

The Magical Mystery World of Claude Chabrol: An Interview

Stylistically, what alternative do your films propose to French cinema?

I've always tried to hold on to the cinema of genre, because I think it's the only way to make films. These days in France, but not only there, one veers mostly toward an overly intellectual vision of things, and I think the only solution is to make some good *policiers*, some good soap-operas and comedies. At this moment, there's the disastrous influence of Godard who is a genius but who is quite alone, and all those who imitate him are really annoying.

What did the New Wave—if one accepts it as an aesthetic and economic movement—give French cinema?

Lots of worries . . . It was an economic movement, which is always the same: we had no money, so it was an economic problem. There was no unity of inspiration, but rather a unity of rejection of certain things. There was an influence of American cinema, which I find very healthy, but very soon, instead of trying to bring into this existing cinematic structure what they could, they eliminated and betrayed their teacher—they tried to make films which were no longer genre films. I think it's very bad. Fortunately, cinema is still a popular art and we need people to go see films: they'll go to see a *policier*, a love story. Often, people just don't understand the films they are shown.

I've heard the accusation that members of the New Wave, like Truffaut and yourself, are making the same kind of films you used to attack before.

It's not true, of course. It's stupid! If it happens, it is to make, accidentally, a parody of this kind of film, but that's all. If one doesn't see the parody . . . Frankly, it's not at all possible.

What do you think of the way directors like Rohmer, Resnais, and Godard have developed?

Godard's case is apart, because his is an intolerable cinema—except by himself, because he has genius. When he's in shape, it's superb. It's never great for a long time, because it's not the kind of cinema one can sit through for an hour and a half. But for 20-30 minutes, it's an extraordinary cinema.

As to Rohmer or Resnais, I feel closer to them because I know them better. Let's say . . . *Merde*, I'll say what I think! I reproach them for not trying to make popular films. Yes, even Rohmer. It's not that he doesn't want to—he can't. He just doesn't have the right mind for a large public. The success of his films—and we've spoken about it, the two of us—has always been caused by misunderstanding. The titles of his films: *My Night at Maud's*, *La Collectionneuse*, *Claire's Knee*, *Chloe in the Afternoon*, give the impression of being obscene, and people go to see these obscenities but they get something else . . . It's only the titles: *The Marquise of O*—it sounds like a whore . . .

And Truffaut?

He has no problems. I didn't like *Small Change*. I find the criticism he made about children's films . . . when he made fun of *Forbidden Games*, for example, he was very precise, but I think he fell a bit in the same trap in *Small Change*. Well, he wanted to make a film that would be assured of success in France. It's a cinematic strategy that he has. But I like the fact that although he tries to change, he never does. I say it more as a compliment than as a reproach. He really tries to change his kind of films. He has two lines: the *Jules and Jim* line, and the *400 Blows* line. He also has a less interesting, Hitchcockian line—*The Bride Wore Black*, *La Sirène de Mississippi*—because

CLAUDE CHABROL

he's enormously influenced by Hitchcock. Even *Small Change* seems to me very influenced by Hitchcock in terms of the way of shooting . . . It's OK when he doesn't deal with subjects that are *policiers*, but when he does—one gets the impression of a copy of Hitchcock, an almost involuntary copy . . .

Let's talk about Hitchcock.

He doesn't make films anymore. He's working on a script which takes place in Finland in winter. With his pacemaker, he won't be able to see it through. He'll kill himself, like Molière. It frightens me. I liked *Family Plot* very much, especially when the guy in the garage hides behind the door and finds himself outside in the street . . .

In your book about Hitchcock, you spoke about the transfer of guilt and the reversal of roles, which are present in your films as well.

Yes, I think that they are more present in my films than in Hitchcock's. Of course, it exists in Hitchcock, but we pushed it a bit . . . I don't think that the core of his films is automatically the transfer of guilt. It must interest him, because he's dealt with the subject several times, but I don't think it interests him above all . . . And don't ask me what interests him above all, because I couldn't answer.

Why your interest in this principle?

It interests me to the extent that I believe in the *revelation* of guilt. There is a certain amount of guilt in every individual—it's the real Original Sin—and I noticed that guilt is always transferred from the most guilty to the least guilty. It's never the other way around. So, in a way, the act of the guilty releases him from his culpability: it's enough to commit the act to be able to transmit it to somebody else. In *Violette*, she has practically no remorse. She never regrets her deed and still manages to give a feeling of guilt to her mother and all the people around her—and she's the one who kills!

*Do you agree with the view that divides some of your films along the inspiration of Lang and others along that of Hitchcock? In *Que La Bête Meure* there's a very Langian element of fate.*

Yes, *Que la Bête Meure* (This Man Must Die) is mostly Langian.

