibid., 254.

⁹ Susan Hayward, *French National Cinema*, 126.

do in their policies toward the North and South American continents,” he noted in his diary. “We must become the dominating movie power on the European continent.”¹⁰

That goal set the tone for the attitude of German authorities in France, who seemingly believed that French product, shaped and controlled by Germany, could be useful in that sense, especially because German film production had declined because of shortages of personnel and resources. A revived French film industry, therefore, would face two monitors – Vichy and German occupation authorities – one subordinate to the other, both encouraging of movie-making and both cooperating to control it.

The Germans soon eased up on the ban of French films produced in the Unoccupied Zone and then allowed Paris studios to resume their work, although production there would be dominated by Continental-Films, a new German company secretly funded by Berlin through the Reich Ministry of Propaganda, that is, Goebbels. For its part, the Pétain regime, with German blessing, set out to provide the film industry with the organization, unity, and financial stability for which many people long had clamored. In fact, the two top directors in the country, Jean Renoir and René Clair, both of whom would subsequently leave France rather than cooperate with Vichy and endure Nazi rule, had submitted a joint proposal to the government as recently as the early *drôle de guerre* period calling for “State surveillance” of movie production through the creation of a “technical bureau” and a “financial bureau” that would resolve the very problems that the Vichy reforms subsequently addressed.¹¹ The chief mechanism used by Vichy to end the disorder and flux in national film production was a new agency, the Comité d’Organisation des Industries Cinématographiques (COIC), established under a

¹⁰ Colin Crisp, *The Classic French Cinema*, 48; Williams, *Republic of Images*, 256-57, 270-71.

¹¹ “Enquête sur la reprise du cinéma français,” *Pour Vous* 572, 1 Nov. 1939, 15.

German order of August 1940 that disbanded all existing workers' and employers' associations and ordered that a single corporate entity ("organization committee") be set up for all economic sectors. The reforms effected by COIC included enhanced professionalization of personnel through specialized training, a guarantee of adequate funding – COIC arranged financing for up to 65 percent of production costs – and simplification of taxes. Under the new system, production did revive – 220 feature films and 400 short subjects by 1944 – the overall technical quality of films improved, and French movie-makers could actually make a profit off the domestic market. French audiences seemed to like the wartime product, although the only options were films turned out under the aegis of Continental-Films or Italian movies, since German authorities prohibited the screening of any American movies in the Occupied Zone in 1940 and extended that ban to all of France after the Anglo-American invasion of North Africa in 1942.¹² One of the costs to filmmakers of being allowed to practice their craft in a more stable environment was bureaucratization, but there were steeper ones: loss of artistic freedom and the disappearance of their colleagues considered Jewish under Nazi according to Nazi categorization. Still, those involved in film production were satisfied enough with the institutional arrangements to keep them in their essential form after Liberation, changing the name of COIC to the Centre National de la Cinématographie in order to disassociate it from the taint of collaborationism, and

¹² Crisp, *Classic French Cinema*, 43-63; Paul Légliise, *Histoire de la politique du Cinéma français*, II, 25-95; Roy Armes, *French Cinema*, 110. The quote is from Crisp, 54.

enjoying its support and protection in the highly competitive international film environment of the post-war years.¹³

Another striking consequence of the war years that had profound implications for Franco-American relations in all spheres after 1945 was an internal political and ideological divide unequalled since the era of the French Revolution. That cleavage grew out of bitter politico-ideological struggles of the pre-war Popular Front era that saw conservative, rightist elements railing against the perceived corruption and weaknesses of the Third Republic. Thanks to Hitler's panzers and Luftwaffe, the Right suddenly found itself in a position in 1940 to dictate internal policy, at least in a substantial part of the country, through Pétain's "National Revolution." Arguing that the presence of goose-stepping German troops in Paris was proof of the bankruptcy of degenerate republicanism, the Right backed the hero of Verdun in his efforts to reconstruct French society along conservative lines, which included an attempt to impose on the nascent film industry the obligation to extol the simple, virtuous, hard-working common man who lived, preferably, in the countryside or small village, away from corrupting modernity.¹⁴

The very fact that this campaign was carried out within the framework of collaboration with *les Boches* deprived the "National Revolution" of any legitimacy and, as German occupation policy became progressively harsher with defeat on the horizon, French men and women in increasingly greater numbers scrambled to polish their credentials as *résistants*. Although few people actively opposed the Germans before 1944, most would claim after that period to have done so. And the best way to prove

¹³ Crisp, *Classic French Cinema*, 64; Jean-Pierre Jeancolas, "The Setting-up of a 'Method of production' in the French Cinema, 1946-50," 59-67. A close analysis of the French film industry during the war can be found in François Garçon, *La distribution cinématographique en France, 1907-1957*, 157-181.

¹⁴ Rearick, *French in Love and War*, 248-264; Francis Courtade, *Les malédictions du cinéma français*, 204-06.

that was, especially for intellectuals, to glorify the Resistance as a *revolution*, one that demanded punishment of collaborators, a continued commitment to change, and visceral opposition to any foreign influences widely perceived to be suspicious in character for whatever reason. Sharpening that disposition was the fact that a nationwide vendetta against collaborators saw nearly 11,000 executions during the period of Liberation and resulted in another 7,000 death sentences in post-1944 trials, 800 of which were carried out. Thousands more lost their employment and spent time in prison. Another factor contributing to French intellectual rigidity and selectivity vis-à-vis foreign, especially American, influence in the early postwar period was the attraction of Communism. The prestige of the Soviet Union, and hence of its ideology, because of that country's role in destroying Nazism reached its apogee at the end of the war, making that country and the ideological underpinnings of its regime an irresistible magnet for legions of French citizens. The French Communist Party, heavily Stalinist in the late 1940s and the second largest one outside the emerging Soviet Bloc and China, regularly controlled a quarter of the French electorate for years after the war. Soviet attacks on Western, especially American, influence and activities thus found booming resonance in post-1944 France. The result of this general situation was that, once the Cold War set in, a Frenchman who showed any sympathy for the United States, its policies, and cultural exports, ran the risk of triggering immediate and frequently damaging charges of "collaboration."¹⁵

There was little that American studios could do about the French market during the war, but producers, directors, and script-writers kept a thematic eye on that country.

¹⁵ Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals, 1944-1956*, 27-74, 111.

There were fewer movies dealing with France because the international situation militated against the kind of romantic comedy that had been so popular in the 1930s and because making films about pre-war France seemed incongruous. The emotional response of many Americans to the fall of France found a symbol in poignant lyrics spontaneously penned by famed lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II. The resultant song, *The Last Time I Saw Paris*, was, he told *Time* magazine, the first uncommissioned song he had written and it marked the first time that he had written lyrics to one before his associate, the renowned Jerome Kern, had composed the music. Singer Kate Smith obtained exclusive rights for a period of six weeks to perform the song on radio and several other singers made records that included the piece. That it was popular did not surprise Hammerstein, who noted that “everyone feels that way about Paris, even the people who’ve never been there.” The song was included in the movie *Lady Be Good* and won the Academy Award for 1941 in the Best Song category. The fact that it had appeared in 1940 (and not 1941) and had not been written specifically for the movie elicited sharp complaints from competing songwriters – even Jerome Kern had raised doubts about its eligibility – and suggests that the song garnered a sympathy vote.¹⁶ For that same Academy Awards ceremony, a Warner Brothers musical short had been nominated for an award; its title, *The Gay Parisian*, was slightly jarring in the circumstances.¹⁷

One wartime film did have a familiar, but muted, ooh-la-la tone – MGM’s *Young Ideas*, released in 1943. The movie opens with scenes of readers from all walks of life

¹⁶ “Music,” *Time*, 23 Dec. 1940, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,765092,00.html#ixzz1I97Paz00>; Mason Wiley and Damien Bona, *Inside Oscar: The Unofficial History of the Academy Awards*, 121.

¹⁷ *The Gay Parisian* (1941), author’s copy.

avidly buying and pouring over a book titled *Paris As I Knew It* by an American author, “Josephine Evans” (Mary Astor), that in a few screen seconds goes through ten editions; one newspaper comment shown on screen said, “It was a gay life in Paris as Josephine saw it!” Astor’s college-age son and daughter try to break up her marriage to a staid college professor by suggesting that the book is autobiographical, that the “Colette”, “Marie”, and “Yvonne” whom Astor describes are actually based on her own experiences. “She had to split herself up,” the son maliciously explains to the step-father. “She said people wouldn’t believe one woman could cover so much territory” – the obvious implication being that Paris is, or was before the war, the place to give free rein to one’s carnal instincts. Making that point, the son adds, “You know how Paris used to be,” a comment clearly intended to divorce Paris under the Nazi jackboot from the traditional City of Lights (as seen by Hollywood). In the movie itself, the back cover of Astor’s book has a large, clear photo of the Eiffel Tower; but the theater lobby poster, prepared by studio publicists seeking to exploit the tradition of imagined naughtiness, prominently displays the book with a scantily clad Parisian in a red dress on the back cover. “THE PICTURE THAT GIVES YOU Young Ideas,” the poster read.¹⁸

The only feature films with French settings unrelated to the Resistance theme all came out that same year: Universal’s remake of *The Phantom of the Opera*; 20th Century Fox’s *Song of Bernadette*; and two MGM productions, a new version of *Du Barry Was a Lady*, which had been a recent Broadway hit and starred dancer Gene Kelly, and *Madame Curie*. Interestingly enough, three films with French themes competed for the Best Picture award at the 1944 Academy Awards ceremony: the two

¹⁸ *Young Ideas* (1943), author’s copy. The poster can be viewed at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Ideas.

MGM films, along with the Warner Brothers production *Casablanca*. The female leads in *Song of Bernadette* and *Madame Curie*, Jennifer Jones and Greer Garson respectively, vied for the Oscar for Best Actress, with Jones winning.¹⁹

It was the theme of French courage and resistance vis-à-vis the German oppressors that gave the war period its unique stamp insofar as the cinematographic dimension of Franco-American relations were concerned. American producers found in stories of France's contemporary tragedy a profitable commodity for domestic consumption and a useful morale-builder on the homefront – and practically all major studios exploited them, although in some cases perhaps as much to showcase stars as to hail non-collaborationists in France. The earliest film on the theme was Universal's *Paris Calling*, which reached theaters in January 1942; the producer chose an Austrian-born actress (Elizabeth Bergner) and an American one (Gale Sondergaard) to play the principal "French" women involved in a Resistance cell headquartered in a waterfront dive. A *New York Times* reviewer took the script writer to task, labeling the screenplay "totally irresponsible," and characterizing the entire movie as "graceless frivolity on the edge of doom," but the movie, which opens with a shot of the Eiffel Tower standing guard over a Paris on the eve of defeat in 1940, does exalt the spirit of defiance. When the heroine's fiancé confides to her that the government is going to abandon Paris and urges her to flee as well, she is incredulous. "Paris? You are giving it to the Germans?" she asks. When he insists, she still is baffled. "Run away and not fight for Paris?" Her subsequent participation in the underground is the logical consequence of her quietly heroic spirit. The following month audiences could see a Twentieth-Century Fox release *Joan of Paris*, with a bona fide French actress, Michèle Morgan, in the female

¹⁹ Wiley and Bona, *Inside Oscar*, 133-136.

lead and that summer Fox brought out *The Pied Piper*, which featured Monty Woolley. Not strictly in the Resistance genre, but arguably part of it, the story concerns a British tourist caught in France during the German invasion who, determined for action, saves a group of children from German oppression. The movie was nominated for three Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Actor. An MGM film, *Reunion in France*, appeared at year's end; it starred Joan Crawford as a French woman involved with the Resistance – and with John Wayne, who played a downed American flyer. The following year, 1943, saw four more films on the Resistance theme: Warner Brothers's *Casablanca* with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, judged Best Picture for the year by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences; RKO's *This Land is Mine*; MGM's *Assignment in Brittany*, and Fox's *Paris After Dark*. And six Resistance films appeared in 1944: Warner Brothers kept Bogart in the fray with *Passage to Marseilles* and *To Have and Have Not* (set in Martinique), and featured Errol Flynn in *Uncertain Glory* (1944), while MGM again saluted the Resistance with *The Cross of Lorraine*, Universal released *The Impostor*, and RKO used a Franco-Prussian War setting in *Mademoiselle Fifi* to extol the contemporary French spirit of resistance.²⁰

Casablanca is a good example of the tribute paid by wartime Hollywood to the fighting spirit of France. Hal Wallis, executive producer of the film, sensed the patriotism-stirring appeal of French symbols. After viewing the rushes of a scene in which French patrons of the café owned by “Rick” (Bogart) stand to sing *La Marseillaise* to drown out a group of German officers who had launched into song, he insisted that the scene be more robustly staged. “On the *Marseillaise*, when it is played in the café,

²⁰ T. S., “Paris Calling (1941),” *New York Times*, 19 Jan. 1942, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9804EFD6163CE33BBC4152DFB7668389659EDE>; all films mentioned, author's copies.

don't do it as though it was [sic] played by this small orchestra," he instructed the director. "Do it with full scoring orchestra and get some body to it."²¹ A further reinforcement of the theme of Paris as the place for romance, the doomed couple Rick and Ilsa (Ingrid Bergman) meet and fall in love in that city, and Bogart utters one of cinema's most memorable lines when assuring his love, "We'll always have Paris." Warner's *Uncertain Glory*, directed by Raoul Walsh and released in 1943, was another flattering patriotic pitch and salute to the Resistance. Errol Flynn stars as a Frenchman named Jean Picard, a thief who turns himself in to the Gestapo at the end of the film for a crime he did not commit – the blowing up of a bridge by members of the Resistance – in order to save the lives of a hundred hostages threatened with execution. At one point Picard complains about the slowness of a mule pulling a cart in which he is riding, asking the driver if the animal could not go faster. "She's like France: too old to beat, too tough to die," the weary driver replied. "What keeps her going?" Picard asks. "Courage," replied the proud old Frenchman. As Picard is about to surrender to the Nazis, and with strains of *La Marseillaise* playing in the background, he explains his sacrifice. "I suppose there's a time when any man, even a man like me, can find something bigger than himself for which he's ready to die, without question, almost, almost happily." Inspector Bonnet, the detective who had captured Picard but then agreed to allow him to surrender as the saboteur, must tell the thief's girlfriend about his execution. When she asks what Picard had been "really like, deep down in his heart," Bonnet replies, again as the French anthem plays softly, "He was a Frenchman."²²

²¹ Hal B. Wallis, memo, 2 Sept. 1942, in Rudy Behlmer, *Inside Warner Bros.*, 216.

