

FR268 – French Cinema and Society from the First to the Second World War

Module Outline



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Overview

This module aims to explore France and its cinema from the period between the two World Wars, and examines the interplay between film, politics and history. The key aims of the module are these:

- To introduce key works, artists, techniques and debates in the so-called ‘classical’ period of French cinema from the late 1910s until the mid-1940s.
- To survey key events, actors, debates and problems in French social and political history of the period from the First World War to the Liberation.
- To explore and critically debate the relationship of mutual influence and interpenetration between the social and political history of France and its cinematic representations during the same period.
- To show how specific audiovisual techniques are used in filmmaking to convey ideas and emotions.

Preparation

For each seminar, the only **requirement** is to have watched that week's film, which will be available on the module Moodle page (and, if you are presenting that week, to have prepared a short presentation about the film). It would be good if you were able to do some reading about the film, the director and/or the period, and I've included some hints as to where you may start in the outline below (though these are far from the only useful sources). There is also a selection of bonus films, which I've chosen to enhance your sense of the context of that week's film and director – they're all accessible either on the Moodle, in the TRC or in the Library – it would be good to watch them if you had time, but again, there's no obligation.

The sessions will take the form of a lecture delivered by me, which I'll aim to keep at around 45 minutes, because I want to use the time more to discuss the texts with you. Each week, in advance of the sessions, I'll circulate some questions and a quote from one of the recommended readings to think about – you don't have to come with pre-prepared answers necessarily, but it would be useful to watch the films and do the readings with those ideas in mind, and perhaps make some notes, in order to fuel discussion. See seminars as a space to test your ideas and to practice your film-reading skills, and I'll do my best to support you!

If you're a Letterboxd person, a list of all the required and bonus films is available here:

<https://letterboxd.com/recegoodall496/list/fr268-french-cinema-and-society-from-the/>

I am conscious that many of you may not have studied film before other than me blitzing it a bit on 'The Story of Modern France', but I'd urge you not to be too worried here. There is a video available on the module Moodle page called 'Reece's Intro to Film Terms', in which I run through most of the language and terms you'll need with examples, and I'd highly recommend that you watch it as early as possible if you're unfamiliar with film analysis.

I'll also run a couple of sessions about analysing film – one **before** the first class, and then I'll discuss holding a second with you when I meet you. There's no obligation to come to one of these, but I'm hoping that they'll be useful if you do!

If you would like to read something on filmic and audiovisual techniques, these books are worth finding at the library:

- David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (6th edn., New York: Knopf, 1998)
- Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience* (Boston: Bedford, 2004)

You will have many chances to practice unpicking film in the seminars (in general) and in your presentations, so you will be well equipped to respond to questions by the end of the module – however, if there are any worries, please do let me know and I'll lend you a hand!

Assessment

There are two forms of assessment on the module:

- An essay of 2,750-3,000 words (80%)
- A 10-minute presentation (20%)

The essays will require you to situate a film in context, using evidence from the films themselves and the readings to explore how these films reflect the concerns and ideologies of their times. In short, it's a chance for you to dig into the film on a thematic and formal level, and use both the evidence of the film and the context provided by the readings to describe exactly what these films indicate about interwar France and how.

For each week, I've provided a selection of essay titles and ideas. These take the form of either:

- A close analysis of that week's film in its context
- A discussion topic about the film's social, political or cultural context
- An auteurist analysis of one of the directors

There are many options available, so I hope you find something there that appeals (and remember, you only need to pick one).

The presentation will test your ability to unpick the formal aspects of a film, conducting a close reading into a particular technique or theme with the use of images/videos. You'll make a 10-minute video with your presentation, and then submit the video to Tabula. I'll give an example of the sort of thing we're after in week 1, and then there will be opportunities for everyone to do a practice presentation in the seminars (there's no obligation again, but it's highly recommended!).

The questions/topics for both the essays and the presentations are available in this document. You are able to create your own question (on one of the core or recommended films), but please speak to me first so I can help guide you if that's your intention.

We'll discuss assessment in the seminars, but if you've any questions or worries, please do let me know so I can help you out!

Week 1 – Studying history through film; looking at film historically; France between the wars

Film: *La Grande Illusion* (Jean Renoir, 1937)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Martin O’Shaughnessy, *Jean Renoir* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Martin O’Shaughnessy, *La Grande Illusion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009)

Julian Jackson, *La Grande Illusion* (Basingstoke; New York: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

Cinema and cultural context

Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on film, film on history* (New York; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017)

James Chapman, *Film and history* (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

Extra films:

Napoléon (Abel Gance, 1927; available in the Library)

La Marseillaise (Jean Renoir, 1938; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	- <i>La Grande Illusion</i> as an anti-war film
	- National identity and nationalism in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>
	- The role of social class in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>
	- French films of the interwar period are useful tools for understanding French national identity. Discuss.
	- Class and culture in the films of Jean Renoir (W1; 4; 7)
Presentation-type questions	- Use of language in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>
	- Construction of space in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>
	- Types of performance in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>
	- Role and uses of music in <i>La Grande Illusion</i>