*And *La Femme Infidèle* is more Hitchcockian?*

I don't think so. I don't consider Lang and



QUE LE BÊTE MEURE

Hitchcock from a thematic point of view. I consider them in terms of style, and in this I'm much closer to Lang than to Hitchcock. Hitchcock tries to convey a story subjectively—everything is based on the subjectivity of the character, while Lang seeks the opposite, to objectify all the time. I try to objectify too. It's characteristic of Hitchcock—even the titles of his films always bear on his personal psychology: *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Suspicion*, *Psycho* . . . They all have to do with personal, individual things. In Lang, it's *Human Desire*—it's never individual. Intellectually—in terms of pleasure derived—I was more influenced by Hitchcock than by Lang. The thing that strikes me enormously—it's a unique case in the history of cinema—is a great film-maker making a remake of two films by another great film-maker: it was Lang in relation to Renoir. *La Bête Humaine* became *Human Desire* and *La Chienne* became *Scarlet Street*. At first glance, there is no greater difference between two film-makers than between Renoir and Lang, but it isn't true. There is a greater difference between Renoir and Hitchcock, and even Hitchcock and Lang, than between Renoir and Lang. One can't imagine Hitchcock making a remake of Renoir. It's unthinkable.

What is the difference between your own scripts and the ones you wrote with Gégauff, or those he wrote himself?

In general, I write for three reasons: (1) I have an idea and I see no reason to give it to someone else, though I don't like writing, it bores me—I detest it. (2) I read a book and decide to

adapt it faithfully, with no intention of changing much, so I see no reason to pay—even if it's a friend who may need the money—since I just intend to copy the book. I do this too . . . (3) For example, *Violette* is a film I wanted to shoot for a long time: about Violette Nozière, the girl who poisoned her father and mother in 1934. Since it deals with what goes on in her mind, I preferred to have a woman do it—Odile Barski. This is a special case.

Do you find in Gégauff something that you want to say, but that he can maybe say better?

That's it. What I like in Paul is that he's quite crazy. I'm crazy too, but it's *la folie sage*, which is not his case. He often has ideas that are extraordinarily courageous. He's one of those people—and I admire it very much—who, when they have a problem of tying up something, they're not taken aback by it. In *Que la Bête Meure* we had a problem as to how to justify the fact that this guy, by coincidence, tracks down the killer. So, Paul just said it was by coincidence. It was terrific. He's very good at that. He's also good at . . . he says he refuses to write polished dialogue, but as soon as I need dialogue which is a bit polished—I hate it and don't know how to write it—I go to him. I'm good at writing dialogue for fools, and he's good with dialogue for intelligent people. I tell him: "Paul, here they have to be intelligent." So, he does it. If they are fools, I keep them and do it myself—I'm absolutely unbeatable at that . . .

There's something classical about the scripts you've written—La Femme Infidèle, La Rupture, Le Boucher, Juste avant la Nuit—something very gracious.



It's a matter of construction. I love that. It's my great pleasure. I construct very quickly; I'm good at that. That's why it's classical: because it's constructed.

How did you construct a film like Le Boucher?

The construction of *Le Boucher* was based on two ideas: the depth, which was in the area, in the earth-bed—the grottos, because they were there—and the sun, the morning sun. From then on, it was very easy—I mixed the two with the characters and it came about all by itself.

The only dramatic element in *Le Boucher* is the cigarette lighter. It's from the lighter that things begin to . . . (1) The lighter is offered. (2) The lighter is found on the cliff-top. So, the conclusion: it's the said lighter. (3) No, it's not the one. (4) Yes, it is. So, it's very easy. I adore symmetry, I love symmetrical things . . .

I think it's an interior need that balances . . . Internally, psychologically, I seek to maintain my equilibrium while my natural tendency is toward imbalance. So, the search for symmetry in things helps me in doing that. There's only Hercule Poirot who's like me—he adores symmetry too. But I'm not for simple symmetry. Symmetry doesn't mean putting one chandelier on the right and another on the left!

You have often used the melodrama as a vehicle to express a quite tragic vision of life.

Yes, I adore melodramas. All films are melodramas to the extent that you put some music in . . . Only Rohmer doesn't use any music in his films. I find melodramas moving. When there are moving elements—like a woman who loses her child—one can take a distance, on condition that the film doesn't turn out cold. I prefer this to the other way around . . . I saw the first film by John Frankenheimer, *The Young Stranger*, which is great, but there's a moment when he returns home, goes up the stairs—and there's this terribly dramatic music—opens the refrigerator, and takes out an . . . apple! I prefer this to having him find a corpse in the refrigerator: his mother's corpse, for example . . .

You have also used the roman policier as a similar vehicle. Why do you find it useful to express a tragic vision?