²² *Casablanca* (1942), *Uncertain Glory* (1944), author's copies.

Hollywood filmmakers seem to have made, on the whole, a greater effort to inject authenticity into films, an undertaking made easier by the influx of French actors, set designers and art directors. For a Technicolor remake in 1942 of the operetta *Desert Song*, which was set in French North Africa, Warner Brothers turned to Robert Florey, under whose direction the film became, in his words, “an anti-Vichy and anti-Nazi musical melodrama.” His cast included actor Marcel Dalio, who had managed to flee Vichy France with his teenage bride the previous year. In one somewhat poignant moment described by Florey, symbolic of the wartime plight of important segments of the French artistic elite and intelligentsia, the two sat on the hotel terrace after the day’s shooting, musing over the incongruity: a Frenchman, “uprooted from the streets of Paris,” finding himself in the deserts of New Mexico and Arizona, where hundreds of Navajos and cowboys played Riff warriors and temperatures reached 130 degrees. But Dalio had just spent several weeks in southern France and then Lisbon trying to get passage to America, so he himself represented a dose of authenticity in the film; Florey, moreover, was able to secure the services of probably the best-known French art director and set designer, Eugène Lourié, who had arrived from Occupied France only months before. *Desert Song*, in fact, was the first film assignment for Lourié, who had been supporting himself and his wife by designing advertisements for fashion publications in New York. “It was a marvel,” Florey said of Lourié’s work on the film, which was a box office hit. As technical director on *Casablanca*, Warner Brothers contracted a young French officer who was an escapee from a German POW camp and Vichy France.²³

²³ Robert Florey, *Hollywood*, 199-200, 203; Eugène Lourié, *My Work in Films*, 72-73; Lawrence Leamer, *As Time Goes By: The Life of Ingrid Bergman*, 89.

Wartime émigré director Jean Renoir directed *This Land Is Mine*, the subject of which – life in France under Nazi rule – was something he himself had only recently experienced; to help create the proper atmosphere he hired Lourié as his art director. The film, nonetheless, was meant for American audiences and it came off an American studio “assembly-line,” so the two Frenchmen did have to compromise. “We wanted a nondescript, anonymous, contemporary French town where an average Frenchman lives his ordinary life,” Lourié recalled. But RKO, in part because of government-imposed restrictions on new materials for movie sets, objected. “We already have a French town built on our lot,” Renoir and Lourié heard from studio budget monitors. “You have to use it.” And what was the “town” available? “I was driven to the RKO ranch on Ventura Boulevard,” Lourié later wrote, “and there I confronted the decaying sets for the medieval French streets built for *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.” The “flamboyant Gothic style” of the 1939 set was out of harmony with Renoir’s conception of the film, but he changed some camera angles and Lourié designed some new façades, so that the final look had the authenticity they wanted. On the other hand, Renoir decided that all street signs and posters would be in English, a concession to the domestic audience.²⁴

The French community in Hollywood, galvanized by Charles Boyer, helped to prevent, or at least minimize, the glaring cultural missteps that had characterized American films of earlier periods. Like many European émigrés safe in the United States, Boyer went through inner turmoil as war engulfed his homeland and threatened family members. At the height of the crisis in May 1940, he decided that he could stand idly by no longer and with his wife flew to London in search of a way to contribute to the

²⁴ Lourié, *My Work in Films*, 76-77.

war effort in some way. From the British capital he followed the evacuation of Dunkirk and became involved in the rescue of various prominent Frenchmen, and he was there to welcome a relatively unknown Charles de Gaulle, who soon proclaimed the Free French movement. It was Boyer who recorded for transmission to the United States an English-language version of de Gaulle's famous radio proclamation over the British Broadcasting Corporation urging the French people to resist the German conquerors. In August, as the Battle of Britain raged, Boyer returned to the United States determined to do what he could to promote his country's interests and the war effort of the gaullist Committee of National Liberation. One of his first steps was to establish the French War Relief Committee.²⁵

The idea of a special library that would serve as a resource for the movie studios, providing more accurate information on all aspects of French culture and history, had its origins in Boyer's frustration over the film industry's penchant for "careless and consistent misrepresentation of France and the French people." Launching the venture in the fall of 1940, Boyer invested considerable time and personal finances in it – an estimated \$2 million over the next decade or so. With contributions and donations from the French community and other supporters, including French government authorities, he eventually built a library that, according to Florey, contained "thousands of volumes" and was housed in its own building constructed by Boyer. Three full-time researchers were available to assist filmmakers. Florey described what the enterprise meant, in practice:

The studios and their producers, writers, directors and technicians can obtain, in a few minutes and with at no cost all desired information for the purpose of establishing the correct atmosphere for a historical or modern film in which the

²⁵ Swindell, *Charles Boyer*, 164-165.

action takes place in France. If the accessories director for a film needs a Parisian *coupe-fil*, or would like to know the form of French birth certificate, or a metro ticket, he can contact the Foundation that will then give him the information. One may consult, in this building, all the books possible on French costumes, uniforms, or furniture from throughout the ages. A director who contacts the Foundation is sure of not making any mistakes.

At the Academy Awards ceremony in March 1943, Boyer received a special Oscar “for his progressive cultural achievement in establishing the French Research Foundation in Los Angeles.”²⁶

Censorship by both the PCA and the Office of War Information (OWI) proved to be a powerful mechanism for preventing offenses to French, especially Gaullist, sensitivities. Joseph Breen, director of the PCA, insisted on several changes in the script of *Casablanca* that greatly diluted the depiction of the Vichyite prefect of police in Casablanca as “an immoral man who engages himself in seducing women to whom he grants visas.”²⁷ The OWI had no authority to censor movies for domestic audiences, but it was empowered to censor those sent abroad and it carefully watched for scenes or dialogues that might give offense to Free French authorities. It insisted that, because of scenes unflattering to inhabitants of French North Africa, Paramount’s *Road to Morocco*, a 1942 entry in the “Road” series starring Bob Hope and Bing Crosby, not be allowed into that area even after its liberation. The OWI also forced the removal of scenes from *Desert Song* that showed French officials mistreating Arabs and then did not want it shown in French territory anyway. And because of OWI objections, Columbia changed the whole character of its story line for *Sahara*, another Bogart film released in 1943. Through a depiction of the war in North Africa, the studio originally

²⁶ Ibid., 165-166, 184; Florey, *Hollywood*, 109-110.

²⁷ Joseph I. Breen (Production Code Administration) to Jack. L. Warner, 19 May 1942, in Aljean Harmetz, *Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Making of Casablanca – Bogart, Bergman, and World War II*, 165; Breen to Warner, 5 June 1942, in Rudy Behlmer, *Inside Warner Bros.*, 212-213.

wanted to address the question of France's defeat. "Using Marshal Pétain and Pierre Laval as real characters, the film would illustrate how the Nazis undermined civilian and military morale." But the OWI did not want Paramount to wander into sensitive political areas at a time when the United States maintained official diplomatic relations with Vichy, yet simultaneously was waging war in French territory against the wishes of authorities in Vichy, so the censors warned Paramount that it would not receive an export license. As a result, the film became basically a story of fighting between Americans and Germans. And to avoid wounding French feelings in general, the OWI imposed dialogue changes that left no doubt that a character representing the Free French underground was not afraid to die for his cause.²⁸

As had always been the case, despite a well-intentioned effort to give films as much authenticity as possible, producers and directors made gaffes. The occasional brushes of Marcel Dalio with Hollywood's traditional brisk and careless way, awkward if not irritating to French professionals, of handling the representation of things French is illustrative in this regard. After his arrival in California almost penniless with a young bride in tow, he grabbed at whatever roles he could get. On learning from Claudette Colbert's brother that director Mervyn LeRoy was searching for an actor to play a Brittany fisherman in a Resistance film he was going to make – *The Pied Piper* (1942) – Dalio hastened to the casting office where he joined the other "fishermen" hoping to earn a few days' pay. When LeRoy selected him, the other applicants, "disgusted," looked at Dalio in disbelief. "They knew well what a fisherman looked like, Breton or not. Everybody knew, except the director," Dalio recalled. "But for him, everyone who was small and swarthy was French and in me he had found his ideal." When it came

²⁸ Clayton R. Koppes and Gregory D. Black, *Hollywood Goes to War*, 131, 302-303.

time for his first scene, Dalio was dismayed when he saw the “perfectly ridiculous” clothes the Fox wardrobe department costume had assigned him. “Despite my cotton jersey, my large boots, and my small moustache,” he wrote, “I looked like a fugitive Middle Eastern crook who was hiding out in Brittany in a bad disguise.” Then came his initial turn before the camera. “My first scene was commensurate with my costume. Drunk, a cigarette butt behind my ear, another in the corner of my mouth, I had to transmit a message in an inn full of Germans,” he remembered. “To top it all off, I had to strike a match on the seat of my pants, a Breton custom most certainly thought up by Mervyn LeRoy.”²⁹

During the filming of *The Song of Bernadette* (1943), he encountered further disregard for cultural authenticity. He noticed that a “store” in the French town on the studio lot bore a sign that spelled *Pâtiserie* with one s instead of the requisite two for the French word for sweets shop and then farther away there was one that read *Boulagerie*, a misspelling of *Boulangerie* (bakery). Thinking that he was doing the studio a favor, he brought the errors to the attention of one of director Henry King’s assistants. “Go mind your own business,” was the curt reply. Dalio took the lesson to heart. When King himself showed him a *Farmacie* (the correct spelling is *Pharmacie*) and asked him what he thought, the actor didn’t hesitate. “Absolutely perfect!,” he said. “One would think it’s real.” He did a somewhat similar thing when working on *To Have and Have Not*. One of the script writers was famed novelist William Faulkner, who asked Dalio one day to read some new lines he had written for a wounded Resistance character in the film. He would like a French perspective, Faulkner explained. “What does it matter if I die,” Dalio read, “there will always be a Frenchman to pick up the torch of liberty again and a

²⁹ Marcel Dalio, *Mes années folles*, 180-182.

Frenchman to take the place of another Frenchman!” When Faulkner asked if it sounded right, Dalio was encouraging. “Yes, yes, it’s fine, it’s just what a Resistance fighter who is going to die would say!”³⁰

Culture clash remained a major theme of the American-French exchange during World War II. The experiences of writer-exiles in the United States were interesting as illustrations of the tensions and possibilities the two cultures offered each other in the unusual circumstances of that period. A prominent figure in that group was André Maurois, who left Paris on the eve of its fall to the Germans and made his way first to London and then to the United States. Angst he would feel in this country, but in his case it seems to have arisen more from the circumstances of his homeland and not from culture clash. Indeed, he was comfortable in the United States, where he was well known in literary and educational circles. His self-imposed mission was to awaken American sympathy for France’s plight and he spent a hectic three years giving public lectures across the United States, teaching college courses, and writing articles and books. It was frustrating to him at first to see the low esteem in which broad sectors of American seemed to hold France because of its ignominious collapse and the increasingly collaborationist regime headed by Henri Pétain at Vichy. “Our unfortunate country,” he remembered, “was accused of a thousand faults.”³¹

³⁰ Dalio, *Mes années folles*, 208. In the case of the last two films, somebody must have reconsidered. The misspelled signs do not appear in *Pied Piper* and the Resistance character’s remarks in *To Have* are less histrionic. “There’s always someone else,” he says. “This is the mistake the Germans always make with people they want to destroy. There will be always someone else.” *The Pied Piper* (1942), *To Have and Have Not* (1944), author’s copies.

³¹ André Maurois, *I Remember, I Remember*, 289.

Maurois rejoiced over Pearl Harbor – “Yes, the Lord had delivered the Nazis into the hands of the Allies and from now on their [the Nazis’] loss was certain.”³² – and the Anglo-American invasion of French North Africa in November 1942 was electrifying. His sense of gratitude toward the United States deepened as Washington began equipping French army units for combat. He offered his services to the National Committee of Liberation in North Africa and was assigned as an historian of French participation in the fighting there. Leaving his wife in New York, he sailed for Casablanca. “We have a nice, very nice army, well-equipped by the Americans and made up of men who love their machines,” he wrote to her in mid-1943.³³ Ordered back to the United States at the end of that year for publicity work on behalf of the French military activities, he plunged into a ceaseless round of lectures and interviews. He measured the success of his speaking tours by the fact that American audiences frequently would stand and sing the Marseillaise when he finished speaking. He was in New York in August 1944 when word came of the liberation of Paris and the outpouring of joy from Americans deeply touched him. “All of Fifth Avenue was decorated with red, white, and blue flags,” he remembered. The display of sentiment and solidarity deepened Maurois’s affection for the United States, but would it last? One of his projects at this time was to take advantage of the wartime popular sympathy toward his country and write a history of France that would expand American understanding of its seminal contributions to Western civilization. “I didn’t ignore [the fact] that the stories about France were numerous,” he later wrote, “but the Americans hardly read them . . .”³⁴

³² Maurois, *Mémoires*, 345.

³³ Maurois to Simone Maurois, 1 August 1943, *ibid.*, 369.

³⁴ *ibid.*, 382-386.

