THE TRADITION OF FEMININITY: RETHINKING GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN 1950s FRENCH CINEMA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University

2011

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ABSTRACT

French films in the 1950s that tried to compete with Hollywood films were labeled as being a part of what was called the Tradition of Quality. These films have been consistently saddled with the negative reputation of being substandard and tedious, thanks to François Truffaut’s condemnation of it in 1954. Since that time, scholars have blindly and systematically ignored film of the period. While some scholars have begun to take a second look at cinema made during this period, a comprehensive study of filmic adaptations, which bear the brunt of the negative reputation, has not been undertaken. My dissertation seeks to open up a dialogue reconsidering the value of Tradition of Quality adaptations. I focus my examination on the portrayal of female gender and sexuality on the French film screen during this time. My goal is to determine how the cinematic image of women reflected the complexities of their negotiation of the modern role in contemporary French culture. I examine French films from the fifteen-year period following World War II and focus on three aspects of the representation of female gender and sexuality. First, I study how gender and sexuality play out narratively and visually in four of Jacqueline Audry’s films, Olivia (1951), Huis clos (1954), La Garçonne (1957), and Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon (1959), and I contend
that despite limits placed on the way that female directors were received and conceived of at the time, Jacqueline Audry was an auteur in her own right. Her oeuvre is replete with affirming images of sexually desiring female agents who finish well in the end. I also examine how women’s representation in Carné’s Thérèse Raquin (1953) and Autant-Lara’s Gervaise (1956), as cinematic readings of two of Emile Zola’s novels, portray their female characters in an unexpectedly favorable light.

Second, I examine the star persona of Edwige Feuillère and show how her image runs counter to expected objectified images of women in the 1950s. I show how her image is interrelated with the narratives and images of female gender and sexuality and that her star persona emerges as an agent who challenges social and cultural limits for women at the time. Finally, I examine how the complex system of cultural and viewer reception was intertwined with these narratives, images and stars at the time. My research reveals that each of these aspects evinces contradictions between the implications of these limits and the changing realities of the feminine domain as it evolved in the 50s.
To my sister, Mary, who inspires me daily.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my advisor, Professor Judith Mayne, for her unwavering support during the writing of this dissertation. Professor Mayne has been a true source of inspiration through her teaching and through her scholarship. I am truly indebted to her for her guidance, insight, patience and encouragement throughout the entire project. I also wish to thank Professor Jennifer Willging and Professor Dana Renga for their participation on my committee and their support.

I am indebted to my sister, Mary, for proofreading portions of this project and for providing valuable feedback. I wish to thank my mother, Katy, for her constant encouragement and support and for her faith in me. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Jamie, for her unfailing support, patience and love during this process.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

*Qu’est-ce que la femme?* Or, The Ambiguous Role of Women in French Cinema in the 1950s

French film of the 1950s has consistently held a negative reputation, one that has endured due to the over-arching influence of François Truffaut’s condemnation of what he saw as the weaknesses of popular filmmaking trends during the period. In 1954, Truffaut published his fervent denunciation of what he termed “le cinéma de papa” in his “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” (Truffaut 15-29). In it, he attacked “quality films” (studio films with elaborate costumes and settings, usually adapted from literary sources, with a classical, “invisible” film style where film art is subjugated to the needs of the plot and the characters) as well as the producers and screenwriters who made them. He argued that adaptation, typified by the scriptwriting team of Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, negatively altered literary originals, in the name of staying true to their spirit. Yet these adaptations were, in Truffaut’s reasoning, betrayals (16). Truffaut contrasted screenwriters with *auteurs*, such as Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, and Jacques Becker, whose distinctive style is apparent in their oeuvre, and contended that *auteurs’* work merited attention while scriptwriters’ did not. Truffaut’s denigration of screenwriters caused a flurry of controversy and was
one impetus in the emergence of the New Wave. Thanks to Truffaut’s indictment of the
Tradition of Quality (the term used to describe this film style) and the controversy that
followed, films made during the post-war period before the New Wave have been
consistently ignored by scholars because they have been saddled with the reputation of
being too literary (i.e. not cinematic), non-innovative, and sub-standard work. As a
result, most films made in the 1950s are poorly known because they have been written
off by scholars who have blindly followed Truffaut’s assessment.

Despite the far-reaching effects of Truffaut’s article, it should be noted that his
distinction between “quality” film and “auteurist” film is not nearly as clear cut as his
arguments seem to suggest. Several films from the period, such as Becker’s Casque d’Or
(1952) or Max Ophüls’ Madame de... (1953), illustrate the fluidity of Truffaut’s
categories. While Truffaut’s denunciation of the Tradition of Quality seems at first
glance to be largely aesthetic, it is significant that his article targets Aurenche and Bost
as the primary culprits in his case against “quality” filmmaking. Truffaut notes that in
addition to taking liberties with the adaptation of literary originals, the duo was also
guilty of a having a taste or profanation and blasphemy (16). The scriptwriters were
leftists, though, and Truffaut’s attack on their blasphemy was really a thinly-veiled
attack on their politics. Similarly, Truffaut attacks films such as Le salaire de la peur
(Clouzot, 1953) and Le Blé en herbe (Autant-Lara, 1954) as examples of how film
adaptation of the time engendered gratuitous indecency. In Le salaire de la peur, there
is an obvious homo-social subtext, while the original literary text of Le Blé en herbe’s
includes a lesbian character that lives with the woman in white. Truffaut’s vehemence, then, was also rooted in his objection to the treatment of homosexual subject matter in film or in their literary originals. My contention is that Truffaut’s objection to the Tradition of Quality had more to do with his politics and with his view on sexuality than has been previously assumed. We can see, then, that Truffaut’s views on politics and sexuality were also a factor in the rise of the New Wave.

Geneviève Sellier has demonstrated the extent to which the emergence of the New Wave was built upon assumptions concerning gender, popular culture, and film art. She emphasizes that the prominent trait of the New Wave was not aesthetic innovation, but rather the preeminence of the auteur, and that subjectivity and creativity were limited to the masculine (“Masculine” 222-24). Judith Mayne has shown, through her analysis of the lesbian character in Clouzot’s film Les Diaboliques (1947), how the character represents preoccupations with marginalized sexualities and acts as a reflection on dominant ideologies in the 1950s (“Dora” 46). These and other analyses reveal how the denunciation of the Tradition of Quality was also shaped by assumptions concerning gender and sexuality.

It is only recently that 1950s French cinema has begun to receive a second look. Susan Hayward and Sarah Leahy have published work that reconsiders the representation of gender and sexuality in 1950s French film. Ginette Vincendeau has studied Melville and has reexamined great auteurs who haven’t received adequate attention yet, and Tim Palmer has done work that reevaluates crime films in the 50s. My
dissertation, then, is part of a burgeoning, ongoing dialogue on the reconsideration of the 1950s. My contribution to this dialogue is a reassessment of the reputation that Tradition of Quality adaptations have. Through an exploration of the ways in which female gender and sexuality were problematized on screen in different ways, I seek to demonstrate that the blanket assessment of “quality” films as substandard and pedestrian is unjustified. To this end, I examine the way that women are represented in several films made in the 1950s and use textual analysis to support my contention that, despite the preponderance of objectifying on-screen images of women that were also present at the time, alternate representations of women appear. Such images in the films I examine are evidence that films made during the Tradition of Quality are not as simplistic as their reputation suggests and that they merit examination.

To situate the time frame of my examination, I borrow Phil Powrie’s conceptualization of the 1950s in French film as comprising the fifteen-year period following the end of World War II, as these years encompassed the films made after the end of Nazi control over the French film industry and before the beginning of the New Wave (5-13). Looking at these years as a collective whole helps us to understand how the changes that took place in the French film industry shaped the filmmaking tendencies that Truffaut criticizes. The emergence of the value placed on ‘quality’ in filmmaking during this period can trace its roots back to practices implemented during the German Occupation of France. Colin Crisp notes that the Germans implemented a

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1 When referring to 1950s French film for this project, I mean the years of 1945 to 1959.
Comité d’Organisation for all workers’ and employers’ organizations, which they used as one step in the acquisition and maintenance of control of French signifying and representational practices (45). For the French film industry, the Comité d’Organisation de l’Industrie Cinématographique (COIC) was established. Although it was a French-run organization, it functioned in terms of German expectations, passing anti-Semitic laws without express direction from the German authorities. Additionally, the Germans rented big Paris studios, banned French production until later in the war and created Continental Films to produce French-language films under German administration. Thus, the Germans were able to obtain a monopoly on exports, a dominant position in distribution, control of exhibition, and control of the commercial sector of production (46-47). Control extended to personnel and financial issues, legislated by the COIC.

After the war ended, the COIC was transformed into the CNC (Centre National de Cinématographie), but many of the COIC’s policies continued to have an effect. One effect was that France’s hold over its film industry was weakened and, therefore, it was difficult to make it profitable. In the third tome of his L’âge classique du cinéma français : du cinéma parlant à la Nouvelle Vague, Pierre Billard identifies the four main problems that the post-war French film industry faced: structural issues in the industry itself, the influx of American imports after the Liberation, the problem of making France’s own exports competitive in Europe and, finally, competition with television. The CNC sought to address the first three problems that the French industry faced, and several laws were put into place to facilitate changes. First, the Blum-Byrnes agreement,
signed on May 28, 1946, lifted the restrictions on American imports into France, thus alleviating some of the French debt to the U.S. after the War and encouraging movie-going. On September 23, 1948, a law subsidizing production by way of surtax on entries was signed into law. Also, on October 19, 1949, an agreement was made between France and Italy to enable co-productions between the two countries to compete with big-budget Hollywood films (Crisp 75-76).