Because I've always liked the *roman policier*. I think that practically all *romans policiers* have

CLAUDE CHABROL

a metaphysical side to them, to the extent that there's either a mystery with a capital M or a villain who has to be destroyed. This is pure metaphysics. It interests people: to open the fridge door and discover the body of an old woman . . . It interests them for a while.

Is it mostly as a vehicle to express your vision of life or rather the mechanism of suspense that appeals to you?

I'm interested in it because the form itself expresses something. The principle of the *film policier* itself expresses something. Afterwards, you can add all kinds of things to it—tell the history of the world from its origins to our time: this doesn't bother anybody. But what happens to the spectator is that he doesn't fall asleep . . . It mustn't be too complicated or else you lose a lot of time trying to unravel it, which is annoying. But when it's not complicated, it's OK, it's a bit like . . . I'm not saying that the message should be bitter, but when you have a bitter pill to swallow, you put some chocolate around it, as you do with children and cats . . . You can do that in a good *policier*.

You have said you're optimistic, but your vision of the world seems to me quite pessimistic: in your films, evil lurks everywhere while virtue is rare.

Ah, it's very true!

But at the same time, your vision is also curiously humorous.

Virtue is always a bit ridiculous because it's such a rare flower that, first, it has such a hard time surviving, and then, it's rather dull . . .

Marie-Chantal contre Dr. Kah and La Rupture are the only films where you have a completely virtuous heroine.

Yes, In *La Rupture*, she's even more virtuous because she has suffered, while Marie-Chantal is innocent, a *naïve*.

You don't have a male hero who is virtuous in this way . . .

A virtuous man, no. Not yet. Ah, I have one: Donald Sutherland in *Blood Relatives*. It's really the story of a virtuous man. It's curious: a virtuous cop!

Because he does things for others or for himself?

He tries to do something for others, and a bit



Donald Sutherland reflected in BLOOD RELATIVES.

for himself. It's a man who tries to understand himself, who tries to behave decently. There is a limit to virtue: to just let things be. The enemy of virtue is preaching, and if you don't agree with the lesson . . . Things aren't as clear-cut as that.

But in a film like Une Partie de Plaisir, I feel there's a "message"—against self-sacrifice, for healthy self-interest. If everybody took care of his own interest, it would be better for all . . .

I have an old theory that this thought has to be divided half and half. Half for oneself and half for the others. This is healthy. Otherwise, it's very difficult. One has to be a bit selfish.

In Que la Bête Meure, there is an ambiguous situation (one isn't sure if the hero is going to die at the end) as well as a moral ambiguity (the victim-hero isn't all that pure himself). Is ambiguity an important principle for you?

It's not the ambiguity which is important. It's the . . . I abhor judges. They frighten me. They judge according to what? This is why my "great testament," my "definitive message" is that imported phrase: Don't judge! One has to avoid judgments to avoid traps, but this is not always easy. One judges in any case, but this judgment shouldn't have too great an import or consequence. Judgments are always made in relation to the self, even with judges and members of the jury. What one demands of jurors is terrible: an intimate conviction. "Beyond a reasonable doubt" is really a phrase that frightens me . . .

And yet good and evil are often well-defined in your films!

They mix. Laws aren't that simple. If good gains, it doesn't mean that it will also triumph, and if evil sweeps it along, it doesn't imply its victory. The battle between good and evil is more complicated. The principle is: when there's a character who is nice and another who is evil—for example, in *Le Boucher*, which is a limited case and a very simple one: there's the bad butcher and the nice teacher. But you can say that the butcher sometimes has more virtue than the teacher, that he tries to love her but she refuses. He gives her presents. She only gives him a lighter, a kiss—it's not much: he is much more generous than she is. The notion of good and evil is always relative to something.

How about characters who are completely negative, like Michel Bouquet in La Rupture, Jean Yanne in Que la Bête Meure or Akim Tamiroff in Marie-Chantal contre Dr. Kah? Is it to caricaturize?

There, yes. Tamiroff in *Marie-Chantal* is both the good Dr. Lambaré and the bad Dr. Kah. He is both, so good and evil are in the same person. The case of Bouquet in *La Rupture* is less about the theory of evil than about the theory of rule: he's a man blinded and misled by his principles. For him, things are no longer within the realm of judgment. He can't be considered evil, because he doesn't reason his evil. He tries to do good—he does evil because he doesn't consider the character of Stéphane as a human being, but for his son and grandson he is capable of anything. As to Yanne in *Que la Bête Meure*, he himself saw the character as very sympathetic and the others as ignoble. Look at his qualities: he's generous, open, a good son to his mother. The only thing that's terrible is his incredible egoism.

But he tortures his wife and son!

Tortures! She writes a stupid poem . . . And the son doesn't study and gets lousy grades. He spends a fortune on food and his wife doesn't prepare it right because she writes poems! He's right! And he offers a lucrative deal to Duchaussoy . . .