The celebrated pilot-author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry also formed part of the trans-Atlantic migration. He had a considerable following in the United States, his 1931 novel *Vol de nuit* having been published by Reynal & Hitchcock in translation in New York as *Night Flight* that same year. The book had served as the basis for an “A” movie from MGM, also titled *Night Flight* and released in 1933 with a cast that included the legendary Barrymore brothers, John and Lionel, as well as Helen Hayes and rapidly ascending young stars Robert Montgomery, Clark Gable, and Myrna Loy. Saint-Exupéry captured the American public imagination when he attempted to fly from New York to Patagonia early in 1938; the flight, his last one in peace-time, ended badly when he crashed the plane while taking off at Guatemala City. While convalescing partly in New York, he wrote sections of his next work, *Terre des hommes*, which appeared almost simultaneously in France and the United States in 1939. Reynal & Hitchcock’s translation, *Wind, Sand, and Stars*, became a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection, a Ballantine paperback edition appeared and made Saint-Exupéry a bona fide literary star in the United States. That summer he made two trips to New York, where he was lionized by the press, radio, and literati before returning to France on the very eve of the German invasion of Poland.³⁵

When the German offensive against Western Europe erupted in May 1940, French authorities had thought to utilize Saint-Exupéry’s literary prestige in the United States as a means of encouraging American support for France, but he had turned the assignment down in order to participate in the fighting as part of a badly mauled aerial reconnaissance squadron. As German armored units rolled across northern France,

³⁵ Marcel Migeo, *The Story of Saint-Exupéry*, 155, 173-74, 176, 205-206, 218-223; John Douglas Eames, *The MGM Story*, 98; Mordaunt Hall, Review of *Night Flight*, 7 Oct. 1933, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movies>.

however, he called on the head of the government, Paul Reynaud, and offered to fly to the United States to make a personal appeal to Franklin Roosevelt for American intervention. Reynaud declined the proposal,³⁶ but the important thing is that Saint-Exupéry, like so many Frenchmen in that dramatic hour, saw the only hope of salvation in the United States. With the defeat of France, he managed to get permission to leave the country and sailed from Lisbon for New York in December 1940, speaking no English. During the voyage he shared a cabin with the famed director Jean Renoir, who remembered well their language difficulties. “He even went so far as to refuse to learn English,” Renoir remembered, “saying that he had had quite enough trouble learning French.”³⁷ But insofar as Saint-Exupéry’s personal standing in the United States was concerned, it was solid. *The New York Times* interviewed him the day after he arrived and two weeks later he received the National Book Award for *Wind, Sand and Stars*, which had sold over 150,000 copies to that point.³⁸

The immediate cause of the writer’s pronounced spiritual disquiet in the United States arose from the plight of his homeland. “Saint-Exupéry was not happy in the United States,” his American translator, Lewis Galantière, recalled. “But, in 1941, he would have been unhappy everywhere except at the front, and at that time, he did not have a place on any front.”³⁹ Like Maurois, Saint-Exupéry hoped to use his prestige to influence public opinion and spark American intervention, so Pearl Harbor and its aftermath left him euphoric. “Now, the Americans are in it,” he exclaimed to another French friend after news of the Pearl Harbor attack, “it’s the start of France’s

³⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Écrits de Guerre, 1939-1944*, 106.

³⁷ Migeo, *Saint-Exupéry*, 245-46; Renoir, *My Life and Times*, 183.

³⁸ Saint-Exupéry, *Écrits de Guerre*, 147-149, 154.

³⁹ Lewis Galantière, deposition, *ibid.*, 173.

salvation!”⁴⁰ Inevitably Saint-Exupéry would return to the battlefield; imitating Maurois’s steps, he got himself assigned to the French forces in North Africa and carried with him a sense of gratitude toward for the country that had sheltered him and now promised deliverance for France. Posted with his former reconnaissance squadron and attached to an American unit, he wrote to his publisher in New York. “I am leading life exactly as it is in an American camp and . . . [sic] I’m learning English!” he reported in June 1943, registering his admiration for the United States: “As for your war effort, seen from America, it is hard to understand it,” he noted. “Seen from here, it is absolutely formidable. You can not imagine the impression produced by this avalanche of materiel.”⁴¹ In an article (“Letter to an American”) for *Life* magazine in 1944, he praised the “nobility” of America’s war aims. “It is not in pursuit of material interests that American mothers have given their sons,” he declared. “It is not in pursuit of material interests that these boys have accepted the risk of death.” On the contrary, he said, the United States had embarked on a “spiritual crusade” to destroy evil and preserve liberty.⁴²

Saint-Exupéry evinced the ambivalence of many French observers toward the United States. On the one hand he could recognize virtue and moral grandeur in the American system, but on the other he instinctively recoiled from what he perceived as fundamental defects of modern, mass, industrial society that it epitomized. Anne Lindbergh, commenting on a visit that Saint-Exupéry had paid to her and her famed aviator husband Charles on the eve of the war, remembered clearly his concern with “the place of the machine in modern life” and his remark that things “have so changed

⁴⁰ Ibid., 207.

⁴¹ Saint-Exupéry to Curtice Hitchcock, 8 June 1943, *ibid.*, 372.

⁴² Saint-Exupéry, “Lettre à un Américain,” *ibid.*, 495.

his world that he is like a foreigner in it.” Life, for Saint-Exupéry, at least life in the United States, was too materialistic, too hurried, too devoid of things spiritual, too organized, too standardized. He spent a few weeks in Hollywood in 1941 visiting his friend Renoir, who unsuccessfully tried to interest Darryl Zanuck, now vice-president of Twentieth Century Fox, in making a film based on *Wind, Sand and Stars*. The insights Saint-Exupéry gained from Renoir’s experience with the studio system’s mass-production approach to making movies apparently confirmed his darker impressions of American society. As he wrote to Galantière at the time,

My present freedom rests only on mass production, which stultifies all dissident desires It isn’t very original to follow a present-day Babbitt’s footsteps, to watch him buy his morning newspaper, digest the ready-made thoughts in it . . . , choosing one of the three opinions proposed to him, then make a 50-degree turn of the screw shunted along to him on the conveyor belt, lunch at a drugstore where no allowance is made for any individual wish, then follow him to the movies, where Mr. Zanouck [sic] crushes him under his dictatorial stupidity It is a travesty of freedom to be free to choose between four models produced by General Motors, or between three films by Zanouck [sic], or between the twelve items offered at a drugstore. Freedom then becomes nothing more than the choice of an article among a number of standard articles, all alike.⁴³

His own relationship with his American publisher, who had Galantière caution him in January 1942 about the need to meet deadlines – the project was *Pilote de guerre*, published in translation as *Flight to Arras* later that year – left Saint-Exupéry “in a rage.” Here was the *machine*, i.e., the needs of the commercial world interested in maximizing profits, forcing the artist into a regimented, structured existence. “Ah, Lewis, you cause me much unhappiness,” he wrote. Saint-Exupéry’s general malaise over modern trends, and his identification of the United States as the embodiment of the changes he scorned, came across clearly in an unsent letter he wrote in North Africa in 1943.

⁴³ Anne Morrow Lindbergh, *War Within and War Without*, 27; Saint-Exupéry to Galantière, [January 1942], *Écrits*, 181-182.

Decrying modern man's "conveyor-belt" existence, one devoid of "poetry, color, love," he implicitly laid the blame on the United States. What had that country produced? he asked rhetorically. "A robot-man. . . spoon-fed with a ready-made, standardized culture as one feeds cattle."⁴⁴ When Antoine de Saint-Exupéry disappeared on a flight the following year, the United States did not necessarily lose a friend: rather, a Frenchman died who could express gratitude for America's aid in France's hour of need, but who at heart rejected the American way of life.

The reaction of other French expatriates had broadly similar, if not quite so spiritually painful, reactions to American methods, especially in the film industry. Some, those with previous experience, could adjust better now. Simone Simon, whose undisguised dislike of Hollywood had caused problems for her during her initial sojourn there in the mid-1930s, managed to get out France in the spring of 1940 as Hitler unleashed the Wehrmacht against Western Europe. Older, no longer with any illusions about Hollywood, and probably more subdued because, for the time being at least, there were no other palatable options to making a go of it in the United States, she left no record this time of feuding with her American managers. Instead, under contract to RKO, she accepted the roles offered her and made a short series of unremarkable, mainly low-budget films, among them *Mademoiselle Fifi* in which she had the lead role.⁴⁵ Jean-Pierre Aumont, on the other hand, experienced the newcomer's shock – and indignation – at having to make fundamental adjustments to survive in the American entertainment world. After serving in a tank regiment during the Battle of France, he managed to secure an exit visa and left France in July 1940. His initial work

⁴⁴ Saint-Exupéry, draft letter, June 1943, *ibid.*, 376-377, 380.

⁴⁵ "Simone Simon," Servel, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 124-25.

was on the stage – he spoke “not a word of English” when he arrived and had to learn his lines phonetically at first⁴⁶ – and there one of his early lessons came when a “furious” stage manager berated him for not showing up for rehearsal the morning after opening night. “How was I to know that during the preliminary performances to the ones in New York,” the young actor thought, “we would continue to rehearse every day, and this for months?”⁴⁷ What Aumont did not realize was that in the American theater, directors did not limit themselves to a few run-throughs and then allow routinely for creative improvisation during performances; on the contrary, through constant rehearsal, they sought to ensure a more polished final product.

When his presence and talent on the stage captured the attention of Hollywood, he was called to an interview with David Selznick, the celebrated producer of *Gone With the Wind*, an encounter that opened a window for him on the place of actors in the Hollywood assembly line. “I had the impression of being a horse, at the fair, having its teeth examined,” he recalled. Declining a contract with Selznick, the actor left New York for Hollywood where, through the work of his agents, he found easy entrée into elite social circles: “A young Frenchman, not a bad-looking guy, speaking a few words in broken English, and possessing a tuxedo, was, at the time, received with open arms,” he discovered.⁴⁸ He agreed to terms with MGM in June 1942 and met with studio mogul Louis B. Mayer to sign a standard contract, an encounter that sent another clear message about the nature of the actor’s place in the assembly-line. “I don’t want you to be impressed by my legend,” Mayer said to him. “I am a man like the others” In his ensuing lecture to the actor, the MGM head made repeated references to God.

⁴⁶ Jean-Pierre Aumont, quoted in Servel, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 206.

⁴⁷ Jean-Pierre Aumont, *Le Soleil et les ombres*, 85.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

“Sometimes, he mistook himself for God. . . ,” Aumont remembered. “I felt ready to confess all my sins.” The overall impact of the encounter was a singular one. “I had the impression of taking my vows, of entering in a monastery where I would serve Louis B. Mayer for seven years in a habit made from sackcloth and hairshirt.”⁴⁹

Aumont’s early work at MGM revealed the two main problems about which French observers long had complained: Hollywood’s ignorance of France and the stultifying effects of factory methods. His first role was a starring one in the Resistance film *Assignment in Brittany*, released in 1943. The very first day of shooting opened his eyes about the studio’s expectations of the film audience. The script called for him to reveal that the network’s transmitter was “right in the middle of the Champs-Élysées,” but the script boy interrupted that people would not know what or where the Champs-Élysées was. Aumont involuntarily “howled” in incredulity and quickly conducted a survey of ten technicians on the set only to discover that nine of them had never heard of the famed avenue. When he asked what they knew about Paris, they all replied “the Eiffel Tower.” The transmitter, he then sardonically proposed, should be located “right on top of the Eiffel Tower.”⁵⁰ Unhappy to be in Hollywood while French forces were entering combat under the Allied banner in North Africa, Aumont decided to enlist. Mayer was able to persuade Free French authorities in Washington to delay the actor’s departure so that he could do a second war film, *The Cross of Lorraine*, but they instructed Aumont to monitor production carefully to avoid anything that was not authentic in its depiction of France and convenient for the political movement headed by Charles de Gaulle. In Hollywood, however, the studios controlled tightly all phases of

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 98.

⁵⁰ Aumont, *Souvenirs provisoires*, cited in Serval, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 120.

production and were reluctant to allow deviations from the plan, which proved extremely frustrating to Aumont. “Every time I asked for changes,” he recalled, “work had to be stopped, in order to refer to the screenwriter, the dialogue coach, the producer, to L. B. M. [i.e., Louis B. Mayer] himself.”⁵¹

The situation of Michèle Morgan was poignant. She had realized her adolescent dream of becoming a movie star, the highlight of her early career coming at age eighteen when she co-starred opposite the country’s top male star, Jean Gabin, in a 1938 film, *Le quai des brumes* (*The Port of Shadows*), which won Best Picture honors in France that year. A bittersweet “older man” love affair then ensued with Gabin, who was sixteen years her senior – and her work also brought her to the attention of Hollywood, eventually landing her a contract with RKO.⁵² The collapse of France in 1940 found her in Cannes, where she had gone to discuss a movie project; her parents were trapped in the Occupied Zone, and she had not heard from Gabin in what seemed ages. Pressured by her agent and by RKO to leave for the United States, the lonely, frightened, heartsick young woman, just barely twenty, sat down and wrote to her parents asking for their blessing, picturing them sitting at a table trying to conjure up the America that she would be seeing. Word came back that they approved, the Vichy authorities authorized an exit visa for Morgan, and RKO made the necessary arrangements with the American consulate in Nice, the United States having maintained diplomatic relations with the Pétain regime until 1942. Her final days in Cannes played like a Hollywood melodrama: as she was selecting her clothes for the trip, the phone rang and it was Gabin. He had learned that she was leaving and was on his way to see

⁵¹ Aumont, *Le Soleil*, 105-107.