The laws enacted in the late 40s significantly helped the flailing industry. The subsidization of entries into theaters ultimately helped create a pattern in French filmmaking by forming a small group of established directors who, having proved their capacity to make popular films, received funding for additional films. This trend in filmmaking gave rise to the repetition of formulas and conventions in the films because it generated revenue and, consequently, additional filmmaking opportunities (Gimello-Mesplomb 143-44). So many films were made by this small number of filmmakers because of this system that new or unsuccessful filmmakers had great difficulty getting funds. As a result of the system, the French film industry saw much success in its goal to attract audiences to French films. Because of this success, the system of repeating themes, formulas and conventions that were popular became equated with an emphasis on the idea of producing “quality” films. The industry thus began to equate the notion of quality with that of popularity, to which Jean-Pierre Barrot’s 1953 article, “La Tradition de la qualité” attested. He asserts:
Since the creation of big-budget films with famous stars and a high emphasis on production values brought in audiences, the trend in the cinema industry flourished. Critical response to quality films, however, tended to be highly derogatory. Critics in the film journal *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* had bemoaned the emphasis on quality films starting as early as 1952.\(^2\) It was Truffaut’s lambasting of the Tradition of Quality, however, that sealed the fate of the films made in this style.

The place of *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1950s film culture was not merely a critical one. Certainly, it was the most revered and prestigious French film journal since its inception in 1951 (Ciné-Ressources, *“Cahiers”*). Founded by André Bazin, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca, the *Cahiers* prompted the advent of the *politique des auteurs*, which was to serve as the theoretical base of auteur theory. The journal was originally written and edited by Jacques Rivette, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, and Jean-Luc Godard, all of whom would become influential directors of the New Wave. In the 1950s, *Les Cahiers* competed with other critical journals, such as *Image et son* and *Positif*. The journal also changed the way that film

\(^2\) In a commentary called, “Le cinéma est mort”, Michel Dorsday lambasted *Adorables Créatures* and Charles Spaak specifically and *la qualité française* in general (55-58).
was seen because it was the first journal to make the use of detailed filmographies standard practice and to conduct lengthy interviews with filmmakers (Ciné-Ressources, "Cahiers"). Most importantly, the journal served to set the tone for popular reception of film in that it helped shaped French public opinion concerning the old, out-dated modes of classical filmmaking (epitomized by the Tradition of Quality) and that of the emerging New Wave. Through its critical model of the authorship in cinema, the journal facilitated a change in popular opinion concerning French film in the 1950s.

The state of the French film industry is only one part of the picture, however. In post-war France, the frictions associated with the new and evolving position of women in French society plays a significant role in the way that women were portrayed on screen. To situate my discussion of the representation of sexuality and its function in 1950s film, it is necessary to understand how the position of women in French society during the post-war period took shape. After the Liberation, France underwent an uphill battle to reconstruct its national identity, and a part of that reconstruction involved the renegotiation of women’s place in French society. After the return of approximately one million men from labor camps in German and nearly one million more prisoners of war (Laubier 3), French women faced the difficult task of determining how to ally their newfound freedoms and responsibilities with their traditional roles as mothers and housewives. On the one hand, French women had won the right to vote in 1945. In addition to their newfound freedoms, women also had an increased opportunity to work after the war, thus providing them with a means of gaining a modicum of
independence. On the other hand, women were still expected to perform all of the household and child-rearing tasks that they had traditionally done. The demands of their traditional tasks were multiplied, too, for working class women whose family income depended on their financial contributions from working to their household. Prices for food and other necessities soared after the Liberation and many families had difficulty in making ends meet. Furthermore, for families whose fathers had been killed in the War, the mothers had to work out of absolute necessity. So while the right to work was an opportunity for middle class women, working class women were often obliged to work (Laubier 2-3). This opposition in work force dynamics acted as one of the major sources of stress in France’s post-war societal reconstruction.

To be clear, it is important to take note of this opposition for women in the work force after the war. The effects of mass deprivation of goods following World War II made it necessary for women from working class families to find jobs so as to make ends meet. For middle class women, however, the dynamics surrounding the choice to work were very different. The option for middle class women to work was mediated by several conflicting factors facing these women in their new post-war roles. That is, even if middle class women were now permitted to hold a job, their duties as mother and housewife were not lessened. Men did not share in the child-rearing and household tasks after their return to France and middle class women who chose to work were still expected to perform all of the household tasks that they had done prior to the war.
For the middle class women who were working, jobs outside the home posed the problem of leaving them with less time to tend to their domestic tasks. Since France was in desperate need of an increased birthrate after the War, the French government put a number of incentives, such as the *allocations familiales*, into place to encourage families to have children (Weiner 24). The government incentives worked and by 1954 the French population reached 42,777,000, which was roughly 2 ½ million more people than there had been in 1946 (Laubier 29). Paradoxically, however, this increase in the birthrate did not preclude middle class women from seeking jobs outside the home. Rather, the rise of a consumer culture in France is, to a large extent, responsible for allowing women to take on duties outside of the home. The appearance and mass marketing of the household gadget in France molded women as both consumers of these gadgets and fabricators of household productivity in the years that followed the War.³

Rebecca Pulju discusses the construction of French women as “consumer citizens” during the *trente glorieuses*, or the thirty-year period of increased economic growth after the end of World War II. She contends that the home served as a site of modernization through the increased prominence given to the purchase and use of domestic appliances in the home (82). She notes that during the years immediately following the War, most French consumers were not able to afford new household gadgets since the country was still feeling the effects of wartime deprivation and

³ From this point forward when referring to the situation of women in France, I mean that of middle-class, Caucasian women.
economic decline. She cites the 1948 reopening of the *Salon des Arts Ménagers*, a yearly exhibition that showcased the latest household appliances and gadgets, as a prime example of this post-war effect. Pulju explains that household appliances were not only over-priced, they were also immediately unavailable due to the high demand (184). In the 1950s, though, the push toward economic prosperity through a marked increase in consumerism resulted in more affordable and more readily available household appliances and a greater number of households using these appliances. Pulju illustrates the extent to which the increase in marketing to women in the 1950s promulgated the swift modernization of the French household. She describes the push as a desire for “normalcy,” one which includes, “the recognition that women had become full citizens, the drive for reconstruction and productivity, and the belief that consumer decision drove the postwar economy” (18). Pulju asserts that this belief in “normalcy,” propagated by media (such as the press and women’s magazines, surveys and commentaries), kept French women focused on the home as their contribution to reconstruction. She contends that this push acted as a way to acknowledge the increase in women’s postwar autonomy without upsetting gender boundaries.

Pulju’s analysis of the place of women within the rise of French consumerism during the *trente glorieuses* is in line with Kristin Ross’ assessment of what she calls the “colonization of everyday life” (7), which began to crystalize after the Battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Ross sees the French loss of the war with Indochina as the marker of the beginning of a period in which the country underwent a strikingly fast transformation
toward modernization (or Americanization) at the same time that the country was dealing with the effects of decolonization (which was, in essence, a form of emasculation for France). Ross shows how the interrelationship between decolonization and modernization permeated French culture in virtually every way. She cites examples in film, advertising, and myths about coupledom to show how narratives concerning domesticity reinforced concepts about consumer society in general and, more specifically, women’s place in that society. Ross’ main contention is that in dealing with the aftermath of decolonization, “the colonies are in some sense ‘replaced,’ and the effort that once went into maintaining and disciplining a colonial people and situation becomes instead concentrated on a particular ‘level’ of metropolitan existence: everyday life” (77).

According to Ross, this “colonization of everyday life” took shape both within the domestic sphere and the public sphere. In the domestic sphere, women were pressured by media and advertising to be clean so as to be modern and this pressure was spurred on by the sharp rise in consumerism. In the public sphere, men were expected to embody the “new man,” typified by the jeune cadre (the young, hard-working male). This modern image was reflected in the household by the inclusion of the automobile for men and the refrigerator for women. Ross shows how the modern image of men and women was propagated by films such as Godard’s 1959 film, A bout de souffle (44-45) or Tati’s 1958 film Mon oncle (191-96). For men, Godard’s film illustrates one example of the “mythical element” of “things American” (44) that fascinated the French and were a
major impetus for French modernization. In Tati’s film, by contrast, Mme Arpel’s pride in fancy household gadgets and in keeping a clean house, though tongue-in-cheek, allegorizes the need for completeness in the utopia of modernization (194-95). For both men and women, then, the myths associated with French modernization were rooted in fantasies about the household and were perpetuated by press, film and advertising. Ross links these myths with dominant ideologies of the time, such as structuralism, to show how the fantasies of modernization explain how France’s plunging of itself into modernism/Americanization was tantamount to declaring itself separate from its colonial history and thus freeing itself from its memory of its past (196).