Still, do you see these characters as caricatures?

Yes, sometimes I make caricatures so the story will be sharper. But at the same time I also notice that one thinks they're caricatures and then one day in the street one sees people who are much worse, who are caricatures of this caricature. Let's say that these are people some of whose traits are more accentuated than others.

You once wrote in Cahiers du Cinéma that the film policier carries the seeds of its own destruction. Can you elaborate?

Yes, because people who wrote *policiers* obeyed the rules of the genre, but these rules are no rules but a mere convenience to keep or reject. The *roman policier* is dying, because they followed the rules to such a point that it's always the same thing: it's like a bridge party where you look at the hand and make a diagnosis: this genre corresponds to this trick or another and there's never a surprise. Now the *roman policier* is enjoying a new birth, emerging from its ashes, because people have become a bit freer. You have to be flexible with the rules of the genre. When you make a *film policier*, you shouldn't try to find out whether it obeys the rules, whether it's orthodox or not. If you decide in the middle that it won't be a *policier*, you do something else. As was the case with classical tragedy, the absence of freedom in the *policier* brought about its death. Since there no longer was intelligent material, one invented things just to solicit. There's a guy called Mickey Spillane, whom I hate because, in theory, his novels were like those of Chandler and Hammett, and at the same time they were completely disgusting. They're really bad, without interest, stupid. Certainly, one later discovered that it was not the worst . . . Now they think it's not all that bad—still, it's an example of how decadent the genre can become.

You have often subverted the genre.

Yes, but it's not so much for the subversion . . . Let's say, I don't want to submit myself to a genre. I use it because it helps me or it seems practical. It's easier for me, but I don't want to become enslaved to it. I don't want to be a priest of the *roman policier*. I think one should be free to do what one wants. I reproach Truffaut for having too great a tendency, when he says: "I'll make a *film policier* based on William Irish" or something like that, to stick to the rules of

CLAUDE CHABROL

the genre. Unlike Hitchcock, who has always disregarded them. This is his great strength—he couldn't care less.

How about Blood Relatives?

It completely respects the rules of the genre. It's a book by Ed McBain, who is none other than the scriptwriter of *The Birds*: Evan Hunter. When I read the book, it didn't grab me because I realized who was guilty by the second page. And all this, because he obeyed the rules of the genre—I found the trump he was using. But at the same time I thought it was a great subject, so I was quite faithful and simply changed the characters a little bit. But the end result is not the same: it's the same story, but not quite the same subject. I pushed in another direction, which changed the outlook a bit.

What is the subject of the film?

It's the relationship of a 40-year-old cop with his daughter.

Does it develop through an inquiry?

Yes, but it's not even his daughter. We hardly see her. Her presence is there during the inquiry. She is 12, and there's another young girl in the story.

You seem to be quite interested in the relationship between parents and children. In almost all your films . . .

I'm interested in it to the extent that I'm a father myself. For more than 15 films, there were no children at all. I started putting children in my films only from the moment that I really felt myself to be a father. My own children grew up and the problem which they represented and which I could not resolve—I didn't study the problem and when I did, I had no solution. When I saw them growing up, I noticed that each gesture of your child has a symbolic value *vis-à-vis* yourself. It's as if it were a projection of yourself doing something. The power—even that of suppression—that a child has over you is superior to that of any other person. This is why I used children as elements representing what one calls "bourgeois stability" and when these elements are shattered in some way . . . In my films, one tortures children a lot: in *La Rupture*, he's thrown at the wall right away. In *Une Partie de Plaisir*, the torture is even more terrifying because Paul Gégauff interrogates his daughter



LA RUPTURE

about her mother and gives her messages for her. I find it's an extraordinary representation of the characters themselves—a revelation of sorts. The relations with children and the torture children have to bear—it's violent and it fascinates me. In *La Femme Infidèle*, it's double torture: the mother tortures the boy when she throws down his puzzle and the kid tortures his parents by saying "I detest you."

Let's talk about Violette's relations with her parents and the shifting system of alliances within that family.

What I tried to show is that she and her mother seek each other. I show it by kisses: either Violette wants to kiss her mother and her mother doesn't or her mother wants to kiss her and Violette no longer wants to. They have great difficulty getting through to each other. There's a much less difficult rapport between Violette and her father. The scenes where she's alone with him are much calmer and more "normal" than the ones with her mother. And yet, it's her father she kills. This is a great mystery for me: why she kills him rather than her mother. The only thing that made me ask the question is that maybe it's true that he tried to rape her, but I don't believe it. As to the relationship between the Nozière parents, the father always indulges his daughter and the mother is always stern. This is because the father accepts his daughter as she appears to him while the mother wants her daughter to accomplish things she dreams about.

You have often criticized the family and yet you've said you are not against it.