⁵² Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 20-120; Geneviève Sellier, “Danielle Darrieux, Michèle Morgan et Micheline Presle à Hollywood: l’identité française en péril,” 130-132.

her. They were able to spend two days together before the inevitable tearful farewell scene at the railway station. “Jean on the platform of the station would remain, for a long time, my last image of France . . . [sic] and of him,” she would recall. She made her way to Lisbon and there, escorted by an RKO agent, she embarked in September 1940 for the United States.⁵³

Friends had warned Morgan when she had signed with RKO shortly before the war that disappointment lay ahead. After all, the French actors who had been really successful in Hollywood could be counted on the fingers of one hand. “You know, as soon as American studios see a young talent appear in Europe capable of competing with their stars, they show up with a contract,” her friends had cautioned. “What does that cost them? A few dollars! Once over there, . . . it is an unequal struggle. When the contract expires, they don’t renew it. After a triumphant departure, it will be a return without fanfare, half forgotten, and you’ll have to start over.” Morgan’s frustrating discovery was that Hollywood insisted on reshaping European actresses into its own image, transforming them into stars “made in America.”⁵⁴ According to one report, as soon as her ten-day ocean voyage from Lisbon ended in Hoboken, New Jersey, she “let out a ‘yahoo’ of exultation, in imitation of the Indian war cries she had heard in Western films.”⁵⁵ Upon arrival in Manhattan, the young actress quickly found herself enmeshed in the studio publicity make-over. No sooner had she checked into her New York hotel room than she had to face a battery of reporters and photographers who hurled questions and commands at her that she could barely understand. “What about your romance with Jean Gabin?” they wanted to know right off the bat. Before she could

⁵³ Michèle Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 130-136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁵ “Two Who Fled the Tides of War,” *New York Times*, 1 Feb. 1942.

manage a reply, a photographer called out for her to cross her legs and reached out to push her skirt up so as to display more of her thigh. "O.k.," he said, and then commanded, "Say cheese!" She was taken aback. *What does cheese have to do with anything?* she asked herself. "Say cheese for the smile!" he explained. In a state of semi-shock after the brazen invasion of her privacy, Morgan realized one practical problem: "The English spoken by my cousins in London has nothing to do with the nasal accent of American reporters."⁵⁶

Within three days of her arrival in the United States, Morgan was in Hollywood being overwhelmed by the "star treatment" and RKO's program for re-doing her in the American image. The day she arrived the RKO publicity chief, Mr. Brown, accompanied by French director Julien Duvivier, himself a refugee from the German invasion, gave her a leisurely tour. Morgan found the palm-lined streets, white houses, and flowered gardens enchanting, but Duvivier's cautionary comment was a cold shower: "You get that impression when you first arrive," he said, "but after a few months you'll think you are living in a cemetery." Years later she ruefully commented that he had been right. Another press conference was scheduled for that afternoon and the RKO official told her that he had assigned as her guide one "Boris," a French-speaking Russian who had a complete file on her and therefore knew all about her, including her family and her tastes. "Boris will know better how to exploit your background than you do!" Brown said, thinking that he was reassuring the young actress, who, instead, felt a "sort of interior rage" building as she listened. *They must picture my father with a Basque beret on his head and a loaf of French bread under his arm . . . !* she muttered to herself. On the way to the press conference at the RKO studio, Boris's assistant, Adele Palmer, turned

⁵⁶ Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 137-38.

to Morgan to explain the personality she should exhibit. “For us Americans, you are the typical French girl,” said Palmer. “Sentimental but with a spark, shy but not feather-brained, you like perfume, intelligent men, wine from Bourgogne and cheese.” *Again with the cheese!* a dismayed Morgan thought. Because of the look on her face, Brown added, “You don’t like cheese? It’s very French. Besides, it’s in your dossier.” Morgan replied with thinly veiled sarcasm that she understood. “I should be a robot-like French girl.” Afterward, as she fielded questions from the male reporters – “their leitmotiv: Jean Gabin” – she thought she detected a touch of lasciviousness in their stares, which were accompanied by looks that said “With her, I can be daring!” She interpreted this as a stereotypical reflection of American perceptions of French women – and found that she would have to contend with the problem throughout her wartime years in the United States. Crowning her first day was a party at the spacious, luxurious home of Ginger Rogers, where guests included a small crowd of major screen personalities, among them Cary Grant, Olivia de Havilland, Orson Welles, Mickey Rooney, Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Gary Cooper, Tyrone Power, and various other major screen personalities. It seemed to Morgan that she was “walking through an American super-production,” while Rogers’s home struck her as more of a museum or movie set or a department store that catered to the wealthy than a place where somebody actually lived. And the hostess’s mother made sure that Morgan understood that she was in the United States by insisting that she have a milkshake.⁵⁷

That first day set the tone for the rest of her stay in the United States. Disappointment and disillusion, some of it her fault, but largely a product of the Hollywood system, came quickly. The RKO studio was a “gigantic factory,” impressive,

⁵⁷ Ibid., 139-146.

to be sure, for its organization, efficiency, equipment, and sets that left her “astounded” and feeling lost, but the people there, while friendly, bustled about absorbed in their work, giving her the impression that “they do not have time, within the confines of the studio, to be human!” Her first discussion with a studio head was intimidating: RKO, he said, needed to build up public interest in her, but the first task was to overcome her heavy accent and for that purpose it would arrange a personal English instructor. She now faced long months of language-training with “Dr. Michneck,” a specialist in assisting foreign actors in Hollywood with language problems. “With me you will speak English like an English woman living in America,” he assured her. In November 1940 the studio thought that she might have a chance for the female lead in a film that Alfred Hitchcock was preparing to shoot with Cary Grant; a screen test, however, revealed that her accent was still too distracting. The post-mortem led to a harsh solution: “Live, eat, learn, inform yourself: newspapers, radio, spend your time, in American [i.e., speaking English], with Americans!” That meant, Michneck implied, severing contact as much as possible with the French community in Hollywood; she even received tips about how to turn down invitations politely. In 1941 the studio did allow her an unaccredited appearance in *My Life with Caroline*, a Ronald Colman film; she played a maid, spent perhaps 30 seconds on screen, and spoke a handful of words.⁵⁸

That same year, however, RKO found the “right property” for Morgan – a story of the French underground, *Joan of Paris*, in which she would play the heroine. The script disappointed Morgan because it gave her character, she thought, an elementary “psychological level” and a “little boy-scout” dimension, making her heroism more “instinctive than patriotic.” Another surprise came after the producer saw the first

⁵⁸ Ibid., 151-52; *My Life with Caroline* (1941), author’s copy.

rushes: “My silhouette did not meet his ideal of a young French woman, a Parisian, and, moreover, a Resistance-fighter.” In sum, she was too flat-chested! Thinking of her character, she retorted that “heroism is not measured by breast size,” which elicited a hearty chuckle from him – and instructions to the wardrobe department to rig her with padded brassieres. That process evolved over several takes until finally, Morgan remembered, “I had started the film with a slightly rounded bosom and ended up with Jane Russell’s!” Morgan did her best, rationalizing that it was the first film to depict resistance to Nazi rule in France – and well aware that she had no real option. The film capitalized on the shock that swept the country as a result of Pearl Harbor, opening in January 1942, to a “miraculously good” response from the critics and success at the box office, triggering a chain reaction that yielded in the series of Resistance movies and not only earning her further starring roles, but bringing an unexpected personal triumph and publicity coup for the film: a luncheon invitation to the White House for her as part of a group of stars on a war bond tour. The First Lady greeted the group, FDR presided over the luncheon table, and Morgan beamed when the president complimented her on her English. To crown the afternoon, Eleanor Roosevelt ran into her coming back from the powder room after the meal and gave her a personal tour of the residence.⁵⁹

Morgan understandably was elated by the results of her first starring effort, but her next assignment reminded her that she was nothing but a cog in the Hollywood machine. Summoned to a meeting at the studio, she learned that she was to play the female lead in a musical comedy, *Higher and Higher*, which was to be a vehicle for crooner Frank Sinatra’s screen debut. “I was left breathless,” she later would say, “and could find the words to raise but one basic objection: ‘I do not know how to sing or

⁵⁹ Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 166-68, 174-75; *Joan of Paris* (1941), author’s copy.

dance.” The producer, allowing her to see that he was “slightly irritated” by her reaction, said simply, “You’ll learn.” She persisted, asking him if he was certain that it was a role she should play, at which his irritation increased. “Miss Morgan, to each his own,” he said tersely. “Yours is to film, ours is to know what you should film.” Once again she saw no option and plunged into voice and dancing lessons. Then the next blow fell: The producer and director stood looking her over and informed her that her face was not quite right. When she objected that they shouldn’t cast her in the part, they ignored it. “Don’t worry,” they told her. “We just need to accent two or three little details, smooth out three or four others, so that you will fit the woman in the script marvelously.” So she then became “kind of a wax doll” in the hands of the studio’s chief make-up artist and when he had finished, she looked in the mirror and “an unknown woman looked back at me.” She accepted the results, but throughout the filming, felt unnatural.

The film combines elements of Cinderella and Pygmalion. Morgan plays a scullery maid in the home of a millionaire who loses his fortune; the household staff comes up with a scheme to have Morgan, properly dressed and coiffed, pose as his daughter in order to marry a wealthy man and save everyone. She, however, is in love with Jack Haley, the millionaire’s valet; Sinatra, playing himself, loves her, as does a foreign aristocrat, but she chooses Haley. The movie was a box-office hit and the *New York Times* film critic labeled Morgan “a lovely and talented chick,” but all Morgan could

see on the screen was a woman who had lost “all charm, all naturalness” performing awkward movements. “For me, “she would write, “the film is a vision of horror!”⁶⁰

Morgan went on to make two more films in the United States before the end of the war, including *Passage to Marseilles* (1944) with Humphrey Bogart, but overall her time in the United States was a painful one. “I knew in Hollywood the longest and most grueling period of solitude in my life,” she wrote in her memoirs.⁶¹ Clearly, factors in her personal life accounted for much of her angst. Her youth, separation from her parents and lack of regular news from home, her concern over events in France, the collapse of her dreams regarding Jean Gabin – and inability to reignite the passion when he managed to escape France and reach Hollywood early in 1941 – equipped her badly for the emotional and psychological challenges posed by the rigid, impersonal nature of the studio system. A comparison of her situation with that of Annabella, who left France for the United States with her new husband, Tyrone Power, late in August 1939 on the very eve of war, underscores the significance of individual characteristics and personal situations. Annabella had lost any illusions she might have had during her pre-war stay in Hollywood and had learned what movie-making there entailed. Her marriage to Power in 1939, moreover, gave her a source of emotional support that Morgan lacked. Annabella made only two movies during the war, but did not face the necessity of supporting herself.⁶²

Marcel Dalio, on the other hand, was entirely dependent financially on work in Hollywood and his published recollection of work there is good-humored, despite a

⁶⁰ Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 188-92; *Higher and Higher* (1943), author’s copy; Bosley Crowther, Review, *New York Times*, 22 Jan. 1944,

<http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9900E6DC1030E53BBC4A51DFB766838F659EDE>

⁶¹ Morgan, *Avec ces yeux-là*, 155.

⁶² “Annabella,” Serval, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 132.

sharp drop in his professional status. His career in France had flourished in the pre-war years, culminating with a major role in the critically acclaimed *La règle du jeu* (1939), but his birth name was Israel Moshe Blauschild and the prospect of living under Nazi rule after the events of 1940 admittedly frightened him. He therefore quickly married his girlfriend, the 17-year-old Madeleine LeBeau, and fled with her to Biarritz. After a considerable delay, he managed to obtain exit visas and the couple, with dwindling funds, left by train for Lisbon. Unlike some of his show-business countrymen, he did not have a contract with an American studio, so he learned at the American embassy in Lisbon that, to secure a visa, he would have to find a sponsor living in the United States. He immediately wrote Charles Boyer, but Boyer was already the official sponsor for his secretary. The director Julien Duvivier did send him \$300.00, which Dalio later learned was from the special refugee fund that Boyer had organized – Michèle Morgan was one of those who had contributed some of the money for Dalio. But as for getting to the United States, he was on his own. Eventually able to obtain temporary visas for Mexico, he and Madeleine sailed aboard a Portuguese ship bound for Chile via Mexico; when it stopped over in Norfolk, Virginia, he managed to obtain thirty-day visas to visit the United States. The visit would last five years.⁶³

His way to Hollywood was a roundabout one, passing through New York and Montreal. He arrived with \$17.00 in his pocket and two words – he claimed – in his English vocabulary: *thank* and *you*. The other French exiles made his adjustment easier. He became part of Boyer's more socially formal circle, regularly visited Jean Gabin and Marlene Dietrich, became good friends with Aumont, and enjoyed spending time with Renoir and St.-Exupéry because they would talk about things other than

⁶³ Marcel Dalio, *Mes années folles*, 141-153.

movies. It was Claudette Colbert's brother who pointed him in the direction of his first acting jobs, but the only roles he could play were minor ones because he did not speak English. That was not a great handicap for some parts; in fact, it got him a small one in a Fred MacMurray film, *One Night in Lisbon* (1941). Before he approached director Edward Griffith about a job, he practiced a couple of sentences; when the moment came, he said brightly, "Oh! Mr. Griffiths, I'm so happy to meet you, I'd so much [sic] to work with you!" Griffith was delighted and chuckled. "That's exactly what I need for the role of the Portuguese porter," he said, "somebody who speaks French well and mangles English!"

