CHRIS MARKER: A POSTHUMOUS TRIBUTE TO HIS MANY LIVES

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Although the film's first frames introduce *Young Mr. Lincoln* as "Darryl F. Zanuck's production of *Young Mr. Lincoln*"—not "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" (the latter slogan is plastered all over the Criterion disc's sleeve)—we have been schooled for decades not to see what is in plain sight. But it is a remarkable little biopic—the opening text foreword is not about a great white man—it doesn't even have the superimposed words of Lincoln. Instead, we are asked to read a poem by Rosemary Benét speaking as Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks, asking unanswered questions about her son. Perhaps this is a rare feminine historiographic perspective on Lincoln. We see him learning law (the hokey story of how he found Blackstone's *Commentaries* in a barrel is true, not a myth), fidgeting nervously before a speech, cheating in a game of tug of war, and diplomatically refusing to decide which of two pies should get first prize at a fair. We see him lonely, parentless, losing the love of his life, and unsure of himself. Above all, we see Henry Fonda, who had a disarming gentleness and sensitivity unequalled on screen (at least until he met Sergio Leone in the late 1960s).

Zanuck's plan to release the film in summer as a kind of working-class history lesson for the kids recently let loose from school reminded me of the way I as a parent have tried to teach U.S. history to my kids. Zanuck, Trotti, Fonda, and even Ford are better teachers than I ever had or ever could be. But in looking back on 1939 and this film, I wish we had a decent print of the life of another, more unconventional hero, Jesse James. Released in January 1939, *this* is the first film in the studios' late 1930s reboot of the Western, not *Stagecoach*, directed by Ford and released in February. But Henry King, like Zanuck, and like most screenwriters, is not valued in the business of canonical and popular silver-screen marketing. It doesn't matter now if you're Turner Classic Movies or *Senses of Cinema* or a cog in the PhD program at Iowa or Kings College London (or Yale)—auteurism is smart marketing.

If every film and every author got what it deserved, Criterion would be releasing *Wuthering Heights* (1939) in honor of Emily Brontë's two-hundredth birthday this year. When they do get around to it, I'm dead certain the film will be marketed as part of director William Wyler's oeuvre (although admittedly, that tack would be preferable to "Classic Screen Romances" or "Hollywood Heartthrobs"). As far as *Young Mr. Lincoln* is concerned, Criterion's administrators are at the vanguard of an established franchise, and probably had to study *Cahiers du cinéma's* turgid essay as graduate students. We're still reaping the consequences. But, in the meantime, Trotti's script and Fonda's performance make watching this modest little biopic worthwhile. And the visual quality of this new Blu-ray edition, a 4K digital restoration, isn't bad, either.—**J. E. Smyth**

Elevator to the Gallows

Produced by Jean Thuillier; directed by Louis Malle; screenplay by Roger Nimier and Louis Malle, based on the novel by Noël Calef; cinematography by Henri Decaë; edited by Léonide Azar; production design by Rino Mondellini and Jean Mandaroux; featuring original music by Miles Davis; starring Jeanne Moreau, Maurice Ronet, Georges Poujouly, Yori Bertin, Jean Wall, Lino Ventura, Iván Petrovich, Charles Denner, and Félix Marten. Blu-ray or DVD, B&W, French dialogue with English subtitles, 91 min., 1958. A Criterion Collection release, www.criterion.com.

What was the first film of the Nouvelle Vague? The smart money would answer Claude Chabrol's *Le Beau Serge*, which premiered in June 1958, or (more knowing still) his second effort, the even more New Wavy *Les Cousins*, which opened nine months later. Both films charged out of the gate ahead of Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), and the successes of Chabrol and Truffaut paved the way (and ensured financing for) Godard's *Breathless* (1960), and many of the sensations that followed, including the debut efforts of Jacques Rivette and Éric Rohmer.

But a sparkling new Blu-Ray edition from the Criterion Collection makes abundantly clear that it was *Elevator to the Gallows*, the first film of Louis Malle, which was ground zero for the French New Wave. Malle is typically, and appropriately, held at arm's length from those five young Turks, who cut their teeth writing pointed criticism in *Cahiers du cinéma*, and, when given the opportunity, would set out to back up their brash rhetoric with films that subverted established conventions and forged new approaches to cinematic storytelling.