No, I'm for it, but I criticize it because it's

lamentable. A family is the people you love. I have a family of 30 people and if I add my children . . . It's very pleasant, but I think it's mostly European, or even French . . . What's frightening is that there's a father, a mother, and children who are all pressed together—it's disgusting. The father keeps an eye on the female next door, the grandmother . . . , the children . . . It's disgusting, frightening! I don't see how people can live that way—and yet it has such strength. It's masochistic; they're unhappy but it endures.

You have made many films where the existence of the couple is invaded by a third person, often the woman's lover. What do you find most interesting in that domain: the power struggle between the three?

No, it's not that. What amuses me is to create an imbalance in a universe that tries hard to stabilize itself. But it's crazy: there can be no equilibrium *à trois*, so it's the suppression of one of the three which causes the imbalance. In fact, I'm not particularly interested in triangles, but this is what people are familiar with most. You can do a lot of things with a sexual triangle and, at the same time, it's very simple—everybody knows what it is: the woman makes a phone call and hastily hangs up when her husband enters. Everyone understands that. No need to add a scene to explain what has happened. It's very practical, which is why I use it . . . It's also very French . . .

What do you find interesting in a relationship: the facade, its cracking, or its explosion?

Both interest me. The facade is interesting because it's the social fabric and the cracking is interesting because it's the truth. Maybe it's my pessimistic side, but I can't imagine one without the other.

What is the great evil of bourgeois life? Mediocrity?

It's mostly its extraordinary egoism. Bourgeois life is entirely conceived in egoism, like an old candy that one finds and which is completely . . .

What is the function of the meal scenes in your films?

The meal, for the most part, is the moment when people are united. The father works, the mother is out shopping, the children are at school, but they're united at the dinner table. When a

man wants to sleep with a woman, he doesn't say: "Come, sleep with me!" He says: "Let's grab a bite in a restaurant." The meal, then, has a very important function, so I put a lot of meal scenes in my films.

But I noticed that in most of my films—and it irritated me greatly—people never eat, or very little. In *Blood Relatives*, there are small meals—they're not very important, but there are nevertheless six. They gorge themselves all the time . . .

There are very few such scenes in La Rupture or Juste Avant la Nuit. Is it in order to express something?

When there are meals? It depends. For example, the most important one, the one in which there are the most things to see, is in *Que la Bête Meure*, because it's part of the character—the visceral side of the character.

Do you always intend to make funny films, even when they're serious?

Yes. I always try to make my films funny, with some rare exceptions. *Le Boucher* or even *La Rupture* may have amusing moments, but they don't try to be funny, while *Juste Avant la Nuit* is, in fact, a comic film. It's really vaudeville material transformed into tragedy. It's about a character who wants to confess and people say: "Shut up! Shut up!" It's subject matter that could have very well been used in a comedy. But the film is funnier if comic material is treated in an austere way.

What is the role of politics in your films? For example, Nada is a critique of the corruption and sadism of the police as well as the brutality of the anarchists.



CLAUDE CHABROL

Yes, but it's not anarchists—it's terrorists. I don't see the difference between terrorists and beasts. They behave in the same way.

Why your interest in the themes of manipulation and the use of power?

It's a will not to let power impose itself. Power is the most twisted, the most evil, the purest . . . What was misunderstood about *Nada*, which treated that, is that it's not the political stand taken—the extreme left, like the terrorists, or the extreme right, like the policeman or Goémont: in any case, the state crushes. The state is the master of he who destroys it, not of its supporters. Another phrase which applies to *Nada* is: the state prefers its own destruction, and the death of all, to the revolution. It's true.

And in Les Biches? What starts as a sexual attraction between the two women ends up as manipulation and power struggle.

Of course but, alas, if it's a power struggle, I'd be entirely for Why. But it isn't really a power struggle. It's a revolution: the replacement of one class by another—Why replaces Frédérique, but she does it by *becoming* Frédérique.

But you also show the attraction of fascism in Les Cousins and Une Partie de Plaisir.

Yes, but this is Gégauff's side. He loves to pass for a fascist. When I want to have a portrait of a fascist, I call Gégauff. In *Une Partie de Plaisir*, he plays one himself.

You have said: "The real center could be a form of Marxism for the 20th century."

Yes, but I speak of Europe because the US is quite different. In France and the rest of Europe, where the existing social structure is strongly disputed by at least half the individuals, and people think of changing it, I think that the real center is no more right-wing than the left. The center-left is as rightist as . . . I think that the real center will be a sort of modern Marxism. I didn't say it would be the solution. There'll be problems, but it will be the center. The center-right will court the liberals. The left will be leftist anarchists, but it's already like that: terrorists, who are pro-Albanian . . .

You often use social origin as indicative of victimization: the heroines of La Rupture and Une Partie de Plaisir.