As his English improved, he began to get slightly better roles, a bit more screen time, making himself known as a character actor. Edward G. Robinson spoke French and helped him feel at home during his short time on the set of *Unholy Partner* that same year; Dalio's part was significant enough for his name to be listed in the *New York Times* review of the film. After 1942 he could boast that he had "made a movie" with Humphrey Bogart, playing the croupier at Rick's Café in *Casablanca*; his screen time was fleeting, but he found Bogart to be a man of "great generosity," one who helped him improve his English pronunciation. His ex-wife Madeleine played Bogart's sometime girlfriend in the movie who starts singing *La Marseillaise* at the café one night in what is perhaps the most stirring scene in the film; when the camera rolled the first time, she got as far as the words "*Allons, enfants de la patrie*" before she broke down crying, overcome with emotion. Filming stopped while she pulled herself together, Take 2 began, "*Allons, enfants de la patrie. . .*," and she collapsed in sobs. Take after take after take ensued, perhaps as many as ten, with the same result. "There was nothing to

be done; it was a festival of tears,” Dalio recalled. The film’s budget scheduled him for just over a week’s work at \$500.00 a week, so his total earnings amounted to \$667.00; he may not have known that his lachrymose ex-wife earned \$33.00 more than he did. His most impressive scene in an American film may well have been the one in which his “Clemenceau” clashed with Alexander Knox’s “Woodrow Wilson” at the Versailles Peace Conference in the 20th Century Fox production of *Wilson*, which was released in 1944. Zanuck had been impressed by Dalio’s performance in *La règle du jeu*, had him take a screen test, and hired him to play the famed French leader. By that time, Dalio’s English, although thickly accented, was easily understood, and he carried the scene well.⁶⁴

Dalio’s most important role came with his next film, Warner Brothers’s *To Have and Have Not* (1944), which reunited him with Bogart and marked Lauren Bacall’s screen debut. He featured prominently in the story, playing “Frenchy,” owner of a small hotel in Martinique who is connected to the local anti-Vichy underground and gets a reluctant Bogart, who owns a fishing boat, involved in its activities. “He had protected me a little with *Casablanca*,” Dalio later recalled of the American star, “and continued to do it with *To Have and Have Not*.” Dalio had signed for only six weeks of work and was preparing to leave the shoot, but Bogart had grown to like him so much that he told director Howard Hawks that he wanted a farewell scene for the two of them written into the script. That bought Dalio two more weeks of work and a scene in which he

⁶⁴ Ibid., 154-179; T. S., “Unholy Partners,” *New York Times*, 29 Dec. 1941, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A01E0DB173DE333A2575AC2A9649D946093D6CF>; Bosley Crowther, “Casablanca,” *New York Times*, 27 Nov. 1942, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C06E1DF1039E33BBC4F51DFB7678389659EDE>; “Budget #410 Casablanca,” 2 June 1942, in Behlmer, *Inside Warner Bros.*, 209-210; *Wilson* (1944), author’s copy.

emotionally thanks Bogart for deciding to help the Resistance. "I'm glad you are on our side. I'm glad . . . ," his character says and then starts to embrace Bogart, who gives a tough-guy reply, "No kissing, Frenchy." The main reason that Bogart wanted to make that gesture, which he probably intended as a thank-you note, was undoubtedly because Dalio had become an important part of the celebrated romance that developed between Bogart and Bacall during the filming. Bogart was still married, so he and Bacall used Dalio, at first without his awareness, as a cover for their meetings. It started with Bacall's suggesting to Dalio that they have dinner and then asking if he would mind if Bogart joined them; Dalio soon caught on, as such occasions reoccurred, that his role was that of the "candlestick" they needed to light their way, a situation that amused his Gallic sensibility. The three of them before long would simply go out together after the day's shoot and, said Dalio, "I was always the one they dropped off first!" Fittingly, he and Bogart were alone in the scene in which Bogart's character first meets Bacall's.⁶⁵

Dalio occasionally ran up against the problem of cultural distortion while making films in Hollywood, but he left no testimony regarding problems of adjustment to "factory" life, which is not surprising. He not only had to support himself and therefore was glad for any opportunity to work, no matter what the role or conditions, but the total demand on his time for the eighteen films in which he was involved in Hollywood during the war, and hence the time he would be subjected to the demands of an assembly-line atmosphere, was infinitely less than it would be for a leading actor, such as his friend Jean Gabin.

⁶⁵ Dalio, *Mes années folles*, 205-206; *To Have and Have Not* (1944), author's copy.

Gabin did not come to the United States to obtain a different perspective on filmmaking or to enhance his career or out of curiosity. He was an established star with an international reputation at the end of the 1930s and it was only the war that brought him to America. Disquieted because German movie representatives, presumably connected to Continental-Films, had approached him after the Armistice about making movies for them and determined not to serve the New Order in any way, he used a contract he had signed with Twentieth Century Fox to justify his departure. One report wryly noted “the collapse of the French film industry did what five years of Hollywood persuasion failed to do – convince Gabin that he should go to Hollywood.”⁶⁶ Vichy allowed him to leave and he arrived in the United States early in 1941. His conduct in America suggests that he felt guilty, or came to feel guilty, about not being more directly involved in the war. Making movies certainly was not foremost on his mind. Although he saw Michèle Morgan for a while after he reached Hollywood, he soon began a brief affair with Ginger Rogers and an even longer-running one with Marlene Dietrich and that relationship laid bare his aversion to cultural compromise.

Dietrich, who had learned French as a young girl in Germany and spent considerable time in France – a French movie publication had noted in 1931 that “she speaks excellent French . . . with a very slight accent” – apparently socialized more with French expatriates than with German ones. “I took all the uprooted and desperate French into my house, spoke their language,” she recalled, “and was mother, cook, counselor and interpreter to them.” The group of French ducks-out-of-water included directors René Clair and Jean Renoir, as well as writers and actors, among them Marcel Dalio and, of course, Gabin. Most of them could not speak English, which, in the case

⁶⁶ “Jean Gabin on Way Here,” *New York Times*, 17 Feb. 1941.

of actors, barred them from employment. “In addition, the French didn’t understand the American way of life,” Dietrich said. “Everything here astonished, disturbed them.” The ritual *chez* Dietrich was to enjoy dinner and then she would listen while her guests confessed their “spiritual sufferings.” From Hollywood’s standpoint, Gabin was the prize catch among French actors, but it is not at all clear that his heart was in the opportunity; in any case, he was permanently ill at ease in the United States. In this regard Dietrich offered revealing insight. “He accepted America and Hollywood *in his own way*,” she phrased it. His way certainly did not including an effort to embrace that culture or an attempt to absorb it, as, say, Charles Boyer did; in fact, Dietrich’s memoir gives the impression that he wanted as little as possible to do with the United States. She helped him buy a house and furnish it, “according to his taste, with all the *French* objects we were able to dig up in the flea market or in the Beverly Hills shops.” The house had a garden and the couple spent long hours in it. “Gabin felt well there . . . and regaled me with stories *about France*.” He apparently had not bothered to try to improve his English before crossing the Atlantic and it was rudimentary. Dietrich claimed to have taught him the language. “He was shooting an idiotic film, the name of which I’ve forgotten, but he spoke correct English – I personally saw to that!” Gabin’s first film was *Moontide*, released in 1943 and co-starring Ida Lupino; an anonymous observer noted that Dietrich “appeared on the set daily,” much to the irritation of the producer and director, and would go over the script at night with Gabin.⁶⁷

Did Gabin agree with Dietrich that the film was “idiotic”? The story, a romantic melodrama within a *film noir*-ish context, deals with two beachside drifters, Gabin and

⁶⁷ “Marlène Dietrich, l’ange rose,” *Comœdia*, 10 July 1931, 452; Marlene Dietrich, *Marlene*, 132, 135, 136 (italics mine); D.M. Ladd (FBI) to J. Edgar Hoover, 13 July 1942, http://foia.fbi.gov/dietrich_marlene.

Lupino, who overcome difficult circumstances and tragedy to find happiness together – a story reminiscent, except for the happy ending, of Marcel Carné’s highly successful 1938 film *Le Quai des brumes* (*The Port of Shadows*),⁶⁸ that had helped make Gabin an international star and that had started his romance with Michèle Morgan. On signing his contract with Fox, Gabin had insisted on script approval – and the first version of it left him aghast. He objected emphatically to the portrayal of his character, starting with the name “Frenchy,” which Darryl F. Zanuck, production czar at Fox, agreed to change to “Bobo,” which was hardly an improvement. The character, as described in the first script, struck Gabin as “a half-wit,” a “village idiot type,” a “sort of alcoholic milque-toast without reflexes, without even a sense of humor” and he told Zanuck so in writing. The proposed scenes of his relationship with women, he complained further, were devoid of “any guts, any show of virility.”⁶⁹ One scene had “Bobo” kissing a woman’s hand and Gabin balked, arguing that such a gesture fit Hollywood’s image of what a Frenchman would do, but that it would be unnatural for his character. Gabin, with Lupino as a guide one day, did try to absorb some of the atmosphere of the Los Angeles demi-monde, wandering along Main Street among the derelicts, drunks, and prostitutes. But he was churlish on the set, and, in general, made things more difficult for everybody. Fritz Lang, the original director, quit after only two weeks and had to be replaced by Archie Mayo, although in all fairness, Lang was a notoriously difficult man and it did not help matters when Gabin discovered that his live-in love, Dietrich, had had a brief affair with Lang years earlier. Gabin’s English in the film is passable, although there are moments

⁶⁸ For a detailed synopsis of the film, see Benjamin F. Martin, *France in 1938*, 110-117.

⁶⁹ Jean Gabin to Darryl F. Zanuck, 1941, document shown in *Turning of the Tide: The Ill-Starred Making of Moontide*, documentary included with Twentieth Century Fox’s 2008 DVD release of *Moontide*, author’s copy.

when the viewer has to strain to understand him. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor occurred the month after shooting began and disrupted plans for location filming in the San Diego area; the result was the use of miniature sets for some scenes and shooting that was more confined to studio sets than originally intended, all of which gives the film an artificial, stagey look. But all concerned understood that the purpose of the project was simply to showcase Gabin.⁷⁰

The studio launched a nationwide advertising campaign that focused on Gabin's beefcake qualities and what Fox publicists hoped would turn out to be his alluring foreignness. "S-a-a-a-y Girls – come and see Jean GABIN – he's different!" one ad said. Another showed Lupino in a sexy pose with the heading "LUCKY GAL!" and has her saying, "I'M HIS FIRST GIRL . . . [sic] in His First American Picture!" Still another shows her commenting: "I've known 'em all . . . fresh ones . . . gentle ones . . . tough ones . . . mean ones . . . and I hate 'em all! Then this guy comes along!" While attempting to generate some mystery regarding Gabin, ads and theater window displays told potential ticket-buyers how to pronounce his name: "It's Gab-BAN" was typical, and some read: "It's Gab-BAN, He's All Man!"⁷¹ Released in the spring of 1942, the film met with a lukewarm reception. Critic Bosley Crowther of *The New York Times* underscored the obvious purpose of the film in noting that

. . . seldom has an actor's frank allure been quite as deliberately and as obviously dished up in amplitude as is Mr. Gabin's strange enchantment in this ponderously moody film. You might almost think the lights and camera were working on a glamorous female star from the way they are concentrated on Mr. Gabin's roughly handsome phiz [i.e., physique]. You might suspect his drowsy eyes, his tight lips and his thatch of grizzled hair were more important to the

⁷⁰ *Turning of the Tide* documentary included with Twentieth Century Fox's 2008 DVD release of *Moontide*, author's copy; William Donati, *Ida Lupino*, 89.

⁷¹ *Turning of the Tide* documentary included with Twentieth Century Fox's 2008 DVD release of *Moontide*, author's copy.

picture than the usual conventions of a plot. Indeed, you might even get the impression that the film was made mainly to show him off. And, at that you might not be so far wrong, Mr. Gabin supersedes all else in it.

The actor had “strapping masculine charm” and came across as a “Charles Boyer from the other side of the railroad tracks,” said Crowther, but there was a language problem – the critic put it politely, saying that “his use of the English language is intriguing to the ear” – and Gabin expressed emotion in “slow and studied gestures.” The supporting cast was fine, he said, “but all of them need much more than a vague and irresolute script, much more than synthetic scenery and manufactured moods.” The film lacked “real life,” he concluded, because the director “expended most of his energy in bringing the audience into contact with Mr. Gabin.” The fact was that Gabin did not have the appeal of Boyer. Box-office receipts fell noticeably short of the nearly \$1 million in production costs and Zanuck refused to take another chance on the French actor.⁷²

Gabin’s obvious determination to separate himself as much as possible from American society reflected what he really thought about Hollywood. “Gabin, quintessentially French, protected himself against every foreign influence in his modest home,” Dietrich wrote. “I had to cook French and speak French with him, and we socialized only with French actors and directors.” Dalio, who, as soon as Gabin arrived in Hollywood, became part of the small circle of émigrés who associated with the couple, noted that Gabin was unusually “taciturn” and “certainly distant.” He insisted on living as he would in France, eschewed American food – “Hamburgers, Coca-cola and banana splits were not really for him” – and did not like to go out. And Dietrich, according to Dalio, would kid Gabin about his lack of interest in literature. “He never

⁷² Ibid.; Bosley Crowther, “Moontide,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1942, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9C0CE4DA143EEE3BBC4850DFB2668389659EDE>.

reads,” she said one day. “In reality, Gabin was bored,” Dalio wrote. Gabin’s apparent emotional dependency on Dietrich strengthens the impression that he was miserable in the United States. “Helpless, [he] clung to me like an orphan to his foster mother . . . ,” she remembered. The actress, for her part, later maintained he liked America. “This in no way means that he found everything commendable,” she added. “He liked to joke with me about some of his reservations.” It does not require much imagination to picture the actor privately *mocking* the United States. Dietrich commented that “Gabin could never stand the bourgeoisie” – perhaps the materialism of American culture, its wealth and privileged standard of living, sharpened his rejection of that culture. At another point in her memoir, she is more candid. “His adventure in Hollywood didn’t please him at all,” she commented. “But he had to swallow the bitter pill, since work in films was the only way for him to earn a living.” Years later Gabin himself admitted his dislike for his movie-making experience in Hollywood. “I could hear myself say my lines . . . ,” he commented, “[and] I felt I was no longer what I wished to remain, . . . a Frenchman.”⁷³

Gabin’s uncertain status in the United States logically may have contributed to his angst. He had only a visitor’s visa and the Fox studio employed a female lawyer, Mabel Willebrant, to represent him in negotiations with American authorities for a more permanent one. Apparently miffed when she learned that Dietrich had told Gabin that she would run interference for him in Washington, Willebrant told the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Dietrich might be a collaborator helping Vichy to impede Gabin’s request for an extension of his visa. That denunciation led J. Edgar Hoover, director of

⁷³ Dietrich, *Marlene*, 135, 137-138, Dalio, *Mes années folles*, 188; Gabin, quoted in Ginette Vincendeau, “Not for Export”: Jean Gabin in Hollywood,” 115.

the FBI, to order an investigation of Dietrich – and that, in turn, led to surveillance of Dietrich, censorship of her mail, and discreet interviews with associates. The FBI discovered nothing that impugned the patriotism of Dietrich; it did learn of her “terrific love affair” with Gabin and one apparently well-placed informant told the FBI field office in Los Angeles in October 1942 that Gabin angrily had said “to hell with this country” during his battle to secure an extension of his visa. That a restlessness born of a desire to be helping his homeland in a direct way may have contributed to his unhappiness in the United States is understandable. Gabin made only one more film in Hollywood, RKO’s *The Impostor*, a Resistance story released in 1944, before sailing for England to join the Free French. Dietrich phoned the head of the FBI’s field office in Los Angeles in June 1943 to say that Gabin was returning to Europe “practically broke, but that when he gets to Europe and eventually France, he will be one of the greatest ambassadors for the United States this country ever had.” Gabin went on to serve valiantly in an armored division, winning the Croix de Guerre, and was with General Jacques Leclerc’s forces that liberated Paris in August 1944.⁷⁴ He never returned to the United States.