Susan Weiner also takes up the question of the rise of the household gadget in France as a means of redefining domesticity in the post-war era. She asserts that after the 19th century, shifts in perception of public and private spheres promulgated a change in the way that domesticity was viewed. She states, “domesticity came to signify passivity, dependence and devalorized feminine emotionality, in relation to the public sphere of male activity, earning power and worldly wisdom” (26). With the upsurge of modern appliances, this perception started to shift. She states, “household appliances signified both modernity and a uniquely feminine desire, one which knew no class bounds” (26). Weiner notes that women’s magazines fed this feminine desire by idealizing the appliances, given that ads and commercials often portrayed American kitchens, thus creating fantasies of “glamorous domesticity” (28).
If magazines and commercials were able to create an ideal of “glamorous domesticity,” they were also successful in creating an ideal of femininity, one that was also reinforced in cinema. As I have already indicated, work on 1950s French film tends to be limited to auteurist film and certain other films that were well received by critics. Rarely are women’s roles in cinema, and particularly those in the 1950s, examined. On the infrequent occasions when women’s contribution to French film in the 50s is discussed, though, it is generally a question of how they were portrayed on screen. Susan Hayward notes that the sex symbol à la française that was born in 1950 and epitomized by Brigitte Bardot was France’s success in competing with American sex symbols. It is in this way, for Hayward, that “women performers gained a relative ascendency over their male counterparts for the first time in France’s film history” (“National” 165-66). She also notes that women’s on-screen image in the 1950s was highly misogynistic: she is fallen, adulterous, ensnaring or scheming (174) or not sexualized except as mother. This dichotomy in representation leads to an image of female sexuality as perverse in the terms of the male narrative and women who try to step outside of patriarchal ideology are punished. Burch and Sellier paint a similar picture of how women were portrayed on the French film screen in the 1950s. For them, French cinematic images of relations between the sexes portrayed classical patriarchal order in the pre-war period, while images of women during the War reflect the shift in power to women in French society due to the absence of men. In post-war images, women are punished for their transgressions and patriarchal order is reestablished.
As a starting point for my analyses of specific film texts, I examined various cases of how popular French media portrayed cinema in the 1950s and paid particular attention to how my subject was portrayed by media. I focused on radio interviews, on television shows on cinema and on articles in the most popular film magazine at the time, *Cinémonde*. *Cinémonde* was a weekly fan periodical that first appeared on October 26, 1928. The publication stopped printing between 1941 and 1945 but resumed after the Liberation. In 1970, it became a monthly publication before its last issue was released in September, 1971. The magazine distinguished itself from other film magazines in that it was tremendously successful due to its varied presentation style. It surpassed its competition easily by including news and gossip about the film industry, articles on films that were currently in production and on anecdotes about the actors in these films, and by including competitions in which readers could participate (Ciné-Ressources, “*Cinémonde*”).

In conducting my research for this project, I noticed that there are two particularly telling aspects of the French mindset concerning sex and gender difference that are pertinent to this discussion. First, popular film media seemed to be decidedly obsessed with gender in several ways, including with whether or not a woman could be a filmmaker. Second, as the 1950s wore on, the amount and quality of advertisements in *Cinémonde* geared toward women changed significantly. In addition to becoming

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4 By way of distinction, *Ecran Français*, a film magazine with a marked political tone, lost much of its readership when content turned more toward political propaganda for the French Communist Party than that of information about films (Ciné-Ressources, “*Ecran Français*”)
more commonly geared toward women, advertisements also became more specific in their intent to compel women to spend money on beauty products and treatments to look more like movie stars. Both of these trends in popular media in France in the 50s are symptomatic of French attitudes and beliefs about the division between the sexes. At a time when neither men nor women necessarily believed in women’s abilities and/or desires to change the fundamental notions associated with a woman’s place in French society, the emergence of these attitudes in popular media is telling.

1.1 The Tradition of Quality and Jacqueline Audry: This Ain’t Your Daddy’s Cinema

Jacqueline Audry’s contribution to French cinema has been largely neglected by scholars, partly because her work falls squarely under the label of the Tradition of Quality and partly because she was a woman making films at a time when women’s roles behind the camera were minimal in the French film industry. Her oeuvre includes sixteen feature films, many of which are adaptations of novels – including several of Colette’s novels – that have women as central characters and that raise questions concerning women’s roles in society. Thanks to her use of Colette’s well-known works, Audry saw a moderate amount of success throughout her career. Her third and perhaps best-known feature film, *Gigi* (1948), for example, was one of the top grossing films of the year with 3,202,482 seats sold (qtd in Powrie 10). Despite this relative success at the box-office, her films rarely inspired critical acclaim. Jacques Siclier best described the
reception of her work: “Without exception her films have met with either (sic) polite interest, offhand condescension or outright scorn” (qtd. in Tarr “Now You Don’t” 106). Burch and Sellier discuss Siclier’s assessment of Audry’s work in what they call “un chapitre élogieux” on her in his 1957 *La Femme dans le cinéma français*. They contend that Audry “est devenue invisible sous l’effet de la ‘politique des auteurs’ mise en place par les Cahiers du Cinéma, qui domine encore la recherche en France, empêchant toute relecture du cinéma de l’après-guerre” (325).

A possible explanation for the disconnect between popular reception of her work, which was often quite favorable, and critical reception can be found in Audry’s filmmaking style. Audry’s sense of aesthetics, her close collaboration with scriptwriters, and her use of period décor and costumes are the traits that are typical of Tradition of Quality films. Her films tend to have a theatrical feel to them and Audry frequently includes scenes in which theater performances or singing and dancing are featured. This theatrical feel is also apparent on the whole in her films as Audry’s unveiling of information to which the spectator is privy is sometimes withheld in the diegesis of the film. The effect gives her films the feeling that performance and spectacle are integral parts of her films’ style.

Audry had help with the filmmaking process from her sister, Colette Audry, who aided in the creation of many of her films as a scriptwriter, and from her husband, Pierre LaRoche, who was the screenwriter for most of her films (Brahimi 31). Many of Audry’s films are set in the Belle Époque, the period in the late 19th century and early 20th
century before World War I that was characterized by flourishing technological advances and widespread optimism. It was an extremely popular setting for many French costume films of the 50s. Geneviève Sellier has pointed out that Belle Époque films frequently offer the opportunity to examine a female perspective on the male-female relationship within the patriarchal order (Sellier, “Belle Époque” 48), and Audry’s films consistently take advantage of this opportunity. Audry’s penchant for lush settings, an emphasis on dialogue, and the importance of production values finds its roots in her formation as a director. Before World War II, she worked as a script girl with several well-known French directors before moving up to the assistant director position. She worked on Max Ophüls’ Le Roman de Werther (1938), G.W. Pabst’s Jeunes filles en détresse (1939), and Georges Lacombe’s Elles étaient douze femmes (1940) among others before directing her first short film, Les Chevaux du Vercors, in 1943. During the war, France saw no women directors of feature films. Audry returned to Paris after the Liberation to find funding for her first feature film, Les Malheurs de Sophie (1944). The film was not well-received, though, and she would have to wait three more years before she was able to make Sombre dimanche in 1948 and then Gigi later that same year. With the success of Gigi, Audry’s cinematic style began to take shape.

Charles Ford’s Femmes Cinéastes; ou, le triomphe de la volonté devotes 10 pages to Jacqueline Audry’s history and pays special attention to how Audry’s “habilité et sensibilité féminine” (104) allowed her to explore subjects in her films that might otherwise have shocked her audiences. Audry’s films often dealt with subjects that
could well have provoked public outrage, such as the examination of a sexual double standard in *Gigi* or of an adulterous woman in *Minne, l’ingénue libertine* (1950). Yet her adaptations did not provoke the negative reactions that might have been expected. While Ford suggests that it was Audry’s creative sensitivity that made potentially upsetting film subjects attractive to her audiences, other critics, such as Paule Lejeune, hold that because Audry was a woman, she was obliged to make films that male directors did not want to make. For example, before filming *Gigi*, Audry prepared an adaptation of *Le rouge et le noir*, a 19th century novel by Stendhal in which the male protagonist struggles to raise his social status through enlistment in the French army. Audry was never able to make the film (Lejeune 59; Bastide). For the same reasons that Audry had less competition to adapt a story of a “monde au féminin” (Lejeune 60), audience reaction to these films was less likely to be as negative as it might have been had the potentially hazardous female characters existed in the masculine (which is often perceived as the “real”) world.

It is perhaps because of Audry’s popular success in making films that she also received a lot of attention as a female filmmaker. She was, in fact, one of only two women to direct films with any regularity during the post-war period. Agnès Varda began her prolific filmmaking career in 1955 with *La Pointe courte*, although this was the only film she made in the 1950s. The only other female directors to make films during the fifteen years following the war were Solange Térac with *Koenigsmark* (1952), Andrée Feix with *Il suffit d’une fois* (1946) and *Capitaine Blomet* (1947), Nicole Védrès with *Paris
Audry’s reputation as a female director was often the first thing she was asked about in interviews, and sometimes it was the only thing. Audry spent a lot of time explaining to French interviewers and audiences why a woman was capable of making films and also of making several films. As I’ve already indicated, Jacqueline Audry distinguished herself during the post-war era not only by the fact that she was the only woman in France to make films on a regular basis, but also by the fact that her films consistently dealt with women as their subject matter. In an interview on Cinépanorma: Emission du 25 septembre, 1956, Audry’s introduction on the show captured the essence of the mystery that this distinction held for her. The interviewer indicated that they would be reviewing Mitsou... Ou comment l’esprit vient au filles (1956) and added, “Son réalisateur, Jacqueline Audry, est une femme. C’est en effet exactement le genre de chose qui n’a pas fini d’étonner le monde.” The interviewer’s assertion was quite the understatement. Not only was Jacqueline Audry obliged repeatedly to justify her existence as a director in interviews while she was actively making films, she and her filmmaking style were also the subject of debate years after she stopped directing.

In the same Cinépanorma interview, Audry was asked to explain why her films typically were those that were “inspirés des romans de femmes ou des personnages féminins.” Audry explained that she had tried in the past to adapt other types of works

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5 Denise Tual made three more films in the 1960s and 70s (Lejeune, 67).
and that she and Pierre LaRoche had spent quite a lot of time and energy on the adaptation of *Le rouge et le noir*, but the film never materialized. She stated that the misfortune with *Le rouge et le noir* made her choose stories that were less appealing to male filmmakers, and that in the process, “je me suis rabattue sur des personnages féminins qui peut-être me valaient beaucoup mieux.” Audry was quite aware of the types of characters about whom her films told the story. She noted that her characters were frequently ones who had a rebellious nature about them and she maintained that, “ça m’amusait de les faire triompher à la fin.”