Up to a point, yes. If there are men, women



Danièle and Paul Gégauff in UNE PARTIE DE PLAISIR

are the victims. This I admit quite willingly, given what the poor things have to bear. To the extent that women are victims, it's more certain they'll be victims in a poor milieu than in a rich milieu. The rich are victims of other things, but it's less serious . . . Women in a modest milieu suffer terribly. It's not amusing at all. It's a cliché, but if they work all day in a factory and at night have to cook and wash—it's terrible! We men are monsters [laughs uncontrollably]. It's funny . . . If women don't laugh, I understand, but I find it funny . . .

How do you see the role of the camera? Does it make a comment on the characters or the situation?

If only I knew . . . I try to avoid—except when it's the purpose of the film—making the camera subjective in relation to the characters in the film. That is, directly subjective—to make the audience identify with one of the characters by the effect of the camera. Except when I want to play a trick—to make them identify with a character and then make them realize what horrible scoundrels they are. That amuses me . . . But otherwise, I think that the role of the camera is to give its own point of view on what is happening. Without going so far as to use the "pretty" vehicle of distanciation, which is heavy, let's say that a light step backward in relation to the story allows you to avoid a deterioration into bad taste, into grandiose affects.

With this system, when you use such grandiose effects, it becomes a farce. People laugh. It's very easy to manipulate the spectator. After



LA FEMME INFIDÈLE (Michel Bouquet, Stéphane Audran)

Hitchcock manipulated the audience so brilliantly in *Psycho*, manipulation was no longer possible.

In the opening sequence of La Femme Infidèle, the camera encircles the characters who are sitting at a table on the lawn. Why?

It seeks them. The principle of *La Femme Infidèle* is that the movement always ends up by returning to its starting point, as if it never moved. At times, it moves to the left but returns to the right; at others, it advances but then recoils. It never returns from the same point, and it's what the character wants—to remain completely . . . He finds himself in his little happiness and he wants least of all to see it move . . . That's the subject of *La Femme Infidèle*—it becomes unbalanced and he pushes like crazy on the unbalanced side to re-establish balance. This movement back and forth was constantly compensated to such an extent that in the last shot I had to use both movements—forward and backward—which is physically impossible. This is why I cheated a bit: I used a zoom forward at the same time that I was moving backward.

And in A Double Tour?

It was the period of madness, because it was the beginning . . . I had a crane which could go very high up, so I amused myself with it like crazy. But it worked. I like taking a stand—any scene can be shot in at least two or three different ways. I detest what they do a lot in the US—the cover-shot. Why is it called that? I'm not cold . . . Even in what is called a master-shot, which is sufficient to tell a film, there are two or three different solutions. What's interesting is to choose a visual point of view which corresponds to the

CLAUDE CHABROL

sense of what is to be done and preserve it all along. Contrarily to what one believes, it doesn't take your freedom away. With this stand you can do anything: you are not tied to a succession of automatic forms. You can go in whatever direction you want, because you have such a solid structure.

Violette has a very complicated system of flashbacks.

It's not very linear, but it's not very complicated. The film can be divided into three parts: the first is the longest, almost half the film—from the introduction of Violette, who comes out of the doorway in the very beginning up to the fatal dinner. She takes the bus. There, we have a flashback with almost chronological elements of her life, with the exception of childhood memories which take place in the beginning of the third part. It stops the moment she's about to commit the crime. She sees things in their chronology but still doesn't want to accept her deed. The minute it's about to arrive, in her memory, she stops the bus—which represents the line of memory—and walks on foot. From that moment, it's reality—we're in direct reality. She returns home and, of course, finds her parents dead, calls the neighbors, is interrogated by the police and slips away. She begins to have visions, a kind of depression, and accepts seeing the moment where she prepares the crime. In the first part, the only thing we see of the crime is when she tries to imitate her mother's handwriting, but not the poison. When she sleeps in her hotel room, she sees the preparation of the poison, but she still doesn't accept seeing the crime itself. We return to linearity—she stops it. Then, she's imprisoned and at that moment, when everything is over, she accepts seeing the crime itself. After that, she herself explores her past, the why of things.

Why are there so many close-ups in Violette?

There are two reasons. First, I didn't have the money to reconstruct the period in a grand manner. So, when I shot outdoors, I was obliged to condense the frames. Had I closed the frame outdoors but let the camera wander indoors, one would have felt I was forced to close the frame. If the frames are closed everywhere, the spectator isn't bothered by the outdoors enclosure. In addi-

Isabelle
Huppert
in
VIOLETTE



tion, Isabelle Huppert's acting is extraordinarily internalized and one can only sense its subtlety when seen from very close. So, I had to use it anyway.

And in general, what is the function of the close-up?