All the new expatriates faced difficulty adapting to American culture and methods; some naturally made the adjustment more easily than others. Among the directors who came over after the outbreak of war in Europe, Julien Duvivier seemed to have the least difficulty, which is ironic because his pre-war experience in the United States, directing the highly successful *The Great Waltz* (1938), had led him to voice familiar complaints about the rigidity of the American studio system and the lack of

⁷⁴ Dietrich, *Marlene*, 135, 137-138; (FBI) memo to Hoover, 13 May 1942; Hoover to Special Agent in Charge [R. B. Hood] (FBI-Los Angeles), 16 May 1942; Hood to Hoover, 13 July 1942; FBI-Los Angeles, memo, 6 Oct. 1942; Hood to Hoover, 25 June 1943, http://foia.fbi.gov/dietrich_marlene.

directorial freedom. Since he could not bear the thought of working, even indirectly, under German supervision, Duvivier sought refuge in Hollywood's studio system "only three years after he had rejected everything it stood for."⁷⁵ Arriving in July 1940, he ended up making four films during the war, a 1941 United Artists release, *Lydia*, and three for Universal, including *The Tales of Manhattan* (1942), which had an all-star cast featuring Charles Boyer, Rita Hayworth, Ginger Rogers, and Henry Fonda, and *The Impostor*, a story of the Free French, released in 1944 with Gabin as the male lead. Duvivier returned to France in 1945 urging greater reciprocity between the United States and France in terms of film importation and worrying about the fate of the French movie film industry otherwise. When one interviewer asked late in 1945 if his wartime stay in Hollywood had modified his directorial style, he masked only slightly his aversion to the Hollywood factory-like system. "I don't think so . . .," he said. "What I most assuredly learned in American studios, among the thousand specialized collaborators on a film on whose prerogatives one could not encroach, was to be patient."⁷⁶ In another interview a year later, he did refer to an old grievance when he commented that "the Hollywood director executes, more or less happily, the work orders he receives and moves the actors around."⁷⁷

Jacques Tourneur, son of the famous director Maurice Tourneur, spent the war in the United States, but was already in the country when his first film, a "B" picture for MGM, hit the screens less than a month before the German invasion of Poland. MGM immediately assigned him two more films in the short-lived Nick Carter detective series, and then he moved to lesser studios, first Republic and then to RKO, establishing

⁷⁵ Williams, *Republic of Images*, 194.

⁷⁶ Raymond Chirat, *Julien Duvivier*, 19-22; Eric Bonnefille, *Julien Duvivier*, 5-38.

⁷⁷ Yves Desrichard, *Julien Duvivier*, 57- 60.

himself as an efficient director of low-budget horror films, such *The Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). He also directed two 1944 releases, *Days of Glory*, in which Gregory Peck made his screen debut, and *Experiment Perilous*, with Hedy Lamarr, both of which appeared in 1944. Tourneur had come to the United States as a child with his father and had grown up, so to speak, in the Hollywood system. He therefore was familiar with it and the fact that he had steady work during the war and that he remained in the country after the war, directing several well-known films, indicates that he adapted to the studio system without problems.⁷⁸

René Clair was one of the top French directors who joined the exodus to Hollywood during the war. He had resisted repeated offers from American studios during the early sound era, not wanting to leave France at the crest of his popularity and while he enjoyed an ideal working relationship with his producer. But his ensuing films met with disappointing financial, if not always critical, results. His 1934 *Le dernier milliardaire* (*The Last Billionaire*) was, he discovered at a sneak preview at a Champs-Élysées theater, “pretty much an unmitigated disaster” and subsequently proved a “downright flop” financially – and that setback persuaded him to accept an offer from Alexander Korda to make a film in England, although, in his words, he “scarcely knew how to read the language.” The project gave him an opportunity not only to improve his English, but to work with American personnel. The film was *The Ghost Goes West*, starring Robert Donat; it not only included American characters and was set partially in the United States, but Clair’s script girl was an American who spoke French and had experience working in Hollywood, his “brilliant” special effects crew was American, and

⁷⁸ “Jacques Tourneur,” Serval, *Frenchie Goes to Hollywood*, 177-78; Geoff Mayer, review of Chris Fujiwara, *Jacques Tourneur: The Cinema of Night Fall*, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/reviews/rev1002/gmbr14a.htm>.

none other than celebrated American playwright Robert Sherwood assisted him in writing the script. The film became the highest-grossing film of 1936 in Great Britain, and Clair made the trip to New York for the film's American premiere, where it also did well at the box office. The experience of making the film had been "exciting and gratifying" – his words⁷⁹ – but he stated at the time that he had to have full artistic control when shooting a film. He did not rule out working in Hollywood, he added. "But I have never believed that large-scale commercial ventures would allow me the freedom that I need when I work," he said. "If that is fear then I confess to it."⁸⁰

Clair's "freedom" included being able to make unprofitable films and drift from project to project without significant results over the remainder of the decade, but he enjoyed the reputation of being a creative genius – and that sparked Hollywood's interest, while hardly boding well for actual movie-making within the confines of the studio system. He resisted offers from the United States until the war forced momentary clarity on his plans. It is telling that he did not accept a contract from an American company until March 1940,⁸¹ almost as if it were simply an insurance policy. He may well have never intended to go since he had made no effort to learn to speak English. But as the Phony War ended, Clair prepared the ground for flight and, a week after the signing of the Armistice and apparently without the approval of French authorities, he departed with his family by car for Spain and then Lisbon. Was his flight part of some project to help his country in some fashion? "No, I left France entirely on my own, as an independent person, and my reason was simply to get out," he later

⁷⁹ The quotes are all from conversations between René Clair and R. C. Dale, in Dale, *The Films of René Clair, Volume I, Exposition and Analysis*, 234, 236, 238-39.

⁸⁰ Quoted in Celia McGerr, *René Clair*, 131.

⁸¹ Georges Charensol and Roger Régent, *50 ans de cinéma avec René Clair*, 127.

candidly remarked. “I used to tell people who asked me . . . that I had to choose between Hitler and Hollywood, and that Hitler lost.”⁸² The version of that explanation that he gave in an interview many years later perhaps better summed up his attitude toward working in California: “I had my choice between Hitler and Hollywood,” he said, “and I preferred Hollywood. Just a little.”⁸³ After a delay of several weeks in Lisbon waiting for a visa, Robert Sherwood used his influence to secure finally a favorable decision from the State Department, and was there to greet Clair and his family when they eventually docked in New York.

Clair’s name was well-known in film circles and he received a warm welcome from the film community in California, where Frank Capra arranged a special reception for him by the Screen Directors’ Guild. He became one of the group of French expatriates who frequented the home of Marlene Dietrich, who found him “not exactly one of the friendliest of men.” His pre-war exposure to a different film production system in Great Britain may have prepared him slightly better than some of his countrymen for culture shock and smoothed his way through the American studio process. “Don’t forget that . . . Hollywood was a factory, set up like a bunch of plants with different people in different departments doing different things who often didn’t even come into contact with one another,” he subsequently commented. “The Europeans who had actually made films in Europe before coming to Hollywood were pretty rare, and our methods of working were equally rare.” As he described it long afterward, directing was much easier *là-bas*. “I would arrive on the set in the morning and somebody would push my chair under me,” he said, “and I would ask what we were

⁸² Dale, *The Films of René Clair, Volume I*, 274-75.

⁸³ Quoted in McGerr, *René Clair*, 135.

scheduled to shoot that day.” European filmmakers in America who claimed otherwise were misrepresenting things, he contended, “because everybody knows perfectly well that most of the time one person wrote the script, the director of photography did the framing and composition and lighting, somebody else cut the film from all the shots they had made – the only thing many of those directors ever did was work with actors.”⁸⁴ And the American system, with its infinitely more lavish funding, provided other advantages. “In France, once we have finished shooting, the set gets pulled down,” he explained. “But in Hollywood, many of the sets remain standing.” Directors thus frequently could use, say, a street set from another film, saving time and money. “In France, I would have had to build that set just for a few background shots.”⁸⁵

Clair later said that he was never able to be himself in Hollywood. “How did you manage to make René Clair films there?” a post-war interviewer asked him. “I never did” was his answer. “Everything was a compromise between what I wanted to do and what I could do.”⁸⁶ Clair turned down the first project offered to him, but allowed Joseph Pasternak of Universal to talk him into making *The Flame of New Orleans*, a romantic comedy set in the mid-19th century, as a way hopefully of refurbishing Dietrich’s fading popularity. The producer dictated casting. Clair had nothing to do with choosing Dietrich – “I was her choice,” he said – and for the male lead, he got stuck with Bruce Cabot, a second-rate actor, who was a “mistake,” he realized. Clair implied, in thinking back on the project, that he should have objected to Cabot, but “Hollywood at that time was a machine for producing films; they wouldn’t wait until someone else was available for the part.” Dietrich found her co-star “an awfully stupid actor, unable to remember his

⁸⁴ R. C. Dale, “René Clair in Hollywood: An Interview,” *Film Quarterly* 24 (Winter 1970-71), 35.

⁸⁵ Dale, *Films of René Clair, Volume I*, 315.

⁸⁶ Charles Thomas Samuels, *Encountering Directors*, 79-80.

lines or cues” and, since Clair had difficulty speaking English – she wrote that he “didn’t speak a word of English” at the time, an exaggeration, surely, but perhaps not too far off the mark – the director could do little with Cabot’s performance.⁸⁷

Clair did manage to become personally involved in script-writing, something he had always done on his films, but it involved working behind Pasternak’s back in collusion with the writer the producer had chosen, Norman Krasna. “But for God’s sake,” Krasna admonished Clair, “don’t tell anybody about it; I don’t want to lose my job.”⁸⁸ Clair did not get screen credit for co-writing the script. Another adjustment imposed by the “system” was the need to mold the script around the star; Clair had always written his own scripts without regard to whatever actor would end up playing a part, but now had to remember that the film was intended to be a *Dietrich* movie. The treatment of sex in the film was also different. In his pre-war films, he had approached the subject, in an interviewer’s words, “distantly and tenderly,” but in *Flame* it was handled in “a typically American way; with lots of leering double entendre.” Clair agreed, attributing it to Krasna and to his, Clair’s, intention to adjust to American expectations. If Dietrich’s recollection was accurate, the overall atmosphere on the set had been an uneasy one, a problem she attributed to his difficulty in speaking English, and that may have contributed to the overall result. “I didn’t particularly like René Clair,” she said, “but I didn’t hate him as much as the rest of the team did.”⁸⁹ Although the film would receive an Academy Award nomination for Art Direction, a dimension for which Clair was not responsible, critics and movie-goers shunned his American debut. After seeing the film on its release in April 1941, a *New York Times* critic was shocked.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 80-81; Dietrich, *Marlene*, 184.

⁸⁸ Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 276.

⁸⁹ Samuels, *Encountering Directors*, 80; Dietrich, *Marlene*, 184-85.

“What, pray, has happened to René Clair?” he wrote after seeing the “stilted and sluggish” comedy on its release in April 1941. The script and the acting were mediocre and nothing seemed to come together, he said, which might be forgiven in a “fledgling director,” but Clair was no beginner and *Flame* was a pale reflection of the movies he had made in France. “Whatever the reason, the Gallic wink, the verve, the incredibly inventive humor, the compassionate heart . . . is [sic] lacking here.” Clair’s touch, the critic concluded, “has taken a nose dive.”⁹⁰

Hollywood did not easily forgive a “terrific flop!” – Clair’s expression⁹¹ – and he found himself ignored. “For five years, ever since the success of my first English film, *The Ghost Goes West*, I’d been getting telegrams from Hollywood: come and we’ll give you anything . . . ,” he recalled. “But after one flop, suddenly nobody had heard of me.” Universal wanted nothing further to do with him and he went over a year without employment, a disillusioning and certainly embarrassing experience that led him to contemplate trying to return to Unoccupied France. His situation there, however, became complicated when Vichy, under the terms of a new law designed to punish those who had fled the country in June 1940, abolished his citizenship and expropriated his property. His brother, who was serving with the French army’s film department in Morocco, was able to get his citizenship restored, but some of Clair’s property was lost.⁹² And, meanwhile, he remained in professional limbo in Hollywood.

Clair was able to resume his film career in 1942, not because a studio approached him, but because his agent found a property, the novel *The Passionate*

⁹⁰ T. S., Review of *The Flame of New Orleans*, *New York Times*, 26 April 1941, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9507EEDB143EEE3BBC4E51DFB266838A659EDE>.

⁹¹ Quoted in Samuels, *Encountering Directors*, 79.

⁹² Clair, quoted in Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 295; Charensol and Régent, *50 ans de cinéma avec René Clair*, 134-136.

Witch, that Clair thought would be perfect for the screen and energetically sought a producer. He found the right person in Preston Sturges, a top director at Paramount, who not only specialized in romantic comedy and kept an eye out for talented writers for the studio, but was a Francophile. His free-spirited mother had taken him to live in Paris for several years when he was boy, he had returned to Paris more than once in the 1920s and 1930s, and into early adulthood had spoken English with a French accent. “[H]e spoke French as well as I do . . . ,” Clair discovered.⁹³ Sturges agreed with Clair that the story of an alluring female ghost who comes back to captivate a modern-day descendant of the Puritan who had burned her at the stake three centuries earlier would make a delightful movie – and the timing was right at Paramount, where studio heads were looking for a vehicle for new starlet Veronica Lake. Production chief Buddy de Sylva agreed to give Clair the project, allow him to cooperate on preparing the script, and was willing to make Sturges the film’s producer. Clair, again, had no control over the casting and came to realize that Fredric March was not right for the male lead; the script and any alterations made during filming had to be submitted for approval; and Sturges, for reasons that remain unclear, withdrew from the project and declined any production credit. “The discussion of the script was perhaps tiresome,” Clair said, “but once we were in agreement, it was marvelous.”⁹⁴ Clair impressed de Sylva, who ended up as the film’s official producer. With his speed and economy in shooting scenes, the director coaxed a good performance from the insecure Lake, and the final result was vastly superior to *The Flame of New Orleans*. The film, released as *I Married a Witch*, made money at the box office and critics tended to like it. “Mr. Clair, in his old pre-

⁹³ Preston Sturges, *Preston Sturges, passim*; Clair, quoted in Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 295.