As in so many other interviews, Audry was invariably asked the question of how she, as a woman, made films. Her response, while polite, highlighted the absurdity of the question: “Il faut que le metteur en scène soit un homme-orchestre, et je suis une femme-orchestre. Il faut avoir tous les registres.” In other interviews, Audry tried to point out this same truth about women filmmakers. On December 31, 1966, an interviewer on *Cinéma Vérité* asserted that she and Agnès Varda were the only female filmmakers and he wondered that since filmmaking was a “métier d’homme,” were there women’s films and men’s films (films de femme et des films d’homme). Audry argued that “chaque artiste a un pourcentage de masculinité et de féminité.” The interviewer interjected that what Audry was describing was “différent qu’à une personne ordinaire,” and that Audry was a “double exception parce qu’elle est femme et elle n’a pas fait qu’un court métrage” (implying that women filmmakers were only known for their short films and not full-length feature films).
In a comparatively lengthy statement in a radio broadcast in 1955, Audry talked about the shared traits of male and female metteurs en scène and attempted to identify exactly what qualities male and female cineastes need to possess in order to be an effective director (Audry “Chronique”). She began by stating:

Je suis un réalisateur féminin et pour cela je pense que la mise-en-scène est aussi bien un art féminin que masculin. Je vais donc tacher de vous démontrer que la place d’une femme peut être à côté de la caméra. Pour cela, il me suffit d’imaginer quelles sont les qualités requises pour devenir un parfait réalisateur, et prouver ainsi que rien n’empêche une femme parce qu’elle est femme d’être metteur en scène.

She then continued by noting that there are characteristics that are masculine and ones that are feminine, but that in looking closely at these characteristics one can see that they are often shared by the two sexes. She also noted that the feminine temperament can sometimes be defined by a lack of marked traits. Thus, she reasoned that women do not in and of themselves possess any particular qualities and that any qualities that they do possess are also masculine qualities.

With this background argument in place, Audry then commenced a list of the fundamental and necessary qualities that male and female directors need to have, emphasizing above all the love of cinema (which is not at all inherent to either sex):

Il faut d’abord, avant tout, par-dessus tout, aimer d’amour le cinéma,
avoir la vocation, mettre à sa disposition de l’intelligence, du sens
artistique, le don visuel qui vous pousse à vous exprimer plus en image que d’une autre façon. De l’esprit de l’observation, enregistrer continuellement le comportement de l’être humain et à l’aide de la mémoire, utiliser ces observations au moment voulu avec rapidité d’esprit.

Without changing tone or pausing, Audry added other qualities to the list: “Il faut de la sensualité, de la passion pour les formes, les nuances, les reflets, la matière, la plupart des choses. Il faut aussi beaucoup d’intuition.” These last few characteristics are typically feminine features and Audry used them to illustrate her point. She then pushed the limits of stereotypical qualities for either sex, noting that all are essential for a director. She said:

Il faut au réalisateur des qualités dites masculines... Esprit de création.
L’audace. Le courage. La force. La brutalité même. L’autorité, celle d’un commandant de bateau. Et des nerfs d’acier, c’est déjà beaucoup. Mais, il me reste encore à énumérer de ces qualités, et ce n’est pas des moindres. Ce sont les qualités dites féminines : l’imagination, la sensibilité, la tendresse, la délicatesse, la patience, la ténacité, la séduction alliée au don de raconter les contes de fée.

The opposition Audry created in her list of masculine and feminine characteristics serves to illustrate the gender binary before calling into question assumptions made about sexual difference.
She finished her list of so-called feminine characteristics by including the one which is considered to be the most typical for women, yet shows how a judgment value should not be placed on it:

Et surtout, il faut ce que l’on appelle à tort, pour en faire le lot des femmes, la passivité. Cette passivité n’a en réalité rien de passif. Elle s’oppose à l’activité masculine, comme la force de l’attraction s’oppose à la force de propulsion, comme en électricité, le positif au négatif. Et les réceptivités accueillent, don de se laisser envahir par les choses et les être pour mieux les exprimer ensuite pour mieux les mimer. Et c’est là que la démonstration commence.

Finally, she punctuated her statement by underlining her argument with amusing, yet effective, imagery:

Si un être humain, quel qu’il soit, ne peut réunir en lui tout seul tant de possibilités, il se trouve que les bonnes fées qui se sont penchées sur le berceau du futur réalisateur, ont distribué, au hasard, comme elles le font pour tout être humain, des qualités fondamentales, des masculines et des féminines, sans regarder si ce petit être avait des boucles d’oreilles ou n’en avait pas.

Battling essentialist thought about sexual difference, Audry’s discussion of the characteristics necessary to be a film director shows to what extent French public opinion was centered on the belief that only men were capable of doing certain jobs.
This was particularly true of filmmaking. The mindset is one that continued to permeate French culture long after the 1950s and extended beyond Jacqueline Audry’s tenure as a director. Nearly 20 years later on January 29, 1972, a television show called *Aujourd’hui Madame* illustrated to what extent the mindset had not changed. The show had as its theme “Les femmes cinéastes” and framed the theme in the context of the emergence of women in the working world. They noted that in the previous few years, there had been a marked growth in the number of women who were employed in traditionally male-dominated jobs. They noted that there was suddenly an increase in new labels for women in these jobs: “femme-pilot,” “femme chef d’entreprise,” and “femme qui est entrée dans la compétition d’automobile,” and that the term “femme cinéaste” applied to the 100 or so women who had made films. The talk show invited two female filmmakers, Nadine Trintignant and Nina Companeez, who were preparing films for release the next year.

At the time of the interview, Trintignant had made four films and Companeez had only made one (Lejeune 107 and 210). Charles Ford was also part of the interview, as he had just finished his book on the same subject as the television episode. The interview began with an examination of Trintignant’s and Companeez’s work as cinéastes. Yet, the manner in which the interviewer proceeded is particularly telling concerning the dominant French attitude toward female filmmakers. The interview focused on the idea that their films were reflections of “les sentiments de femme,” and

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6 When asked why they thought that there were not more women who made films, the two interviewees, Trintignant and Companeez, responded “il y a très peu de femmes qui ont voulu être cinéaste.”
the clips and material they showed about the women were limited to male impressions of their work. For Trintignant, who had already made multiple films at that point, the interviewer neglected to show clips from any of her films. Instead, he showed a lengthy excerpt of a film that her husband at the time, Jean-Louis Trintignant, had made about her. For Companeez, the show focused on a collection of interviews from her cinematic family (i.e. her film crew and those who collaborated with her on film projects). The first two people to be asked about her were a woman and a man, respectively. The woman talked at length about Companeez’s beauty and very little about the actual film she had produced. The man, by contrast, was asked if it bothered him that Companeez was a woman. Clearly, the women’s films were not of interest in a television show on women filmmakers.

Charles Ford’s contribution to the interview included situating the work of Jacqueline Audry in French cinema. He distinguished her from other female filmmakers by saying, “Jacqueline Audry est la seule véritable femme française qui lutte dans le cinéma à armes égales avec les hommes. Je veux dire par là que depuis 25 ans, elle réalise des films comme si elle était un homme.” This first statement does clearly distinguish Audry from other female filmmakers in that, at that point, no other woman had made the number of films that she had, nor had they continued to make films for that length of time. Yet when he brought Audry up again, the distinction was less clear. He said, “mais Jacqueline Audry tourne depuis 1945, exactement comme un homme et à elle on lui a reconnu certaines qualités de sensibilité et de tact... pour présenter
certain sujets un peu scabreux qui, présentés par des hommes auraient peut-être été beaucoup plus difficiles.” While he insisted that Audry made films exactly as a man would, he also indicates that there was something special about Audry’s style that allowed her to treat difficult subjects without causing offense to her audiences. Given the way that the discourse about female filmmakers took shape in this interview, it is useful to explore this distinction.

The interviews with Trintignant and Companeez are indicative that the primacy of essentialist thought concerning sexual difference is paramount. That is, essentialist concepts of sexual difference find their root in Plato’s ideas concerning underlying essences and suggest that differences between the sexes are universal, inevitable and biologically determined. This being the case, the interviews also show to what extent this essentialist point of view is reductionist. For Trintignant, she is reduced to her husband’s image of her (and, ironically, it is his image that we see via the medium that, by rights, should give her a voice). For Companeez, she is reduced to her physical beauty, which has nothing to do with her directing of films, and to male approval concerning her job. What, then, does Charles Ford mean when he states that Jacqueline Audry made films exactly like men do? It cannot mean that her subject matter is similar to that of men’s films since her films virtually always dealt with women and their stories. It cannot refer to her style, either, because Ford himself notes that her filmmaking style differed greatly from men’s due to her sensitivity and tact. Though Ford is fairly clear about his assertion that the span of Audry’s career puts her into a different category
than her female compatriots, calling her work a “triomphe de sa tenacité,” it is unclear if the feminine characteristics that he attributes to her work color his assessment. That is, did Jacqueline Audry make films like a man because she struggled in the cinema for 25 years and did not give up? Or did she make films like a man because no one ever commented on her beauty and Pierre LaRoche did not make films himself? It seems like an evident question, but in the context of the Aujourd’hui Madame interview the answer is less clear.