To make what's inside pass through the eyes. The human face is a mystery. To pierce this mystery, there are two orifices, which are the eyes. One has to look into them. The close-up exists for that.

In *Violette*, I did it more or less systematically. In *Une Partie de Plaisir* too, there are lots of close-ups, for a much more perverse reason. Since Gégauff himself played the role, I tried while shooting him, to find what was real in his performance. He was acting but, still, it was something he knew first hand . . . I wanted to find out to what extent he wanted to return to Danièle and to what extent she wanted to refuse. It was a bit like a psychodrama but, amusingly, with no results. When we started shooting, Danièle was very afraid of what Paul might do, and Paul had only one idea—to get her back. In the end, they hadn't changed at all: she still didn't want to live with him. Psychodramas can succeed when the individuals involved are slightly unbalanced,

and Paul and Danièle were not unbalanced. So, nothing happened; it's very strange.

Why is L'Oeil du Malin told from the point of view of Jacques Charrier?

It was a film for which we had very little money and since the main character was extremely mean and petty, I told myself that if I made the film subjectively, from his point of view, the meanness of the character would justify the poverty of means. He is capable of imagining grand things, so he renders everything bitter, with malice, which is why I did it like that. I find it interesting to make a whole film pass . . . In general, it's always the hero who tells the story—or a witness. Here, it's a witness who ends up playing the main role, and who is ignoble, minuscule . . . It interested me to take the point of view of someone minuscule.

And in Que le Bête Meure?

There it's a trap. The first part is based on the diary of the character, because if the film had to be efficient, it needed an identification of the audience with Duchaussoy. It was very easy—one always identifies with a poor man whose child is dead and who wants revenge. The diary allows augmenting the spectator's identification until the reversal and the spectator ends up blaming him-

self: he has identified with the character and thought him good and wonderful, and now he perceives him as full of shadows. This enchants me. In the end of *Que la Bête Meure*, the construction is as if Duchaussoy kills Yanne. But the spectator completely rejects this idea of a mean and cowardly murder and prefers to accuse Yanne's son, who didn't kill. He makes the spectator create a transfer of guilt.

And the subjective sequences in A Double Tour? The two flashbacks by the father (Jacques Dacqmine) and the son (André Jocelyn)?

There was a problem of symmetry, of construction, with the two flashbacks: to make one flashback and then another, which shows what one doesn't see in the first. There was another thing: I tried—not all that well, I'd do it better now—something quite ambitious: the first flashback was from the point of view of Dacqmine, a man of 50 who lives a love and tries to grasp the beauty that has eluded him till now. I shot it in a certain way. The flashback of Jocelyn was the contrary—a man who can't tolerate the beauty of others. I tried to shoot it in a different way. What justifies the fact that after killing Leda he walks around the room and the camera goes behind perfume bottles and things change their color as he passes behind them is that it's a person who is cornered by, completely imprisoned by, the beauty that surrounds him. He can't escape it.

Do you prefer to work in color or in black and white?

I think the choice no longer exists. Unless you're very rich, you can't work in black and white—you must work in color. But from time

to time I do feel like working in B&W. *Blood Relatives* could be shot in B&W: I could have shot it in false colors at the risk of making everything all-black or all-white, or used color and got B&W, but I decided it would be stupid to make an effort to eliminate color, so I shot it in color.

Rohmer told me that everything had already been done in B&W while there's still a lot to do in color. Franju, on the other hand, told me one could not even get a proper shadow in color.

They're both right, but also wrong. It's true that everything has already been done in B&W and there are still things to do in color, but Rohmer was wrong in forgetting that most things in B&W were done using film stock completely different from ours, which enables us to do things we couldn't do before. It also prevents us from doing other things—it's a completely different B&W.

As to color, Franju is wrong in claiming one can't use a shadow. One can, and perfectly well too. Most cameramen are afraid of B&W. I know only four who accept absolute black. With the others, it's never quite black, and it's a pity because black is very beautiful. There are three Americans and one Frenchman who can do it. Since I couldn't get the Americans, I used the Frenchman.

You often use blue: in La Rupture, La Femme Infidèle: even the interiors of Gégauff's house in Une Partie de Plaisir were blue. Is it indicative of decadence?

Yes, but blue is above all the color of madness, a form of madness. A psychiatrist once told me that the dominant color in the drawings and paintings of the mentally deranged is blue. I thought it was strange: "How could it be blue, which is such a calm color?" And he said: "No, think about it; try to imagine living perpetually in blue." It's the most unbalanced, and unbalancing, color. *Voilà!* So, when I wanted to show imbalance, I used blue—to please that psychiatrist, whom I like quite a bit . . . And it's true that it has a strange effect.

Les Biches opened a brilliant period in your career. The six films you made in the period 1968–1971 are among your best. Can you describe the process that led you in that direction?