⁹⁴ Clair, quoted in Charensol and Régent, *50 ans de cinéma avec René Clair*, 137-38.

Hollywood fashion, has a lot of fun with spooks and camera tricks – a bit stiffly, perhaps, in comparison with the sport of his better French films, but still a high bounce above the usual run of cinematic whimsies,” wrote Bosley Crowther of the *New York Times*. A reviewer for the *New York Sun*, however, while giving Clair a passing grade, perceived the influence of the Hollywood factory system. “M. Clair is now a Hollywood director,” she wrote, “and that strange little southern California town seems to have flattened the piquancy of his films.”⁹⁵

Clair’s third and final film released before the end of the war was *It Happened Tomorrow*, another comedy fantasy that told the story of a reporter who gained knowledge of the future. Clair failed to interest Paramount in the project, but was able to work out an arrangement with an independent producer. He recruited his friend Dudley Nichols, a top freelance writer to work on the script with him. Clair enjoyed greater artistic freedom on the project than on his two previous ones in Hollywood and critics would give the 1944 release, which starred Dick Powell and Linda Darnell, high marks, judging it his best American film. The public liked it as well, making it Clair’s second success at the box office.⁹⁶ What is most interesting about Clair’s wartime exile was the reception that his American films, especially *It Happened Tomorrow*, found in liberated France, where critics praised his ability to resist the Hollywood system. “The monster Hollywood doesn’t devour everyone,” one declared. “Here is a Siegfried who is bringing back the head of the dragon in his suitcase.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Bosley Crowther, review of *I Married a Witch*, *New York Times*, 24 Nov. 1942, <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/24114/I-Married-a-Witch/overview>; Eileen Creelman, *New York Sun*, quoted in Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 319.

⁹⁶ McGerr, *René Clair*, 148-150.

⁹⁷ Carlo Rim, *Le Courrier de Paris*, 22 Sept. 1945, quoted in Dale, *Films of René Clair*, 341-342.

The director whose personal experience in Hollywood most clearly underscored the long-standing trans-Atlantic clash between cinema-as-art and cinema-as-entertainment and reflected the broader cultural clash between the two nations was Jean Renoir. Emerging in the 1930s as one of France's most prominent directors, an exponent of the *auteur* school, Renoir had gained increasing prestige in American filmmaking circles. The National Board of Review in New York awarded the prize for best foreign film of 1937 to his *La Grande Illusion* and early in 1938 none other than Samuel Goldwyn offered him a contract.⁹⁸ At the outset of war in September 1939, Renoir patriotically went on active duty as a lieutenant in the Army's film service, but the stunning collapse of France threw everything into chaos and led Renoir to join the exodus South. Although he was not a Communist or really even politically *engagé*, he had made a propaganda film for the French Communist Party in 1936 and in weekly columns in the Communist press during 1937-1938 he frequently had criticized the Nazi regime in Berlin.⁹⁹ Prudence dictated that he try to stay beyond Nazi reach.

The story of his journey south demands a movie script. Renoir and his secretary-mistress and future wife Dido Freire, daughter of a Brazilian diplomat, linked up with his close friend Paul Cézanne, Jr., son of the famous painter, and his family. The only transportation they had was a small Peugeot that seated but three people. Renoir took the wheel and Paul and his wife joined him in the car, while Dido and Paul's brother and sister-in-law trailed behind on bicycles. Tied to the back of the Peugeot was a priceless cargo: a bundle of his father's paintings that Paul did not want to leave behind for the

⁹⁸ Célia Bertin, *Jean Renoir*, 139-165; Jean Renoir (Paris) to Samuel Goldwyn, 7 March 1938, Jean Renoir, *Letters*, 48. For a detailed analysis of his most important films from the 1930s, see Alexander Sesonske, *Jean Renoir: The French Films, 1924-1939*, 221-440.

⁹⁹ Sesonske, *Jean Renoir*, 221-232; Bertin, *Jean Renoir*, 141, 154-155.

Germans. The small caravan joined the hordes clogging the roads south, thinking initially of seeking refuge in Bordeaux. Having survived harassing attacks by Italian planes and concluding that the Germans would include Bordeaux in their drive, Renoir turned off the main road near La Creuse, in the middle of France, and sought shelter at a farm. Its owner allowed the party to use his barn, a hay-filled structure with stone walls. That evening Paul Cézanne hung his father's paintings on them. "At night in that barn we fell asleep amid the . . . masterpieces," Renoir would write. "Our oil lamps provided an ideal light [and] . . . gave us the impression that the persons in the pictures were alive and about to speak to us." The farmer's donkey, unimpressed, looked on from a nearby stall.¹⁰⁰

With the country subsequently divided by the conquerors, Renoir, who had gone to stay with his brother, was left in a state of uncertainty like countless others. His reputation might protect him, but for how long? His previous outspokenly anti-Nazi attitude seemingly left him vulnerable. He did not want to alienate the new regime in Vichy, but he did not want to have any association with the Germans. It was a visit by two collaborationists on behalf of German film interests who wanted him to return to Paris and resume work that ended his doubt. "It was time to clear out," he realized. American friends in the film community, led by Robert Flaherty, the famed documentary producer, helped line up work for Renoir in Hollywood and, once Vichy authorities issued the requisite exit visa, Renoir and Dido went by boat to Algeria and then to Morocco, and from there on to Lisbon, where they finally were able to board a ship for the United States in December 1940.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Renoir, *My Life and My Films*, 181-82.

¹⁰¹ The correspondence of Renoir and Dido Freire with American friends, and his with Vichy authorities, is

Renoir, like his ship-board companion Saint-Exupéry, did not speak or understand English – Dido had been raised in England and served as a linguistic crutch for him – and, once in Hollywood, where he immediately signed a one-year contract with Fox, he had to begin intensive study. “I’ve worked tremendously hard for the past two months, and I am just beginning to understand a normal conversation,” he wrote to his son Alain. “I still do not grasp all that the actors are saying to each other on the screen.” Two months later the situation seemed not to have changed substantially. “My biggest misfortune is that I don’t speak English . . . ,” he confided in a letter to Eugène Lourié, who had been the set designer for his last pre-war films. Renoir suspected that he had not received a film assignment because of his language deficiency and he probably was right. When Zanuck did send him the script of *Swamp Water*, which would mark Renoir’s directorial debut in Hollywood, the expatriate had to confess to Zanuck that he could not decipher it easily. “As I read English too slowly,” he told Zanuck late in May, “it is my collaborator, Miss Dido Freire, who has translated it for me page by page, during the night.” Once work on *Swamp Water* began in earnest, Zanuck had to assign a “dialogue director” to make certain that Renoir communicated effectively with the cast and technical personnel.¹⁰²

The problem of language limited Renoir’s absorption of American culture, but he seems to have developed a generally positive impression of his new home. He brought a left-wing perspective to America with him and had been a fan of the Popular Front governments in France, which may explain why he professed, in a letter to Saint-

in Renoir, *Letters*, 55-81.

¹⁰² Renoir, *My Life and Times*, 183; Renoir to Alain Renoir, 8 March 1941; Renoir to Eugène Lourié, 12 May 1941; Renoir to Darryl F. Zanuck, 23 May 1941, Renoir, *Letters*, 91, 96, 97, 101; Bertin, *Jean Renoir*, 194.

Exupéry, to “love” Franklin Roosevelt,¹⁰³ but he apparently had no trouble adopting a bourgeois life style. With his \$54,000.00 salary from Fox, a sum that left him “dazed,”¹⁰⁴ he and Dido rented “a very pretty house, with a rather large garden, built on a hill which overlooks the whole city.” They had two servants and, rather than the Chevrolet he wanted, he followed his agent’s advice and purchased a more prestigious Buick convertible, while Dido drove a Packard convertible. There was culture shock, to be sure, and American cuisine topped the list of oddities. “Dido and I sometimes come across some extremely funny combinations which make us laugh like lunatics,” he confided to his son after two months in Hollywood. “Americans cook like little girls playing with their toys, making themselves dishes with whatever they can steal from their mothers’ kitchens: a raw carrot, a piece of chocolate, a leftover cauliflower, and some currant jelly.” The director found some culinary solace at Marlene Dietrich’s home. “Renoir loved stuffed cabbage . . . [and] had an enormous appetite,” she recalled. “He was a frequent guest, and I made stuffed cabbage for him each time.” Cuisine aside, Renoir seems to have gotten along well with people he met. “I must say that I like Americans a lot,” he told his son. “One can get along well with them and can work with them.”¹⁰⁵ That was the case of most of the people who surrounded him on his first sets. “American actors are extraordinary, and the workers and technicians are first class,” he told his sister-in-law in mid-1941. “Working with them is a sheer delight. They’re decent people, good-hearted and happy, and they’re disciplined, too.”¹⁰⁶ But his eventual judgment was that something fundamental distinguished the two countries

¹⁰³ Renoir to Saint-Exupéry, 2 June 1942, Renoir, *Letters*, 128.

¹⁰⁴ Renoir, *My Life*, 190.

¹⁰⁵ Renoir to Alain Renoir, 8 March 1941, *ibid.*, 91-93; Dietrich, *Marlene*, 132.

¹⁰⁶ Renoir to Paulette Renoir, 29 July 1941, quoted in Bertin, *Jean Renoir*, 199.

from one another. “The French have a passion for what is natural,” he thought, “while the Americans worship the artificial.” The hectic pace of life in New York left him skeptical. “Everybody walks fast, everybody is in a hurry,” he observed. “It is a competitive civilization: you have to get there before the next man, whatever your destination is.” American life, in short, was “over-regimented.”¹⁰⁷ This view, of course, echoed, at least implicitly, the now familiar argument about the contrast between a culture rooted in sentiment, passion, sensitivity, and tradition and one that embodied the characteristics of the industrial, machine age. Renoir nonetheless applauded his son Alain’s decision to join the American army a few weeks after Pearl Harbor – a decision the youth made after he and his father sat listening to a radio speech by Roosevelt – and applied for American citizenship himself in the spring of 1942. “That has nothing to do with what’s going on [overseas] at the moment,” he explained to his brother, “it’s just because I feel more comfortable in this big country than in the confines of Europe.”¹⁰⁸ Professionally, Renoir’s reaction to America was different in fundamental ways. Indeed, his experience in Hollywood was a study in microcosm of the clash between the two cultures and the operational methods rooted in those cultures. He chafed from the very beginning under the controls placed on a director by the American assembly-line method of filmmaking. A devotee of the *auteur* approach and accomplished writer, but admittedly a “slow director,”¹⁰⁹ Renoir reached Hollywood expecting to launch his own projects with little more than a broad outline of a script and then to flesh out the story as his artistic inspiration dictated *during* filming. The idea of working under strict deadlines, tight budgetary controls, and a script written by somebody else to which he was

¹⁰⁷ Renoir, *My Life*, 207-208, 222-223.

¹⁰⁸ Bertin, *Jean Renoir*, 203-204, 207.

¹⁰⁹ Renoir, *Renoir on Renoir*, 13.

expected to adhere closely represented, for him, an almost complete loss of artistic personality. He bristled at not having been consulted the very first time that Zanuck sent him a completed screenplay to examine,¹¹⁰ and to Saint-Exupéry he grouched that the studio was merely “a Factory” filled with people who took orders. “The studios are run in a military way,” he wrote dejectedly to another friend, “and a director is nothing more than an employee among many other employees.”¹¹¹

In June 1941 work began in earnest on *Swamp Water*, a backwoods murder tale set in the Okefenokee Swamp that would star two newcomers, Anne Baxter and Dana Andrews. Things might have been less rocky if Renoir’s English had been better, but even after six months, it remained rudimentary. “I spoke English very little better than Saint-Exupéry [sic],” he admitted, and so he remained heavily dependent on Dido Freire. Rehearsal of a scene one day on the bank of a river with a young local woman hired as a stand-in for the actress Anne Baxter underscored the handicap. While Renoir looked on from the other side of the river, the young woman hurried through the scene, which called for her to climb into a boat. “Miss, wait a little,” Renoir called out to her, pronouncing *wait* as *wet*. “The girl looked in consternation at Dana Andrews,” Renoir himself later recounted. “Does he really want me to . . . [sic]?”¹¹² The language barrier, with difficulty, could be overcome. The real problem for Renoir was the studio system in which the producer ruled supreme. Zanuck had cautioned him at the outset that he would have a “tight budget and tight shooting schedule” and so, for example, he objected strongly to location work, insisting on making the film at the studio. Renoir had

¹¹⁰ “In this whole matter my own personality may have been a little neglected,” he complained euphemistically to his agent, “and the fact overlooked that the author of *La Grande Illusion* can do more exceptional and personal things.” Renoir to Charles Feldman, 9 April 1941, Renoir, *Letters*, 94.

¹¹¹ Renoir to Saint-Exupéry, 26 May 1941; Renoir to Pierre Figliera, 20 June 1941, *ibid.*, 102, 104.