Malle was not a film critic, but he was young (younger than any of them, actually—all of twenty-five when *Gallows* premiered in January 1958), was similarly obsessed with the movies, and he shared the philosophy (perhaps borne of necessity) that very low budgets and small production crews brought with them the freedom to take magnificent risks. And he was certainly prepared to break the rules, most famously photographing Jeanne Moreau, gloriously, night for night, stripped of movie makeup, illuminated by the storefront lights of the shops along the Champs-Élysées, images captured by a camera placed in a baby carriage that served as a makeshift dolly. Rules? Twice, Moreau walks into her own shot (entering the frame established by her point of view). The film made her a star.

Certainly, there would have been a New Wave without Malle. But first is first. *Elevator* was shot by Henri Decaë, the cinematographer for Jean-Pierre Melville—the man who made his own movies on his own terms and, for that and more, was then a hero to the Nouvelle Vague, in particular for films such as *The Silence of the Sea* (1949) and *Bob le Flambeur* (1956). Not coincidentally, Decaë also shot the debut efforts of Chabrol and Truffaut. Malle may not have run with that crowd, but the degrees of separation are few. It was he who introduced Moreau to Truffaut (thus her cameo as "woman walk-

One slip-up in the otherwise perfect crime of Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet) finds him stuck in an elevator for most of Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*. (photo courtesy of Photofest)

ing dog" in *400 Blows*), and of course she would subsequently appear in Truffaut's *Jules and Jim*. Decaë's first assistant cameraman on *Elevator*, Jean Rabier, was the cinematographer on Jacques Demy's *Bay of Angels* (which also starred Moreau) and, eventually, a couple of dozen Chabrol films. Also gesturing at an emerging New Wave is the appearance of Jean-Claude Brialy in a small, winking role—the actor would soon be recognized as a fixture of the movement, starring in Chabrol's first two films, the early shorts of Rivette and Godard, and ultimately became best known for his central performance in Rohmer's *Claire's Knee*.

Elevator to the Gallows is also of the New Wave in content, not simply connection. The mood is one of newness; as Malle would emphasize in interviews, principal locations were carefully chosen to underscore a nascent modernity. Heroic protagonists are withheld—the screen instead is populated with criminals, corrupt businessmen, and compromised cops. And many of the film's moments, large and small, set down markers that would become touchstones. Godard once said that all you need to make a movie was a girl and a gun. This one has a girl, a fast car, and a gun, as well as a young outlaw couple on the run, and numerous other distinct flourishes that led guardian-of-all-things-Godard, critic Richard Brody, in a defensively dismissive review of *Gallows*, to acknowledge "all of these details should seem familiar, because they all turn up in Jean-Luc Godard's *Breathless*, which came out two years later."

Those elements make up the B-plot of *Gallows*—the principal storyline is even better. Julien Tavernier (Maurice Ronet) commits the perfect murder, of his boss, Simon Carola (Jean Wall), a wealthy, well-connected crooked arms dealer—and the husband of Julien's mistress Florence (Moreau). Of course, there is no such thing as the perfect crime, and, tripped up by a trivial oversight, Tavernier must return to the scene, where he becomes trapped in the film's titular elevator. Failing to rendezvous with Florence, she walks the streets in search of her missing lover and co-conspirator, as fate deals another blow: Julien's car (complete with his gun and raincoat) is stolen by a joy-riding young couple, who subsequently stumble into a capital crime. Thus *Elevator's* central, clever twist: Julien will stand accused of the crime he did not commit, but his only alibi will implicate him in the murder that he otherwise would have gotten away with.

Based on an undistinguished novel, Malle nevertheless saw promise in this plot, which was "like a skeleton" that would enable him to both "make a good thriller" and also speak to larger, more ambitious themes. That vision was eagle-eyed, reflecting a wisdom that transcended his years. But despite his youth, Malle was already something of an industry veteran as he approached his first feature. He had worked with Jacques Cousteau and was given a co-director's credit for *The World of Silence*, which won the Palme d'Or at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival; he then went on to serve as assistant director for Robert Bresson on his masterpiece *A Man Escaped*. These disparate, formative experiences surely imprinted on Malle an appreciation for minimalism and the power of silent passages—and certainly reinforced his formidable cinematic instincts. Malle collaborated on the screenplay for *Gallows* with Roger Nimier, who focused on the dialogue, while the director honed the screenplay's structure and brought essential new ingredients to the story, such as the emphasis on Julien's military background and, especially, with the invention of Moreau's character—central to the film and virtually nonexistent in the novel.