Week 2 – French cinema and the First World War

Film: *J'accuse* (Abel Gance, 1919)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Norman King, *Abel Gance: a politics of spectacle* (London: BFI Publishing, 1984)

James M. Welsh and Steven Philip Kramer, 'Abel Gance's Accusation against War', *Cinema Journal* 14:3 (1975): 55-67

Cinema and cultural context

Richard Abel, *French cinema: the first wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984)

David Stevenson, *1914-1918: the history of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2012)

Extra films:

Tih Minh (Louis Feuillade, 1918; available here:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLdEvwfh8Nyj6tZrLL13A_byO7cVUe2dXT)

J'accuse (Abel Gance, 1938)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	- The depiction of violence in <i>J'accuse</i>
	- An analysis of gender in <i>J'accuse</i>
	- Melodrama and narrative structure in <i>J'accuse</i>
	- French interwar films carry a clear antiwar sentiment. Discuss.
	- Military and modernity in the films of Abel Gance (W1; 2)
Presentation-type questions	- Symbolism in <i>J'accuse</i>
	- Editing in <i>J'accuse</i>

Week 3 – Les années folles and French Impressionism

Film: *La souriante Madame Beudet* (Germaine Dulac, 1923)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Maryann de Julio, *Germaine Dulac* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022)

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *To desire differently: feminism and the French cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) (chapters 1-4)

Cheryl Hindrichs, 'Feminist Optics and Avant-Garde Cinema: Germaine Dulac's "The Smiling Madame Beudet" and Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting",' *Feminist Studies*, 35:2 (2009): 294-322

Tami Williams, *Germaine Dulac: A Cinema of Sensations* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2014)

Cinema and cultural context

Richard Abel, *French cinema: the first wave, 1915-1929* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984)

Jackie Clarke, *France in the Age of Organization: Factory, Home and Nation from the 1920s to Vichy* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011)

Extra films:

Cœur fidèle (Jean Epstein, 1923)

La Coquille et le Clergyman (Germaine Dulac, 1928)

La Chute de la maison Usher (Jean Epstein, 1928)

Thèmes et variations (Germaine Dulac, 1928)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	- An analysis of gender in <i>La souriante Mme Beudet</i>
	- Genre and melodrama in <i>La souriante Mme Beudet</i>
	- Is <i>La souriante Mme Beudet</i> a feminist film?
	- French films of the 1920s should be understood through the lens of impressionism. Discuss.
	- The avant-garde, art and affect in the films of Germaine Dulac (W3)
Presentation-type questions	- Editing in <i>La souriante Mme Beudet</i>
	- Mise-en-scène and atmosphere

Week 4 – The Popular Front

Film: *La Belle Équipe* (Julien Duvivier, 1936)

Recommended readings:

The film/director

Ben McCann, *Julien Duvivier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017)

Edward Ousselin, ‘Film and the Popular Front; “La Belle Equipe” and “Le Crime de M. Lange”’, *The French Review* 79:5 (2006): 952-962



Cinema and cultural context

Claude Gauthier and Ginette Vincendeau, *Jean Gabin : anatomie d'un mythe* (Paris: Nathan, 1993)

Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: defending democracy, 1934-38* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)

Ginette Vincendeau and Keith Reader, *La Vie est à nous !: French cinema of the Popular Front 1935-1938* (London: BFI, 1986)

Extra films:

L'Argent (Marcel L'Herbier, 1928)

A nous la liberté (René Clair, 1931; available in the TRC)

Le Crime de Monsieur Lange (Jean Renoir, 1936; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gender, money and class in <i>La Belle Équipe</i>- Precarity and solidarity in <i>La Belle Équipe</i>- Gabin and the group in <i>La Belle Équipe</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Films of the late 20s/30s can be read as representing the optimism and/or failure of the Popular Front. Discuss.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gender and guilt in the films of Julien Duvivier (W4; 5; 10)
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lighting in <i>La Belle Équipe</i>- The sets of <i>La Belle Équipe</i>- Sound and music in <i>La Belle Équipe</i>

Week 5 – Poetic realism

Film: *Le Jour se lève* (Marcel Carné, 1939)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Jonathan Driskell, *Marcel Carné* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)

Ben McCann, *Le Jour se lève* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013)

Cinema and cultural context

Dudley Andrew, *Mists of regret: culture and sensibility in classic French film* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Noël Burch, Geneviève Sellier and Michelle Perrot, *La drôle de guerre des sexes du cinéma français, 1930-1956* (Paris: A. Colin, c2005)

Deborah Walker-Morrison, *Classic French noir: gender and the cinema of fatal desire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017)

Extra films:

L'Atalante (Jean Vigo, 1934; available in the TRC)

Pépé le Moko (Julien Duvivier, 1937; available in the TRC)