◀ A DOUBLE TOUR

My first three films (*Le Beau Serge*, *Les Cousins*, *A Double Tour*) did quite well and then I had four terrible disasters (*Les Bonnes Femmes*, *Les Godelureaux*, *L'Oeil du Malin*, *Ophélie*). I was obliged to make the films that were offered to me.

The Tiger films?

Yes, films like that. It was a useful experience, because when I could once more make the films I wanted, I brought with me what I had learned while making those films. I could work faster, making one film after another. It was a good situation which later turned sour because the producer, André Genovès, went crazy with delusions of grandeur . . . But other than that it was fine. When you're given the possibility to do what you want, it's good; but if you could always do what you want, you could even become lazy . . .

Why did you decide to shoot Blood Relatives in English, with a star like Donald Sutherland? In the past, films like The Champagne Murders, Ten Days' Wonder, Dirty Hands, and The Twist (Folies Bourgeoises), which were shot in English, were not very successful.

Yes, it's absolutely true, but those were "bastard films." I shot them in France with both English and French actors, and the French didn't speak English. There was no real reason . . . It created complications. *Blood Relatives* takes place in a North American milieu, in Montreal, so there are three French actors: the mother (Stéphane Audran), the son (Laurent Malet), and the daughter (Aude Landry), who keep their French accent, but the father is English, so they speak English, which is perfectly normal. All the others are Anglo-Saxon.

The language, then, is dictated by the specific reality of the film?

In this case, yes. My first intention was to make it in France, but it couldn't stand on its feet because it's a North American family. And there's another point: the difference between family life and the professional domain—the police—is much greater in North America than in France. In France, there's always the intimate, *soupe au chou* side, while in America it's an enormous machine—those sirens . . . , and when a cop returns home, it's different.

I made the other films in English because I

was told it would be better commercially, which I never believed. But in *Blood Relatives* I myself wanted it. I asked to make it in North America. I was a bit afraid it was too much, but it was the ideal thing.

Why did you choose the story of Folies Bourgeoises?

I didn't choose it . . .

It's very different from your other films.

Yes. The drama of *Folies Bourgeoises* is very easy to understand. A producer called me to make an adaptation of a novel by Lucie Faure, the wife of the President of the National Assembly in France. That very morning I received a belated payment, an absolutely gigantic sum . . . And these two things together . . . So, I made the film. I made an adaptation for a little film, *comme ça*, and it wasn't all that bad. No, I started by doing something else. I asked the Englishman who wrote *The Ruling Class* to write a kind of frenzied comedy that would bear no similarity whatsoever to the book. The script was great but both the producer and Lucie Faure rejected it, because it had nothing to do with her book. So, I made another, very simple adaptation for a minor film, and the producer said it was fine. From that moment on, he lied: "I've never seen it before!" So, from the first estimate of \$700,000 for a small French film we found ourselves with a terribly overblown *soufflé au fromage*, with American, Italian, and German actors. I thought of not shooting it, except for the terrible thing that the contract had been signed and the guy had paid me. Three weeks later, he told me: "Let's make the film!" I said: "Fine." I felt dishonest and thought "*Tant pis!* I'll do it anyway!" It was a kind of mishmash.

The murder scene on the highway in Les Noces Rouges, was it influenced by the highway scene in Henri Verneuil's Une Manche et la Belle (What Price Murder), where Henri Vidal tries to kill Isa Miranda?

No, I've never seen it. It's much more curious than that. The topic of *Les Noces Rouges*, which is a crime story, is based on a news item. I adapted it scrupulously, making the characters do exactly what they did in life, especially the way the two lovers kill the woman's husband. During the shooting, I realized that it was really

The Postman Always Rings Twice by Tay Garnett, based on the book by James Cain. What is fantastic is that they found Cain's book at the guy's house. That is, he was really inspired by the book. And since James Hadley Chase borrowed it from Cain and Verneuil adapted Chase's novel, that explains it . . .

To conclude, how did you construct the streetcar scene in La Rupture?

It's for this scene that I made the film, just about. A woman recounts her life—where can she do it? In a streetcar. This is why we had to shoot the film in Brussels, because there are more streetcars there. I was also lucky. The route I chose was ideal, and it was by chance—it was like in Murnau, passing from the city to the

country. I was lucky that in a given moment between shots I looked forward and saw the reflection of the conductor's hand in the window, and I thought: "This is too beautiful! I don't believe it!" This is the sort of thing that you don't rationalize at the time—it is based entirely on sensations. Also, you couldn't disturb the actress—she had changed the text quite a bit, changed the story of her life, but I didn't care because it was good. Stéphane respects the text and the dialogues, but the minute she has a monologue, she changes everything. It's very strange, but it's not serious . . . So, in all my films I put little things like that in order to see what she's going to tell me, because I never know what it will be.