Inspector Chérier (Lino Ventura) apologizes to Mme. Carala (Jeanne Moreau) after she is mistakenly arrested by the vice squad in *Elevator to the Gallows*. (photo courtesy of Photofest)

Malle also sketched in powerful themes that set the film in a political context. As David Nichols, writing in *French Cultural Studies* observes, *Elevator* "relies for much of its effect upon a subtext centered on the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria," in particular with its emphasis on Julien's experiences as war hero and, pointedly, as a paratrooper who had served in both of those wars. Few viewers at the time would miss the significance of these attributes. In 1957, French paratroopers were dispatched to Algeria to restore order and win the "Battle for Algiers"—by any means necessary and with no questions asked. In interviews over the years, Malle had also stressed a number of additional political themes that informed the film, including the trauma and humiliation of the Occupation (it was then only twelve years since the Liberation, a reminder rather provocatively underscored by the affable German businessman who, presumably attendant to that conquering force, was in Paris during the war); the implicit corruption of big business; the destabilizing force of a new, rambunctious generation; and, not to be underestimated, pervasive cynicism about the government. History would soon prove Malle prescient on these fronts: only a few months after the premiere of *Elevator*, French paratroopers seized the island of Corsica, causing the collapse of the Fourth Republic and triggering a crisis that culminated in the return of Charles de Gaulle to power.

One of the achievements of *Elevator to the Gallows* is that these politics are not ham-fisted in their presentation (exemplified by the limping night watchman who calls Tavernier "captain"); rather, innumerable touches like these flavor but do not define the picture, which works as a roaring entertainment. As Malle explained, the movie reflected both his "tremendous admiration for Bresson" as well as the desire "to make a Hitchcock-like film." Each of these influences is apparent in well-executed suspense sequences and, most plainly, in the long hours Julien spends, silent and alone, struggling to escape the captivity of the elevator. Other exceptional scenes are more distinctly Malle-ian, including a knowing study of police rituals—when Moreau's character is caught in the wide net cast by the overnight vice squad, the cops soon fall all over themselves apologizing for having inconvenienced the wife of a man who regularly lunches with the interior minister. Her prospects are clearly contrasted with the streetwalker confined to a chain-link cage, with whom Florence shares a cigarette.

And pure Malle is the long interrogation scene near the end of the film, as police inspector Chérier (Lino Ventura, impeccable) and his assistant (Charles Denner, who would go on to star in several Truffaut films) question the alibi-challenged Tavernier. Shot in total abstraction—a light, a table, three men, and otherwise total darkness (and without a cut for its first four minutes)—the scene is brilliantly choreographed as the two cops circle their prey, drifting in and out of the darkness. A jaw-dropping passage, it makes the masterful interrogation scene in Otto Preminger's *Laura* look pedestrian in comparison. This is one of the great scenes of 1950s cinema. *Elevator* endures, not as a period piece or simply as a historical landmark, but due to such moments of cinematic virtuosity.

Indeed, despite its clever plot, Malle's film is distinguished more by its mood than by its dialogue. (Ronet's elevator scenes and Moreau on the streets are essentially wordless, and it would not take much for *Elevator to the Gallows* to work as a silent film.) Both the score and the cinematography sustain that tone. Miles Davis—who happened to be in Paris at the time—famously improvised the legendary score after screening the film a couple of times, and then, with a handful of local musicians, playing along to the film on the spot in a single, overnight session.

In Malle's opinion, the score "transformed the film." Although the music is not wall-to-wall (perhaps twenty minutes of total screen time), the director "strongly believe[d] that without Miles Davis's score the film would not have had the critical and public response that it had." The same can be said of Henri Decaë's glorious black-and-white images, which are so great that they make you wonder why anybody ever shoots in color. (A thought that apparently occurred to Malle a few years later in another film starring Ronet—he shot the first two days of the *The Fire Within* in color before switching to black and white, an inspired decision.)