As further evidence of what seems to be a French resistance to viewing women filmmakers on equal footing with male filmmakers, TF1 ran a special entitled, “Les pionnières du septième art vues par les dictionnaires 1900-1960,” in early 1984. Proceeding alphabetically, the special noted that Dorothy Arzner was their first entry and that, “les films qu’elle avait tournés n’étaient pas obligatoirement destinés à un public féminin.” Audry was next, and they noted that she was: “une des rares réalisatrices françaises, [qui] adapta Colette avec goût et délicatesse. Presque tous ses long-métrages eurent pour scénariste, Pierre LaRoche, son mari. De l’épouse à la lesbienne, de l’ingénue à la femme libre, c’est l’étude de la psychologie féminine que l’on retrouve au cœur de ses films.” During the reading of Arzner’s and Audry’s entries, the producers inserted a sound track of a woman laughing while the narrator read the entries. During the third entry, which was for Muriel Box, there was a similar sound of a

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7 On October 16, 1950, a picture of Jacqueline Audry appeared in Cinémonde, showing her on the set with Edwige Feuillère during the shooting of Olivia (1950). Audry was dressed in pants and a button down shirt, while Feuillère was wearing one of the dresses she wore in the film. The image serves as an apt symbol of Audry’s relationship to feminine gender expression.
woman laughing as the narrator spoke, yet this time the laugh was much more pronounced. In all three instances, each track of a woman’s laugh seemed out of place and gave the impression that they were inserted to give a more “feminine” feel to the subject of the television show. While the addition of these laugh tracks may seem like an insignificant detail, the overlaid sounds were absolutely immaterial to the so-called dictionary entries and only served as a subtle way to ridicule the subject of the special. The overlays served to reinforce to the spectator on the most stereotypical level that they were watching a special about women. It was not important that the women were filmmakers; it was important that they were women and that what they were doing was frivolous as compared to men’s serious filmmaking work.

The discourse surrounding Jacqueline Audry’s production as a filmmaker and that of women’s contribution to cinema on a larger scale shows the extent to which the collective French view of women’s place in the cinema was secondary at best. French popular media was completely obsessed with the fact that Audry was a woman and with determining if a woman could have the qualities necessary to be a good filmmaker. While other female directors could easily be reduced to their essentialist stereotypes, Audry’s oeuvre was unique. Her body of films both allies her with and distinguishes her from both sexes of filmmakers. Audry’s subject matter was clearly differentiated from that of her male compatriots in that her work consistently dealt with stories about women. More precisely, these stories were about women who tended to finish well in the end. Yet at the same time, Audry’s work was clearly different from that of other
women directors of her time (and from that of many women directors who came after her) in that she made significantly more films than most of the other women filmmakers in France. Audry’s case is unique because her work demonstrates that Audry was, in fact, an *auteur* in her own right and that her distinctive, personal style, shaped by gender discourse, is evident in her films. Media fascination with her work supports this assertion. Popular media could not get past her sex for the same reason that critical journals spurned her work: she was an *auteur* who functioned outside of the limits and conceptions of *auteurism* at the time. As Audry’s oeuvre defied classification, critical media ignored her and popular media latched on to what seemed like an inexplicable phenomenon.

1.2 Marketing Femininity: The Preponderance of Beauty Ads in Cinémonde in the 1950s

To paint adequately the picture of the circumstances of the position of women in the post-war years, it is necessary to understand the extent to which the preoccupation with gender permeated the culture. If popular media was preoccupied with the gender division in their choice of subject matter, this fixation was even more evident in the way that they went about advertising. Ads for beauty products and other typically feminine goods permeated the pages of *Cinémonde*. The magazine had a knack for capturing and reflecting cultural obsessions that were put forth on screen in France, and the very solid place of women as object on the film screen was certainly reflected and supported by
their image in the magazine. In as much as objectifying images of female French film stars were displayed "ad infinitum," generic images of pin-up girls and swimming ladies adorned the pages of the magazine as well. This was particularly true of issues in the late 1940s. In the late 40s and early 50s, Ponds cold cream advertisements and ads for products that promised to lengthen eyelashes appeared in virtually every issue. Ads for Poudre Gemey, a type of makeup, were also prevalent in these issues. One example of the powder’s advertising strategy focused on influencing women to discover their own beauty and how the product could facilitate that discovery. In an ad that appeared in the 23 October 1950 issue of Cinémonde, a woman testifies to Poudre Gemey’s power to uncover her hidden beauty: “J’étais jolie, je l’ignorais... la poudre Gemey nous l’a révélé.” Ads of this type pervade issues of Cinémonde in the late 40s and in the 50s, and this differs quantitatively from the ads in the 30s. Issues in the 30s contained beauty ads, but their frequency increased dramatically after the War. Moreover, in the space between 1954 and 1956, the magazine markedly increased the amount of advertisements for other types of products (i.e. non-beauty products) as well. In fact, there was a marked change in not only the way advertising was presented in the magazine, but also the way that images of women were presented.

While the 1940s issues of Cinémonde offered a plethora of images of the pin-up girls or the swimming ladies, by 1956 the sex symbol images of real stars started to be brought to the forefront. Plunging necklines and short skirts saturated the issues and in the 15 November 1956 issue, we see a spread devoted to the world’s sexiest female sex
symbols. In a series of pictures, Marilyn Monroe, Isabel Corey, Anita Ekberg (from Sweden), Marion Michael (described as the German Bardot), and Sandra Milo (from Italy) are lounging around with their hair spread out on a bed or kicking a leg out or holding up a skirt (3). In the January 3, 1957 issue, the cover showed a close up of Anita Ekberg’s face in full make up. The tagline read “Révélation ‘sexy’ de l’année, Anita Ekberg vivra 1957 en beauté.” In as much as the objectified representation of women on the French film screen had become more predominant in the 1950s, so was their image in periodicals, and Cinémonde was reflecting and reinforcing this image. In focusing on so many different nationalities of sex symbols, Cinémonde succeeded in naturalizing this glamorous and highly sexualized image of women for its readers by reinforcing the idea that women presented themselves this way on a universal level.

This movie star, sex symbol image for women became the standard by which beauty ads marketed their goods to women. Articles crossed the line between marketing and entertainment by talking about how women could look like the stars. For example, in the 11 April 1957 edition of the magazine, there appeared a comprehensive article on how to do your make up. It was entitled, “La femme type 57 vous est révélée par Gabriel Garland...” (14). Moreover, while ads in the mid to late 50s were starting to advertise things other than beauty products, such as Cinzano vermouth, Martini vermouth, various restaurants, and Omo laundry detergent, they raised the stakes on the beauty ads: Advertisements for breast augmentation started to appear. The 3 January 1957 edition, for example, contained an ad for one method to increase bust
size. With an accompanying image of breasts, the ad read, “Ces seins-là, vous les connaissez... Vos seins trop petits, je les développe de 10cm en 20 jours.” Even more explicit was an ad that ran in the 11 April 1957 edition which said, “La ‘Femme Parfaite’ fait 55 centibelles de poitrine et 36 ½ de taille... Et vous? Un ingénieux système (la Méthode Décybelle) inventée par Mme Nathalie Andersen, permet à toutes les femmes d’obtenir une parfaite proportion de chaque partie du corps.”

The shift in advertising strategy during the 1950s from an emphasis on a woman’s discovery of her own beauty to one that began to tap into her insecurities concerning her body reflects both the upsurge in consumerism that took hold in France after the war (as elucidated by Rebecca Pulju, Kristin Ross and Susan Weiner) and the increasingly objectified image of women that we see on the French film screen during the period. In the same way that magazines and other media signaled and sparked a change in the way that domesticity was viewed in the 1950s through the glamorization of household gadgets, the ads in Cinémonde both signaled and helped spark the emergence of the highly sexualized and objectified image of how women were viewed in the 50s. As women were enticed to look like movie stars, the image of what women should look like became increasingly constrained. It is in this context, then, that the objective of this dissertation takes shape. Each example of media obsession (that with Audry’s womanhood and that with creating an increasingly rigid definition of woman so as to entice female consumers to buy beauty products and services) indicates that
French attitudes toward sexual difference were unyielding in their definition of what a woman was supposed to be and what her role in society was supposed to be.

The correlation between the societal and cultural obsession with Jacqueline Audry as a female filmmaker and the discernible increase in ads geared toward women in *Cinémonde* reflects the growing preoccupation with sexual and gender difference during the period and illustrates the link between this preoccupation and how it played out in terms of cinematic representation and the media discourse that surrounded it. This chapter serves to help shed light on the significance of the individual film texts I study in my following chapters with respect to the overall cultural climate in France at the time. Here, I would like to point out that my analyses of specific film texts are in constrast with Kristin Ross’ analyses of films. Ross’ analyses deal with the promulgation of the dominant model of gender roles within the prescripts of modernization, and she suggests that film acted as a type of advertisement for modernity. The goal of my filmic analyses, however, is to uncover how certain other films that bear a negative label due to the over-arching influence of François Truffaut’s indictment of the Tradition of Quality actually oppose their negative reputations and challenge gender and sexual binaries thereby subverting the prevailing push toward modernization.

To that end, I look at two of Jacqueline Audry’s adaptations in chapter 2, *Olivia* (1951) and *Huis clos* (1954), as examples of how Audry’s cinematic readings of lesbian desire challenged its prevalent representations. Taking as a point of departure current modes of thought in adaptation theory, I evaluate these films as cinematic readings of
their original literary texts. I take Richard Stam’s work on adaptation theory as the lense through which I analyze the films in this and the following chapters. Stam suggests that people have a tendency to see literary sources as preferable because they have a fundamental belief that older somehow means better. That is, since the novel precedes the film, it is given preference as the ‘original,’ and because literature as an art form predates cinema, it is typically viewed as a ‘better’ art form (4). After an exploration of the motivating factors associated with the tendency to give primacy to literary originals, Stam surveys the theoretical models that have been used to attempt to conceptualize the relationship between the literary original and its adaptation(s). He shows how structuralist and poststructuralist models give weight to adaptations as a signifying text and how film texts are worthy of the same scrutiny as literary ones. He then notes that deconstructionism broke down notions of “original” and “copy” (8), before discussing how Bakhtin and Foucault’s work opened up the possibility to view adaptation as a sort of “hybrid construction” as an articulation of the mingling of different media, discourses, and collaborations (9).

