

LE REALISME POETIQUE : L'ÂGE D'OR DU CINEMA FRANÇAIS



French cinema has a rich and illustrious history, marked by various film movements and periods that have left a lasting mark on the global cinematic landscape. Among these movements, one stands out for its unique blend of realism and poetic sensibility - **Poetic Realism**.

Poetic Realism's influence extended beyond its immediate context, notably contributing to the emergence of **Film Noir**. Poetic Realism's themes of moral complexity, atmospheric cinematography, and nuanced character portrayals later developed into the dark, suspenseful worlds characteristic of film noir classics.

Directors of Poetic Realist cinema employed innovative cinematic techniques, including the use of long takes, deep-focus cinematography, and **chiaroscuro lighting** (*low and high-contrast lighting, which creates areas of light and dark in films*). These techniques added a visual richness to the films, enhancing their emotional impact.

Come learn about this consequential movement through the study of 3 masterpieces of the genre.

L'ATALANTE - JEAN VIGO (1934)

Jean Vigo's "*L'Atalante*" (1934) is considered a bridge between the surrealism of 1920s French cinema and the poetic realism of the 1930s. The film follows the story of

newlyweds Jean (**Jean Dasté**) and Juliette (**Dita Parlo**) as they embark on their honeymoon aboard the Normandy freight barge *Atalante*, along with the eccentric and passionate captain Pere Jules (**Michel Simon**). Vigo's direction is lyrical, funny, heart-rending, erotic, suspenseful, and exhilaratingly inventive.

The connecting thread of *L'Atalante* is the realist footage depicting the harsh, unremitting lives of the crew and the waterfront folk as the barge heads to Paris and, minus Juliette, on to Le Havre.

Blending documentary realism and surrealism, Vigo achieves an effortless-seeming poetry through Boris Kaufman's omniscient angled camera placement and tracking shots, Louis Chavance's rhythmic editing - and Maurice Jaubert's musical themes.

Like the photographers of 1930s France, Vigo manipulates images—using superimposition and underwater photography to create compelling, emotional sequences that reveal the inner world of his characters.

There is an ethereal beauty to the film - a unique sense of visual storytelling, and emotional depth, which satisfies on so many levels, that it's no surprise *l'Atalante* is widely regarded as one of the greatest films ever made.

LA GRANDE ILLUSION - JEAN RENOIR (1937)

Jean Renoir was a true maestro of storytelling. Most of the action of his film *La Grande Illusion* (1937) takes place in the huis-clos universe of a World War I German prisoner of war camp.

In 1916, on the German front, 2 French officers, Captain Major de Boieldieu (**Pierre Fresnay**), and Aviation Lieutenant Maréchal (**Jean Gabin**) are taken prisoner by German aristocrat Captain Von Rauffenstein (**Eric Von Stroheim**), who treats them with great respect. Their fellow prisoners are a high school teacher (**Jean Dasté**), an actor (**Carette**) and the Jewish prisoner Rosenthal (**Dalio**).

The 2 French officers and Rosenthal are eventually transferred to a fortress commanded by Rauffenstein and it is there that Boieldieu and the German Captain, of the same social rank, begin to form a friendship. Maréchal and Rosenthal share a bond in their mutual

desire to escape the camp. A daring plan is elaborated, with Boieldieu playing a dangerous role in ensuring its success.

While the film appears to suggest that peace and fraternity can possibly overcome class differences and nationalism, the title suggests that these hopes may be but an illusion.

The narrative intertwines the threads of realism and poetic sensibility, resulting in a gripping portrayal of the intricacies of human connections and the nuances of social class.

LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS - MARCEL CARNE (1945)

The collaboration of director **Marcel Carné** and screenwriter **Jacques Prévert** resulted in the iconic work "*Les Enfants du Paradis*" (1945).

A chance encounter with well-known stage actor Jean-Louis Barrault one day in Paris, during the height of the Nazi occupation, inspired Marcel Carne to choose the theater as the subject of his famous masterpiece of poetic realism.

Set in the theater district of Paris during the 19th century, the film circles around Garance (Arletty), a beautiful courtesan, and the four men obsessed with her (all inspired by real life people): Baptiste Debureau (**Jean-Louis Barrault**), a famous mime working in the Funambules theater; actor Frederick Lemaitre (**Pierre Brasseur**); criminal Pierre Lacenaire (**Marcel Herrand**); and the wealthy Edouard de Montray (**Louis Salou**). The four men represent distinct branches of the arts and social classes, all attempting to conquer the figure of beauty represented by Garance. This work epitomized the essence of Poetic Realism, blending romance, social commentary, and moral ambiguity to create an emotionally resonant story.

Because it is set in the world of the theater, director Marcel Carné wanted his film to look like a stage play. Its lavish decors and sumptuous settings transform *Les Enfants du Paradis* into a breathtaking stage production on film.

Come join us beginning Monday, December 2nd, as we discuss our 3 films in the following order:

- *L'Atalante*, Jean Vigo (1934) ;
- *La Grande Illusion*, Jean Renoir (1937) ;

- *Les Enfants du Paradis*, Marcel Carné (1945)

You will be expected to see the three films on your own before each discussion. All three films are available with English subtitles for a nominal rental fee on Amazon Prime or other free platforms (see links below). 1 week in advance of each showing, we will provide vocabulary lists, and suggest possible discussion topics prior to the session, all designed to inspire a lively debate.

We look forward to seeing you at our 3-week ZOOM session, beginning **Monday, December 2nd at 6:00 pm** as we delve into the important French cinematic movement of Poetic Realism.

LINKS TO STREAMING

L'ATALANTE, JEAN VIGO (1934)

https://www.amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B00FJUJLCY/ref=atv_hm_vid_c_baeECJ_1_1

LA GRANDE ILLUSION, JEAN RENOIR (1937)

<https://ok.ru/video/965400529588>

LES ENFANTS DU PARADIS, MARCEL CARNE (1945)

https://www.amazon.com/Children-Paradise-English-Subtitled-Arietty/dp/B00MUJRW14/ref=sr_1_1?crd=2TZBMM6T4YJ1E&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.i5BxzGAzcRDJfQdSHScD1EF4jsR9Vct5ranHbF0kw3yImFsTtNQcyJ2aM4kpsDt61x3IRnNG5MZtZMKXDbO7rcLX50GpN5U00CkxT7kkXioswwOH971tZvVTI4SwOULgXeieP_rFkDID5y_Fc0-q0WWIP8pz5puy5A3jJEej6flvG64d-Trdeiv-68gN9jBEtoPoPor6-nktdy-MjrvO_skAZW-C6OA5YOnZ85m77lc.LC-vI5aYJE6NZy8zIj8VCxmme0AfABuWIWbG9_I4cas&dib_tag=se&keywords=Les+Enfants+du+paradis&qid=1731787774&s=instant-video&prefix=les+enfants+du+paradis%2Cinstant-video%2C106&sr=1-1