The Criterion Blu-Ray is an upgrade of its 2005 DVD, and features the same slate of fine extras: archival interviews with participants including Malle and Ronet; a clip from the 1993 Cannes Film Festival featuring Moreau and Malle; footage of Davis recording the soundtrack; a jazz-inflected short from Malle's film-school days (nothing to write home about); and, the gem of this bunch, an interview from 2005 with Moreau conducted for the DVD release. The accompanying booklet includes a short essay by Terrence Rafferty and excerpts from the interview book *Malle on Malle*. Nice adornments for this release, but it is the film that really sings here. A killer ending, too, with Ventura and Moreau, each with something to say, taking *Elevator to the Gallows* across the finish line.

—Jonathan Kirshner

Women in Love

Produced by Larry Kramer and Martin Rosen; directed by Ken Russell; screenplay by Larry Kramer, adapted from the novel by D. H. Lawrence; cinematography by Billy Williams; edited by Michael Bradsell; music by Georges Delerue; set design by Luciana Arrighi; art direction by Ken Jones; costume design by Shirley Russell; starring Glenda Jackson, Oliver Reed, Alan Bates, Jennie Linden, and Eleanor Bron. Blu-ray or two-disc DVD, color, 131 min., 1969. A Criterion Collection release, www.criterion.com.

Re-evaluating Ken Russell is a daunting but necessary task as we consider the Blu-ray release of *Women in Love*, his greatest film and arguably one of the cinema's greatest literary adaptations. While he has his admirers, Russell also faced a formidable opposition, one that viewed him as the post-war British cinema's major vulgarian. With his iridescent colors and florid directorial style, Russell has never been afforded the respect enjoyed by kinsmen known for dignified restraint, like David Lean, Jack Clayton, or Carol Reed. And there have certainly been mistakes: *Altered States* (1980) appears to be a psychedelic spectacle for those who missed LSD in the Sixties. *Gothic* (1986) is another phantasmagoria suggesting that the Shelleys' orgy with Byron is the real source of *Frankenstein*—giving little credit to Mary Shelley's genius.

But the male hysteria of Russell's style sometimes serves him well; *Crimes of Passion* (1984) captures the sexual paranoia mixed with religious insanity that was the tone of the Reagan era and the first AIDS crisis. *The Devils* (1971) may be Russell's second greatest (certainly most notorious) accomplishment. It is hard to think of a more unrelenting condemnation of church and state power than this grisly fantasia of witch-hunting and the court of Louis XIII, aided by Cardinal Richelieu—one could easily replace the historical main characters, substituting for them, say, Pope Pius XII and Hitler. Although the British Film Institute (BFI) released a handsome Blu-ray of *The Devils*, it still appears in the diminished form it took after the violent ministrations of British and American censors.

Women in Love (1969), Russell's adaptation of D. H. Lawrence's novel, was the director's introduction to the mainstream international audience. With its poster art featuring two nude men in a clenched-teeth wrestling match, and a narrative content about defying sexual mores, *Women in Love* became a popular banner for the sexual liberation movement of the late Sixties. Its controversy, nearly matching Lawrence's novel, has been mostly replaced with respect for a film that adapts its source with respect. Larry Kramer's screenplay could never accommodate Lawrence's massive, philosophical book, but it attends closely to its spirit, in the story of the dour industrialist Gerald Crich (Oliver Reed), his phrase-making friend Rupert Birkin (Alan Bates), and the two sisters who become their soul mates, Gudrun (Glenda Jackson) and Ursula Brangwen (Jennie Linden).

Crich is a brutal symbol of industrialism overtaking England, a preoccupation of British writers at least from Blake. He is offset by his friend Birkin, who espouses sexual freedom and a form of male bonding that seems a rationale for bisexuality, sensible given the poster art and the sweaty nude

Cast members, left to right, in Ken Russell's *Women in Love:* Glenda Jackson, Oliver Reed, Alan Bates, Jennie Linden, and Eleanor Bron. (photo courtesy of Photofest)