Stam elucidates the theoretical movement from notions of fidelity to ones concerning intertextuality and shows how viewing film texts in terms of intertextuality helps us to go beyond aporias of fidelity (26). He references Genette’s categories of “transtextuality” with respect to the novel and shows how these notions can also apply to film adaptation. He notes that “intertextuality” (or “the effective co-presence of two texts”) describes to two texts’ reference or allusion to each other (26). “Paratextuality”
refers to the relationship between a text and its paratexts, which include titles, prefaces and postfaces (27). “Metatextuality” is the term used to describe the relationship between one text and another in which the subsequent texts function as readings and criticisms of their source texts (28). “Architextuality” brings up questions of copyright, while “hypertextuality” deals with the relationship of one text (a hypertext) to another earlier one (the hypotext). The effect of this relationship resides in how the hypertext transforms, modifies or extends the hypotext in some way (30-31). I analyze "Olivia" and "Huis clos" in terms of hypertextuality, and I read the films in terms of adaptation choices made to produce readings of their literary originals in order to show how Jacqueline Audry created characters whose homosexuality is treated as a non-factor and judgment is reserved for other reasons than sexuality. In this way, Audry is able to portray lesbian characters in a more favorable light than what would be expected in the 50s.

In chapter 3, I expand my analysis of Jacqueline Audry’s work to encompass the examination of alternate modes of gender expression for women in her films, "La Garçonne" (1957) and "Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon" (1959). Basing my analyses on the theoretical work of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Pierre Bourdieu, I show how the filmic adaptation of the novel "La Garçonne" and the cinematic rendering of a narrative based on the chevalier d’Eon act as reflections of modern anxieties concerning the gender binary. Beauvoir argues that “on ne naît pas femme : on le devient” (v.2, 13) and that in as much as Man is at the center of all things, Woman is ancillary. Beauvoir uses a variety of oppositions to illustrate how men construct women as their Other,
including the notions of immanence versus transcendence, nature versus nurture. She shows how these oppositions engender unattainable ideals for women and manifest “l’éternel féminin,” or essential femininity, which she discredits. She argues that the logic of oppositions is flawed in that Woman is a part of humanity and that in defining her as Man’s Other, she is denied her humanity (v.1, 31-32). Judith Butler’s work, *Gender Trouble*, came out forty years after de Beauvoir’s assessment of gender. While several other theorists have tackled the question of the gender binary, *Gender Trouble* has come to serve as the basis upon which to reconsider modes of categorization of male versus female and masculine versus feminine. Butler later refines her analysis of gender performance to include the notion of *corporeal style* (“Performative Acts” 521-22) and argues against the possibility of having a “true” gender identity.

Pierre Bourdieu uses concepts of *habitus* and *violence symbolique* to explain how the domination of women by men takes shape and why it perpetuates itself. For Bourdieu, gender is intrinsically linked to sexual difference, which is itself based on a visual, physical difference that takes on arbitrary characteristics that in turn define the division between the sexes as a naturalized social construction. He cites a plethora of oppositions, which appear to justify and support the opposition between male and female by associating the oppositions (such as up/down, right/left, straight/curved, public/private) with the visual difference between male and female (13). In this way, the oppositions serve as proof of the binary and fundamental difference between the sexes. Bourdieu argues that, “en associant l’érection phallique à la dynamique vitale du
gonflement qui est immanente à tout le processus de reproduction naturelle
(germination, gestation, etc.) la construction sociale des organes sexuels enregistre et ratifie symboliquement certains propriétés naturelle indiscutables” (19). The oppositions, then, are taken to be reality and reinforce the dichotomy in social roles for masculine and feminine as active vs. passive, through the gendering of bodies via clothing, or through expectations of behavior (87). In each film, Audry creates worlds in which the gender binary is blurred, transgressed and subverted. While transgressions of gender boundaries are eventually corrected and patriarchal order is restored, I contend that Audry pushes these limits in order to create desiring female agents.

In chapter 4, I look beyond Audry’s work to address two other films typical of the Tradition of Quality. Specifically, I look at two adaptations of Zola’s novels, Marcel Carné’s Thérèse Raquin (1953) and René Clément’s Gervaise (1956). The stories, as Zola’s novels, already lend themselves to an analysis of the social inequalities of women. Yet since both films fall into the category of the Tradition of Quality in the 1950s, they become even more compelling. In Thérèse Raquin, Thérèse is portrayed in a much more sympathetic light than in Zola’s novel and in Gervaise, Gervaise is positioned into the foreground of the story and is given a more predominant voice than in the novel. Both films embody adaptation choices that proffer socially significant and problematized contemporary images of women. As these two films were made by established, well-known directors and screenwriters, the films serve to illustrate that the problematizing
of gender and sexuality on screen in France in the 1950s was not limited to Jacqueline Audry’s oeuvre. The question was one that reoccurred throughout the period.

In my fifth chapter, I discuss the star image of Edwige Feuillère. I note that the cinematic treatment of women in the 1950s gave them more exposure than they had ever had previously on the French film screen and also objectified them to an ever-increasing extent (Hayward; Vincendeau; Leahy), and note how feminization of the French film product bolstered two principal representations of women: that of eroticized femme-objet and that of the femme-enfant (Leahy 55.) Using this distinction as a basis on which to examine the way that Feuillère’s characters are portrayed, I am able to conclude that Feuillère’s star image is one that runs counter to the stereotypes of objectified female stars on screen in the 1950s. Through an examination of several of her roles in films and an examination of her reception in popular media, I contend that her image embodies agency generally not associated with actresses of the era by challenging social and cultural limits for women. Further, Feuillère’s image expresses the contradiction between the implications of these limits and the changing realities of the feminine domain as it evolved in the 50s.

It is in the context of dominant cultural expectations concerning women that my analyses gain significance. On the one hand, traditional images of women permeated the culture in a myriad of ways. The obsession with the fact that Jacqueline Audry was a woman is testament to the inherent belief in French culture that women were not capable of doing certain things. The upsurge in advertising directed at women that
reinforced notions that women look a certain way play into this same concept. That is, women act and look (and consequently “are”) different than men. On the other hand, the popular reception of the counter-trend of alternate images of women’s sexuality and gender that I will discuss in the following chapters shows how these basic assumptions about gender and sexuality in French culture could be subverted. Despite discourses that contend that gender and sexuality were rigidly conceived in the 50s, the fact that reflections of alternate images of women were permitted, tolerated, and even to a certain extent lauded pushes us to reconsider the value of the films made in the 50s and, consequently, the sweeping reputation of the Tradition of Quality as a period wherein only substandard, trivial work was being produced.
Chapter 2

Adapting the Lesbian: Jacqueline Audry's *Olivia* and *Huis clos*

In 1951, Jacqueline Audry directed her fifth feature film, *Olivia*, which was adapted from an English semi-autobiographical novel of the same title by Dorothy Strachey Bussy, written in 1949. Her seventh film, *Huis clos* (1954), was also an adaptation, this time of Jean-Paul Sartre’s play, which was put on for the first time in May 1944 at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. Given the impact of François Truffaut’s reproach of screenwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost for what he called their betrayals of literary texts, the adaptation of Audry’s films with respect to their literary originals is particularly significant to this discussion. To conceptualize the relationship between a film text and its literary source text, Robert Stam surveys the theoretical modes of thought concerning film adaptation. He notes that traditionally discussions of film adaptations render moral judgments based on a film’s ability to “faithfully” adapt a literary text. He also shows how these moralistic judgments bring up questions of what has been “lost” rather than what has been ‘gained’ (3). He lists several factors that feed unconscious assumptions that we make about the relationship between literature and film.
Stam lists other possible sources of prejudices against cinema, such as iconophobia (the hatred of images), logophilia (the valorization of the written word), and the myth of the facility of creating films (i.e. the notion that a director simply films what is there) (5-7). He also discusses the idea that cinema is often seen as a form of parasitism, wherein adaptations are seen as ‘less’ because they are copies of an original and because they do not represent “pure film.” This last notion provides for a special conception of cinema in that it describes the catch-22 associated with film adaptation. An adaptation that is ‘faithful’ to the literary original is seen as uncreative, while an adaptation that is ‘unfaithful’ is seen as a betrayal (8). This attitude was expressly articulated in Truffaut’s indictment of Aurenche and Bost and of the Tradition of Quality and illustrates one of the reasons for which an entire movement in French cinematic history has been systematically ignored.

Stam uses the notion of “hypertextuality” to illustrate how the various forms of transformation that take place in the process of adapting a novel to film should be viewed as independent processes that result in a filmic hypertext. This text should then be seen as separate from the literary source (hypo) text. He emphasizes the different nature of the two media and how the historical and social contexts of each (hyper and hypo) text differ (46). In this way, notions of fidelity and betrayal can be put aside and the relationship between a film adaptation and its literary source text can be viewed in terms of their statuses as independent entities. Filmic adaptations of literary originals can thus be analyzed in terms of how the film acts as a reading of the literary original,
and I shall examine specific scenes in each film to demonstrate how Audry’s readings of lesbian desire in each film is portrayed more favorably than in the films’ literary originals.

In both Olivia and Huis clos, lesbian desire plays a very visible role. The prominence of lesbian desire in these films distinguishes them from others in Audry’s oeuvre to this point. While her other feature films, Les Malheurs de Sophie (1944), Sombre dimanche (1948), Gigi (1948) and Minne ou l’ingénue libertine (1950), all deal with female characters and sometimes with representations of female desire, Olivia and Huis clos were the first in her oeuvre to treat lesbian desire. As I will argue, the filmic adaptation of each novel renders lesbian desire in a non-moralistic fashion. Jacqueline Audry said that her work was “a defence of Woman as a human being but also in terms of her femininity” (qtd in Kuhn and Radstone 26). This assertion highlights one reason why Audry’s lesbian characters are of particular interest in this discussion. In the confines of a rather rigid framework that demanded a certain bienséance in the creation of a film, Jacqueline Audry was able to consistently choose to adapt works whose female characters disrupted the expectations of prescribed societal feminine virtues. In my first discussion, I examine the treatment of woman/girl in the film Olivia in terms of her status as both object and subject of desire and also as the site of different positions of gender expression. Her treatment in the film gives rise to a number of questions concerning the representation of women in 1950s French cinema and challenges the
negative associations that surround the Tradition of Quality in that Audry offers the viewer a complex image of lesbian desire in the film.