Le Quai des brumes (Marcel Carné, 1938; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gender identities and gender relations in <i>Le Jour se lève</i>- A film of four characters: the characterisation and narrative interaction of the four protagonists- Individual and crowd in <i>Le Jour se lève</i>- Work and leisure in <i>Le Jour se lève</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Poetic realism aims to depict 'real life' with a heightened emotional register. Discuss.
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mise-en-scène and the creation of atmosphere- Lighting and sets- Use of props

Week 6 – Reading week

Week 7 – Renoir the Master

Film: *La Règle du jeu* (Jean Renoir, 1939)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Martin O'Shaughnessy, *Jean Renoir* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Keith Reader, *La Règle du jeu* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010)

V. F. Perkins, *La règle du jeu* (London: British Film Institute, 2012)

Cinema and cultural context

Christopher Faulkner, *The social cinema of Jean Renoir* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986)

Margaret C. Flinn, *The social architecture of French cinema, 1929-39* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014)

Extra films:

Boudu sauvé des eaux (Jean Renoir, 1932)

La Bête humaine (Jean Renoir, 1938; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What do you consider to be the political or allegorical significance of <i>La Règle du jeu</i>? How is this significance manifested in the film?- What is the significance of the themes of games, playing and theatricality in <i>La Règle du jeu</i>?- What does <i>La Règle du jeu</i> have to say about friendship?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Class is a key concern of films in the interwar period. Discuss.
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Analyse the construction of space through camerawork, mise-en-scène, etc.- Use of sets- Analyse the role and importance of music in the film

Week 8 – Filming under the Occupation

Film: *Le Corbeau* (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1943)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Christopher Lloyd, *Henri-Georges Clouzot* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

Judith Mayne, *Le Corbeau* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2007)

José-Louis Bocque and Marc Godin, *Clouzot cinéaste* (Paris: Table ronde, 2011)

Cinema and cultural context

Evelyn Ehrlich, *Cinema of paradox: French filmmaking under the German occupation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985)

Julian Jackson, *France: the dark years, 1940-1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)

Christine Leteux, *Continental Films: French cinema under German control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022)

Extra films:

L'Assassinat du Père Noël (Christian-Jaque, 1941)

L'Assassin habite au 21 (Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1942; available in the TRC)

La Main du diable (Maurice Tourneur, 1943; available here : <https://archive.org/details/la-main-du-diable-tourneur>)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- <i>Le Corbeau</i> as allegory- Medical metaphors in <i>Le Corbeau</i>- Characterisation and misanthropy- Justice and injustice in <i>Le Corbeau</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Films made during the Occupation should be read as allegories for resistance. Discuss.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Misanthropy and metaphor in the films of Henri-Georges Clouzot (W8)
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Light and shadow in <i>Le Corbeau</i>- Camerawork and editing in <i>Le Corbeau</i>

Week 9 – The summit of classical French cinema

Film: *Les Enfants du Paradis* (Marcel Carné, 1945)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Jonathan Driskell, *Marcel Carné* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012)

Edward Baron Turk, *Child of paradise: Marcel Carné and the golden age of French cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013)

Jill Forbes, *Les enfants du paradis* (London: British Film Institute, 1997)

Geneviève Sellier, "*Les enfants du paradis*": *Marcel Carné et Jacques Prévert* (Paris: Nathan, 1992)

Cinema and cultural context

Denis Demonpion, *Arletty* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996)

Hilary Footitt and John Simmonds, *France 1943-1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988)

Extra films:

Les Visiteurs du soir (Marcel Carné, 1942; available in the Library)

Le Comte de Monte Cristo (Robert Vernay, 1943; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The uses of spectacle in <i>Les Enfants du Paradis</i>- The meanings of the past in <i>Les Enfants du Paradis</i>- Liberty and constraint- Innocence and crime
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Despite drawing on historical epics and classical stories, French films from WWII reflect the present moment. Discuss.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Setting and spectacle in the films of Marcel Carné (W5; 9)
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A close analysis of dialogue in <i>Les Enfants du Paradis</i>- Arletty/Garance: a study in characterization and performance- The role of extras and minor characters in <i>Les Enfants du Paradis</i>

Week 10 – Looking back

Film: *Panique* (Julien Duvivier, 1946)



Recommended readings:

The film/director

Ben McCann, *Julien Duvivier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017)

Eric Bonnefille, *Julien Duvivier le mal aimant du cinéma français : 1940-1967* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002)

Cinema and cultural context

François Rouquet and Fabrice Virgili, *Les Françaises, les Français et l'Épuration (1940 à nos jours)* (Paris: Gallimard, 2018)

Karen Adler, *Jews and gender in Liberation France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Hilary Footitt, *War and liberation in France: Living with the Liberators* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2004)

Extra films:

La Bataille du rail (René Clément, 1946)

La Belle et la bête (Jean Cocteau, 1946; available in the TRC)

Questions	
Essay-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- A society and its cruelties: the political resonances of <i>Panique</i>- Looks, voyeurism and image-making in <i>Panique</i>- Guilt and innocence in <i>Panique</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- French cinema of the interwar period offered a progressive view of women. Discuss.
Presentation-type questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Characterisation and performance- Mise-en-scène- Camera placement and angles- Sound and music