¹¹² Renoir, *My Life and My Films*, 194-195.

to plead for authorization to shoot exterior scenes in Georgia and, even though Zanuck ended up granting that concession, the process dulled Renoir's enthusiasm. As the producer kept up steady pressure regarding the pace of the operations, friction and frustration became the order of the day. "You are going entirely too slow," he admonished Renoir at the end of July. "From day to day you are turning in less completed film than any other company on the lot." What was Renoir doing wrong, from Zanuck's perspective? "You are wasting entirely too much time on non-essential details in your background," he was changing camera angles too frequently, and he was unnecessarily shooting scenes in different ways. "I regret that it is necessary for me to be stern in this matter," said Zanuck, "but after reviewing the budget it is easy to read the handwriting on the wall" Two days later he again admonished Renoir about his indecision regarding shooting angles.¹¹³ Renoir was stung by Zanuck's constant criticism and confided that he found the situation more like "working in a shoe factory than in the cinema."¹¹⁴ He liked the screenplay by Dudley Nichols and they became good friends, but he resented the fact that, in order to make small changes, he had to secure the approval of Zanuck. Seeing himself reduced to what he thought was little more than a "eunuch" in the creative process, his relations with the Zanuck became "very tense" and he vented his disgruntlement to Nichols halfway into the forty-day shooting schedule, exclaiming that he "would rather sell peanuts in Mexico than make films at Fox."¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Darryl F. Zanuck to Renoir, 21, 26, May, 2 Aug. 1941, in Rudy Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 51-52.

¹¹⁴ Renoir to Fighiera, 20 June 1941, Renoir, *Letters*, 105.

¹¹⁵ Renoir to Dudley Nichols, 21 July 1941, *ibid.*, 110.

By August he was fed up and politely suggested to Zanuck that their association had been a “mistake, both for you and for me,” and that they should terminate his contract. “The fact is, I have been too long in this profession to change the methods in which I have come to believe sincerely, and which, in any case, are adapted to my temperament . . . ,” he wrote. “Since my methods seem to be at such variance with your ideas, why prolong a collaboration which gives no enthusiasm to either of us?” In a letter to his friend Charles Boyer, Renoir admitted that he was “driving Zanuck to despair” by the slow pace of the filming and said that he could “hardly blame” the producer if he did remove him from the project. “He would have liked me to make this film very quickly, and be contented with shooting what is in the screenplay without bringing anything of myself to this filming,” Renoir complained. “I know nothing of this kind of work.” Zanuck, however, undoubtedly fearing the expense, refused to let the director off the hook. To soothe Renoir’s feelings a bit, he found something to praise: the director was doing a “good job” in handling newcomers Baxter and Andrews. But then he gave Renoir detailed instructions, making clear once again just who was in charge. Renoir should film Andrews hatless more often, refrain from putting so many props and characters in scenes – “By this I mean every time we come to the country store it is so crowded with horses and wagons and people that you would think it is in the middle of the city” –, have the minor players stop trying so hard to come across as authentic country people because the scenes were becoming “unreal and fakey,” and, finally, the director had to spend more time preparing at night for the next day’s shooting in order to avoid the “tremendous amount of time” that he was spending discussing scenes and camera angles during the day. “In closing, I want you to know that I am

behind you and I am going to see you through on the picture – but,” Zanuck wrote, “I expect you to play ball my way.” And the producer, of course, had his way and Renoir was left to lament the studio chief’s excising of scenes, including an “all important central” one between two characters, and the resultant diluting of the “strangeness of this story.”¹¹⁶

Released in November 1941, the film met with a mixed critical reception. A *New York Times* reviewer, perhaps reflecting some East Coast elitist snobbery, shredded it. “The fact that Jean Renoir’s initial screen exercise in this country was completed before he learned the A B C’s of our language will mitigate somewhat his responsibility for *Swamp Water*, now at the Globe,” he wrote. “Unfortunately, no one else has nearly as good an excuse for this melodramatic mess about Georgia crackers.” The script was “fraudulent,” said the reviewer, and the film was loaded with “sentimental bosh” and “pretentious hoakum.”¹¹⁷ Zanuck thus may well have been right in some of his criticism of Renoir; in any case, the experience of working with the director had been unpleasant and Renoir certainly had been “very unhappy” working at Fox, so both sides were glad to part ways now that the ordeal was over. As for the film, it ended up passing with flying colors the most important test as far as Zanuck was concerned: it not only made money, but it became one of the studio’s highest-grossing releases of the year.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Renoir to Zanuck, 1 Aug. 1941; Renoir to Nichols, 13 Sept. 1941, Renoir, *Letters*, 113, 120; Zanuck to Renoir, 8 Aug. 1941, Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 52-54.

¹¹⁷ Renoir to Zanuck, 1 Aug. 1941; Renoir to Charles Boyer, 3 Aug. 1941, Renoir, *Letters*, 113; Zanuck to Renoir, 8 Aug. 1941, Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 52-54; T. M. P., Review of *Swamp Fox*, *New York Times*, 17 Nov. 1941, [http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9903EFD8163AE233A25754C1A9679D946093D6CF&scp=1&sq=Review%20of%20Swamp%20Fox%20\(1941\)&st=cse](http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9903EFD8163AE233A25754C1A9679D946093D6CF&scp=1&sq=Review%20of%20Swamp%20Fox%20(1941)&st=cse).

¹¹⁸ Renoir to Erich von Stroheim, 27 Aug. 1942, Renoir, *Letters*, 137; editorial note, Behlmer, *Memo from Darryl F. Zanuck*, 54.

The fact that his first film did well financially gave Renoir another opportunity, this one at Universal Studios directing a Deanna Durbin film, *The Amazing Mrs. Halliday*. As far as Renoir was concerned, the project did not end well. The official reason for his voluntary replacement as director was complications arising from a World War I leg injury. They were real – “Never has my leg given me as much trouble,” he told Nichols – but the main reason was script problems, even though he later confessed that he had been uneasy with the musical genre, which he probably considered beneath him. “My old war wound kind of revolted against the stupidities I had to do,” he explained to Nichols at the time. Underlying this problem, however, was the ongoing clash between Renoir’s individualism and Hollywood’s industrial approach to movie-making that involved micromanagement of all details of film production. “Even a smile, a wink, was discussed by ten people around a green rug,” he later recalled with regard to the Durbin film. “It was difficult for me to work with such seriousness.”¹¹⁹

Zanuck’s original idea in contracting Renoir had been to have him work on *French* stories in *French* settings – and the director now got his chance to do that with the RKO film *This Land Is Mine*. Renoir’s artistic freedom in the making of the film was much greater than on the two previous ones: he was not only the director, but helped Nichols write the script and they acted as co-producers, responsible to the studio only for budgetary matters. The story line concerned a fearful school teacher, played by Charles Laughton, in occupied France, who finds courage and ends up being executed for speaking out in his classroom against Nazi tyranny.¹²⁰ One film critic wrote that a

¹¹⁹ Renoir to Nichols, 7 August 1942, *ibid.*, 134; Renoir, interview, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, April-May 1954, in Renoir, *Renoir on Renoir*, 15.

¹²⁰ Renoir, *My Life*, 218-219; Raymond Durnat, *Jean Renoir*, 234-239; *This Land Is Mine* (1943), author’s copy.

private screening of the film brought most of the reviewers in the crowd to tears. The film “explores Nazi doctrine and exposes its fallacies,” and “undertakes to depict for free people the psychological reflexes of a people from whom freedom has been taken.” The title itself is stirring for it applies to “a state of mind which the narrative asserts is the rock of resistance upon which the invasion barge of aggressors must destroy itself.”¹²¹

The liberation of France in 1944 brought an end to the Hollywood sojourn of most of the wartime émigrés – for some it brought an end to their Hollywood *ordeal*. The United States had provided a refuge, some welcomed it, some seemed almost to have resented it. All of the latecomers, those who left France in the wake of the German conquest in 1940, experienced the same problem of adjusting to life in the United States that their predecessors had. Much of that problem was normal culture shock. But in the case of film professionals, there was an added dimension of difficulty and tension, involving profound cultural differences. The Hollywood studio system represented a work environment totally different from the film-producing world they had known. For every Charles Boyer and Robert Florey who embraced that world, willingly made the necessary adaptations, and enjoyed lengthy careers in California, there were numerous Jacques Tourneurs, Jacques Feyders, Danielle Darrieuxs, and Jean Gabins, who could not overcome the cultural obstacles. The Hollywood assembly-line, with its rigid scheduling, uniform packaging, and subordination of artistic freedom and creativity to box-office returns proved too restrictive for their Gallic spirit.

¹²¹ William R. Weaver, review of *This Land Is Mine* (RKO), *Motion Picture Daily*, 17 March 1943.

CONCLUSION

France in the 20th century underwent a profound identity crisis and at no time was that loss of confidence more keenly exhibited than in the aftermath of the two world wars. A nation with a self-imposed *mission civilisatrice*, a nation that had given the world the Enlightenment and the Revolution, as well as Napoléon, a nation whose language was the language of diplomacy and spoken by elites in all Western countries, a nation of world-renowned thinkers, writers, poets, painters, and scientists, found itself somehow being left behind in fundamental ways by the time the 20th century rolled around. The challenge was political, it was economic, it was military, it was intellectual, it was cultural. French society, stubborn in its clinging to former glory, did not embrace change. The country entered the new century with its self-confidence shaken by humiliating defeat at the hands of the hated Prussians thirty years earlier, was in a vengeful and defiant mood, but faced two formidable adversaries: Germany and, in a sense, the United States. The historic enemy across the Rhine would deal France a thunderous blow during 1914-1918 that would leave the country shattered economically, politically, and morally. The adversary across the Atlantic would go to France's aid in 1917 and help turn the tide in favor of the Allies, but the wartime alliance, resting on a rather fragile foundation, would not survive. The United States, with its optimism, its energy, faith in its institutions, its forward-looking, dynamic population, and its pace-setting economic model based on free enterprise and mass-production, represented practically everything that French traditionalists disliked and feared. Ironically, France emerged from World War I, as it would from World War II, dramatically weakened, its

international status greatly diminished in each case. The United States, on the other hand, emerged stronger from each of those conflicts, the world's leading economic and financial power after World War I, and the world's first superpower after 1945, one that had engineered the liberation of a defeated and humiliated France. In neither instance would any sense of gratitude on the part of France overcome a sense of resentment and, increasingly, a sense of economic and cultural threat.

As the United States began exporting on a grand scale key elements of its popular culture, especially movies, French traditionalists found it a bitter pill. Viewing with alarm Hollywood's enormous success in France, some proud Frenchmen saw it as part of an effort to indoctrinate the French public with American values. And if the attempt were not purposeful, its effects threatened to be the same. But the very popularity of Hollywood's films and other products of the American system suggests that millions of Frenchmen did not see them as negative influences. There was thus a continuing ambivalence in French attitudes toward the United States. Steeped in tradition dating back centuries, resistant to change, France saw its prominent place in world politics greatly diminished by its own weaknesses and failures and by the relentless advance of the United States, whose machine-driven society, symbolized perfectly by production modes in Hollywood, was the embodiment of a different approach to life and work. The French elite tended to look backward, to more glorious times; their nation had little to celebrate in the first half of the century. The United States also looked backward – but to draw inspiration from past achievement to fuel its leadership of the drive toward modernity.

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Arsène Lupin (MGM, 1932)
Arsène Lupin Returns (MGM, 1938)
Assignment in Brittany (MGM, 1944)
Big Parade, The (MGM, 1925)
Casablanca (Warner Brothers, 1943)
Charlie Chan in Paris (20th Century Fox, 1935)
Cross of Lorraine, The (MGM, 1943)
Dodsworth (United Artists, 1936)
Gay Parisian, The (Warner Brothers, 1941)
God's Gift to Women (Warner Brothers, 1931)
Gold Diggers in Paris (Warner Brothers, 1938)
Good Girls Go To Paris (Columbia Pictures, 1939)
Her Sister from Paris (Joseph M. Schenk Productions, 1925)
Higher and Higher (RKO, 1943)
Hot for Paris (Fox, 1929)
Joan of Paris (RKO, 1931)
Joan of Paris (20th Century Fox, 1942)
Josette (20th Century Fox, 1938)
Kiki (First National Pictures, 1926)
Kiki (United Artists, 1931)
Life of Emile Zola, The (Warner Brothers, 1937)
Little French Girl (Famous Players-Lasky, 1925)
Love Me Tonight (Paramount, 1932)
Love Parade, The (Paramount, 1929)
Madame Du Barry (Warner Brothers, 1934)
Madame Sans-Gêne (Famous Players-Lasky, 1925)
Mademoiselle Fifi (RKO, 1944)
Marianne (MGM, 1929)
Marie Antoinette (MGM, 1938)
Moontide (Fox, 1943)
My Life with Caroline (RKO, 1941)
Ninotchka (MGM, 1939)
Paris After Dark (20th Century Fox, 1943)
Paris Calling (Universal, 1942)
Paris Honeymoon (Paramount, 1939)
Parisian Love (B. P. Schulberg Productions, 1925)
Passage to Marseilles (Warner Brothers, 1944)
Pied Piper, The (20th Century Fox, 1944)
Reunion in France (MGM, 1942)
Road to Morocco (Paramount, 1942)
Roberta (RKO, 1935)
Smiling Lieutenant, The (Paramount, 1931)
Story of Louis Pasteur, The (Warner Brothers, 1936)
That Girl from Paris (RKO, 1936)
They Had to See Paris (Fox, 1929)

This Land Is Mine (RKO, 1943)
To Have and Have Not (Warner Brothers, 1944)
Turning of the Tide: The Ill-Starred Making of Moontide documentary included with 20th
Century Fox's 2008 DVD release of *Moontide*
Uncertain Glory (Warner Brothers, 1944)
Voltaire (Warner Brothers, 1933)
Wilson (20th Century Fox, 1944)
Woman of Paris, A (United Artists, 1923)
Young Ideas (MGM, 1943)

VITA

Louise Hilton was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She grew up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, graduating in French Studies from Louisiana State University Honors College in 2004. During her studies at LSU, she moved to Paris, France, for her junior year at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. Upon graduating, she spent two years teaching English to French elementary school students in Metz, France. She returned to the United States and spent two years working in Dallas, Texas, and then moved back to Baton Rouge to pursue her graduate studies. She received her Master in Library and Information Science degree from LSU's School of Library and Information Science in December 2009. During her time in library school, Louise completed three archival internships at the following institutions: the Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Margaret Herrick Library of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. She has worked for the past year and a half in the Manuscripts division of the LSU Libraries' Special Collections at Hill Memorial Library. After completing the coursework for her Master of Arts in Liberal Arts degree in May 2011, Louise is going on a much-needed trip to France, after which she plans to pursue a career as an archivist.