2.1 *Olivia* by Jacqueline: Desire and Transgression in *Olivia*

Dorthy Bussy’s novel, *Olivia*, was written in 1949 and is at least partially based on Bussy’s own experiences at boarding school. Bussy (1865-1960), was known for her work as translator for much of André Gide’s fiction (Brown et al, entry page). *Olivia* is the story of an English schoolgirl who leaves a devoutly Protestant boarding school in London to attend Mlle Julie and Mlle Cara’s school outside of Paris. Upon her arrival, Olivia learns that the school is divided into two camps caused by a rift between the two women. Julie’s penchant for her favorite students reacts with Cara’s hypochondria – encouraged by Frau Riesner who insinuates herself into a care-taker position for Cara – to widen the rift between the two. When Julie takes a special interest in Olivia, Olivia in turn develops a crush on Julie. This piques Julie’s desire and draws Cara’s ire. Julie struggles to suppress her desire, yet the connection between the teacher and student acts as the eventual catalyst for Cara’s breakdown. Julie sells her share of the school to Cara and makes plans to leave for Canada at the end of the term. Cara, however, falls ill and takes an overdose of headache medication which kills her. As it is unclear if the overdose is an accident or pre-meditated, an investigation ensues. At the end of the novel, Frau Riesner takes over the school which was left to her in Cara’s will. Olivia
leaves the school without gaining Julie’s affection: the parting between the two is cold and Julie offers Olivia an ivory paper cutter as a replacement for the gift she owes her. Olivia rejects the gift and throws it out her window before learning that Julie has left for Paris and will not be back before Olivia leaves the school. We learn via letters exchanged between Olivia and Julie’s servant/assistant, Signorina, that Julie does not start a new school in Canada and expressly forbids Olivia to attempt to contact her again. Julie dies of pneumonia in the end and Signorina sends the ivory paper cutter to Olivia as a part of Julie’s last wishes.

*Olivia* is set in a girls’ boarding school, which is significant because the setting has a long history of being the site of lesbian relationships in a variety of incarnations, both in literature and in film. The girls’ boarding school is a privileged site, where women exist together in a women-only space. It is often seen as one of the few possible places where lesbian feeling may manifest itself, even though it is rarely viewed as permissible or natural. Very often, the discovery of lesbian sentiment is treated with the utmost scorn and contempt. In *Das München in Uniform/ Maidens in Uniform* (1931), for example, Manuela (Hertha Thiele) makes what amounts to her coming out speech—a comparatively tame declaration of her love, or even simply of her admiration, of Fraulein von Bernburg (Dorothea Wieck) — under the influence of a “real punch” made

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8 See Elaine Marks, “Lesbian Intertextuality” for a more complete discussion of the history of the girl’s boarding school in literature.
in honor of a holiday celebration. There is no question about Frau Principal’s (Gertud de Lalsky) intolerance of Manuela’s assertion as the camera moves in to a medium shot of her taking an aggressive stance as she exclaims, “Ein Skandal!”

The setting holds a similar status in the 1961 film, *The Children’s Hour*, in which the suggestion of female homosexuality is treated with derision. In much the same way as in *Mädchen*, Karen (Audrey Hepburn) and Martha’s (Shirley MacClaine) relationship is never explicitly spelled out. Rather, Martha’s “disease” only comes to light after a vengeful schoolgirl starts a rumor about the two headmistresses. Whereas the rumor is eventually exposed as a lie, Martha discovers that there is a grain of truth in the accusation. After a rather tragic confrontation between the two wherein Martha sobs that she feels “so sick and dirty,” Karen decides to flee to marry her fiancé while Martha hangs herself. These two films illustrate how over the course of several decades and in different cultures (American and German), the acknowledgment of lesbian feeling in the girls’ boarding school setting frequently results in its reprobation.

Dorothy Bussy’s original 1949 text, *Olivia*, is peppered with clues that Olivia, the schoolgirl, knows that she should feel shame at her discovery about herself. In the introduction to the book, Olivia prefaces her story with what amounts to an *avertissement*, warning her readers that she writes to amuse herself and does so without regard to the feelings of others who were involved (7). She states that her love for Mlle Julie could not be characterized as a “school-girl crush” and that she “had an

9 It is worth pointing out yet another connection here: Colette was the translator of the subtitles for the French release of the film, entitled *Les jeunes filles en uniforme* in French.
uneasy feeling that [...] it was something to be ashamed of, something to hide desperately” (10). She exclaims, “[It is] a deep-rooted instinct, which all my life has kept me from any form of unveiling, which has forbidden me many of the purest physical pleasures and all literary expression” (11). In essence, the semi-autobiographical book is her coming out story, even though Bussy chooses to use the character Olivia’s name as her pen name for the novel, Olivia. Jacqueline Audry’s adaptation, however, borrows little, if any, of this explicit abashment from the book’s introduction. After the opening credits, for example, we merely see an excerpt from the novel’s introduction superimposed over the opening shot: “L’Amour a toujours été la grande affaire de ma vie...Que les Dieux m’accordent la grâce de ne pas avoir profané un pur, un adorable souvenir,” and the text is signed “OLIVIA.” This excerpt, without the accompanying acknowledgment of shame found in the novel, sets an entirely different tone for the film.

For Carrie Tarr, who notes that the original version of the film showed the words in unsubtitled English, the opening inscription acts as a means to distance French audiences from the narrative, pointing out that the film is a costume drama set in the past and deals with an English girl’s experience with homosexual feelings (“Ambivalent” 36). In this way, “the drama is safely confined to the realm of memory, nostalgia and ‘otherness’” (37). While the opening inscription, be it in unsubtitled English or in French, might indicate nostalgia of Olivia’s youth with the phrase, “un adorable souvenir,” the emphasis of the inscription rests on “L’Amour” as the central figure in Olivia’s life. It is
difficult, then, to cite the setting and genre of the film as intentional attempts at
distancing the audience from the subject matter because we see little trace of Bussy’s
“deep-rooted instinct” elsewhere in the film. Burch and Sellier have argued that, Julie
“[lutte] contre son désir pour ses jeunes élèves (non pas à cause de sa nature
homosexuelle, mais en raison de l’inégalité induite par sa place de pédagogue)” (249).
The reticence that Mlle Julie (Edwige Feuillère) has regarding her relationship with
Olivia (Marie-Claire Olivia) is portrayed as a transgression of the boundaries required of
the teacher-student relationship rather than as an explicit reprobation of homosexual
sentiment.

Certainly, the filmic reading of the introduction is not the least of the significant
adaptation choices made as they pertain to this analysis. The opening scene of the film
prefigures the importance of the addition of the character, Victoire (Yvonne de Bray).
Victoire is not found in the text; however, in the film she is the school’s cook. She often
acts as a voice of reason, pointing out truths about the goings-on at the school or
emphasizing the cultural and non-academic aspects of the girls’ formation. Early in the
film, she asserts to Signorina (Rina Rhéty) that she teaches them what to eat, which is
more important than any of the academic subjects that the students study. She has a
close friendship with the math teacher, Mlle Dubois (Suzanne Dehelly), another
character not mentioned in the book. Victoire takes great pleasure in cooking for the
school in general and for Mlle Dubois in particular. Mlle Dubois’ reputation as a
voracious eater is well-known to everyone in the school: one student calls her appetite a
“curiosité de la maison” and Victoire finishes Dubois’ account of a nightmare where she suffered from hunger while in Africa with a missionary by exclaiming, “alors vous dévoriez le missionnaire !” Victoire and Mlle Dubois share a privileged relationship that revolves around food – Mlle Dubois’ rather constant hunger is appeased by Victoire’s ever-present supply of food. Although it is never explicitly shown as anything more than friendship, their relationship is put into opposition with Julie and Cara’s relationship, which suggests that there is a deeper connection between the two women.

In several dining scenes, Julie and Cara find themselves at odds about what Cara is able to eat due to her myriad of health issues. Julie consistently tries to get Cara to eat something while Cara or Frau Riesner insist that Cara cannot tolerate the food in question. Furthermore, Cara’s distaste for food heightens in the scene where Julie asks Olivia her opinion of the dinner and offers her a seat next to her because of Olivia’s excellent response. Cara in turn gets extremely upset about a dish broken behind her and the late arrival of her special dinner. As Julie awkwardly tries to appease Cara, Frau Riesner comes over to calm her. Cara’s special dinner arrives from the kitchen, but Cara is too upset to eat it and flings it off her plate before storming out of the dining room.

Food, then, can be read as a stand-in for desire in this film. The desire between Julie and Cara grows awry, thanks to outside influences such as Olivia’s and Frau Riesner’s, while the desire shared by Mlle Dubois and Victoire is satisfying to each party.

Victoire, however, also serves another purpose in the film. The addition of Victoire harkens back to Audry’s own assertion about her work being a defense of
women both as human beings and in terms of their femininity, and it is through this lens that the addition of this character takes on added significance. Victoire plays a role that can be seen as one of the most typically feminine: she cooks for the school and also plays a nurturing role by taking care of Mlle Dubois. She not only assuages her physical hunger, she also acts as a companion. Several scenes show the two discussing students, classes and, problems, and Victoire offers insight or advice to Mlle Dubois. She is not at all sexualized or even particularly feminized in her appearance and she is neither an example of grace nor elegance. Though not particularly a maternal figure, Victoire’s femininity manifests itself almost exclusively in the taking care of others. At the same time, however, the addition of Victoire serves a different role in the opening scene of the film. In the novel, there is no special attention paid to Olivia’s arrival; however in the film, we see Victoire driving the carriage that takes Olivia to the school. As one of the first two characters to be shown on screen, Victoire’s presence in the scene is meaningful.

The opening shot of Victoire and Olivia riding in the carriage establishes an opposition between the two: the cook says Olivia’s name and declares that it is obviously English, but that it does not mean much. Conversely, when Olivia asks for her name, she proudly declaims, “Victoire! C’est ça un prénom!” Olivia asserts that she does not think that she would like to be called Victoire, to which the cook responds, “mais non, il faut des épaules,” and she likens herself to the replica of the statue of La Victoire kept in Mlle Julie’s library. The allusion to La Victoire de Samothrace in the film is not by
accident. The statue’s representation of the Greek goddess of Victory is marked by its theatrical style and grandeur (Astier). The statue was made during the Hellenistic period, which was characterized by a decline in the gender gap in Greek culture. Women had more opportunities for artistic expression during this period, and male and female roles became less distinct (Blundell 198-200). The allusion to La Victoire and the addition of Victoire the character suggest, as early as the first scene, that the question of victory and of being victorious will come into play during the film. The concept of “victory” takes on a special importance with respect to how femininity is treated in this film and questions surrounding whether or not a woman can be both victorious and feminine comes to light. The question of femininity, and its various manifestations, then, becomes central in this film.

Julie shows hints of ambiguity when it comes to the question of femininity. While she takes on a motherly quality with Olivia at times, given that Julie and Cara (Simone Simon) both know Olivia through her mother, Julie also prides herself on her tough, “victorious” exterior with respect to her emotions. She can be both nurturing and hard, but Julie is only ever presented physically in a feminized way (i.e. she only wears very feminine dresses). Moreover, Julie’s presence is seen by the girls as an object of admiration. The clearest example of the effect of Julie’s presence is in the scene where Olivia arrives at the school to see Julie entering the grand hallway via a large staircase. This space in which the two meet for the first time is divided by two sets of double doors, one through which Olivia enters downstairs and one through which Julie enters
upstairs. We see the room from the outside via a tracking shot that follows Olivia with Frau Riesener (Lesly Meynard) as they enter the room. Olivia looks at the staircase, which we see in reverse shot. Julie enters the room after attending to the last detail of her ensemble, putting on her gloves. As Julie starts her descent, we hear the voices of several school children exclaiming “La voilà! La voilà!” Julie’s arrival in the room stirs awe in the children and they stare at her as she descends the stairs. She is a spectacle of femininity and authority for the students and for the spectator (Tarr, “Ambivalent” 38). Julie makes comments to certain individuals, questioning their dreamy or thoughtful expressions. Yet when Julie reaches the last step, she glimpses Olivia who had been watching her and she pauses herself to gaze, almost dreamily, at Olivia.

As Julie steps off the landing, the camera cuts to a long shot of Olivia standing near the entranceway. Julie crosses to her as Signorina follows, and the camera crosses the 180 degree line to show the three in a medium shot. The camera slowly zooms in to effectively crop out Signorina, as if to foreshadow that Olivia will take Signorina’s place as Julie’s favorite. In this first meeting, Julie asks Olivia if she remembers the novel that Julie gave her when she was young and Olivia enthusiastically answers that it was Les Malheurs de Sophie.10 The scene continues with a shot of the other girls who gather on the staircase to watch their new classmate and their headmistress and to speculate as to whether or not Olivia will join the “Julie” camp. The camera cuts back to Julie, Olivia, and Signorina, as the spectator’s view of the three women is framed by the backs of the

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10 The book references Les Malheurs de Sophie as well; however, in the context of the film, this remark might also act as a self-referential nod to Audry’s first full-length film.
heads of the girls on the stairs. Finally, we see a shot of Julie exiting through the same doors that Olivia entered before the girls run upstairs to help Olivia settle in.

The camera’s crossing of the 180 degree line before Julie leaves the room can be read as a transitional point where Julie and Olivia establish their piqued mutual interest. There is a kind of reciprocity in the way Julie and Olivia occupy the space of the hallway, yet the two are shown as opposites, which serves to suggest that one complements the other. Each enters via a double door and moves through the space in the same, if opposite way: Julie descends the stairs as the camera follows her and Olivia ascends the stairs later with the camera following her reverse (i.e. opposite) movement. In this way, both Julie and Olivia occupy similar and opposite positions in the room and, ultimately, the position of object and subject of each other’s desire.

Jennifer Flock notes the obstacles that Audry faced in articulating the female look on film by explaining the significance of the traditional masculine look of the cinema as elucidated by Laura Mulvey. Though Flock’s assertions concerning Audry’s reworking of the structures of the look are in reference to her adaptations of Colette’s novels, they apply equally to Olivia. Flock contends that Audry was one of the very few French directors to explore the tension between woman as object and woman as subject on screen (54). Given the way that camera work functions with respect to emotion in Olivia, the relationship between look and desire does not limit itself to the spectacle of woman as object. The camera work suggests that Julie and Olivia

11 See her article, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” for an explanation of the psychological underpinnings of desire as it has traditionally manifested itself on screen.
complement each other, and their mutual desire, as they gaze upon each other, finds its roots in admiration for each other. At the same time that Olivia’s admiration for Julie is piqued by her presence, Julie’s admiration for Olivia is piqued by, perhaps her beauty, but also by Olivia’s recollection and appreciation of the novel Julie bought for her. As is illustrated in several moments of the film, intelligence plays the largest role in the evocation of Julie’s desire.

In the first scene with Mlle Cara, we see an exchange that marks the importance of intelligence as an attractive attribute for Julie and for Olivia. Cara tells Mimi (Marina de Berg) to get the photo album out for Olivia. As they flip through it, Cara discusses the fashion of the early years of the school and points herself out to Olivia. Olivia takes an interest in Laura’s (Elly Norden) picture, stating, “j’aime son regard.” That is, Olivia is able to sense what makes Laura special for Julie, as we learn later that Laura was the favorite of all her favorites. Cara responds, “Je la trouve franchement laide... sans grâce, sans élégance... intelligente, oui,” minimizing the importance of her intelligence while insisting that her other, more feminine attributes, are lacking. The other students are aware that Olivia’s intelligence is also a factor in Julie’s interest in her. For example, after two girls take Olivia to the library to peruse the books that she is allowed to read and even take into her room or to the garden, Mimi and Georgie (Tania Soucault) press her about her preference for Mlle Julie or Mlle Cara. Mimi asks her if she is intelligent and a good student, while Georgie, leaning in mischievously, knowing that Olivia will become a “Julie-iste” insists that, “Olivia est sûrement intelligente,” implying that she...
knows that Mlle Julie would not take such an interest in her if she were not intelligent.

Finally, the scene where Olivia listens to Julie’s reading is the prime example of the link between attraction and intelligence for the two. Julie invites Olivia to sit next to her because she answers the questions about Andromaque so well, while Olivia’s rapt attention of her reading is what ignites her passion for Julie. Olivia’s attraction to Julie is emphasized with lighting, and we see that Julie’s reading of the poem, coupled with her grace and beauty, serve to fuel Olivia’s desire.

Intelligence and femininity co-exist in this film and often go hand in hand. Elaine Burrows’ analysis of the film focuses on the role of intelligence for Audry in her films. She notes that Audry shows women as a part of society that is usually ignored, and she emphasizes Audry’s view that education, or lack thereof, is the major factor that leads to inequality between the sexes and that women who have access to education are able to do as well as men in any arena (24-25). As intelligence and education are key factors in Olivia, intelligence is placed in opposition to beauty in terms of what attracts Mlle Julie to her favorite students. This becomes apparent in the ballroom dance scene during the Christmas party.

The Christmas dance scene is significant to this discussion on several levels in that it can be read as an all-female take on the Belle Époque ballroom scene that Sellier sees as one of the few permissible places where a female perspective on male-female relationships can be examined (Sellier, “Belle Époque” 48). In this case, however, Audry succeeds in creating a space in which to examine female-female relationships in a
variety of incarnations. For some scholars, the scene is a disappointment in the film. Carrie Tarr, for example, states that the scene “ought to be a climactic point in the drama, giving full expression to the film’s excesses, paralleling the set-piece ball scenes which are typical of the costume drama” (40). Although the scene does lack the unrestrained, often chaotic quality of the typical ballroom scene, it offers more than just a bland tone. Audry succeeds in playing with the complex structures of desire on the screen and in inviting her spectators to partake of this game. The scene opens with four pairs of girls who dance in costumes for everyone in the room, but for Julie and Cara specifically. It is in this way that the female dancers slide between positions of desiring and being desired and are able to occupy different gender positions during the dance. In each couple, one girl is dressed as a man and one is dressed as a woman. Georgie, for example, is dressed in a theatricalized, masculine outfit that emphasizes her shoulders, giving her the appearance of being more masculine than Olivia and several other girls in the scene. Georgie’s masculinized look is toned down from the novel, however, in which she wears a false moustache and beard to the dance (80). When the couples finish their performance, Cécile (Nadine Olivier) strolls out onto the dance floor, alone, in a large draping dress that resembles the American flag. Julie is quite taken with her beauty and exclaims, “Cécile, vous êtes une radieuse beauté!” Signorina mocks her choice, though, because she knows that Cécile is known for her beauty and not for her brain and asks her if she came up with the idea all by herself. Cécile replies, with a particularly strong
American accent, “Oui, j’ai beaucoup pensé,” highlighting the fact that intelligence is not Cécile’s strong suit.

Julie and Cara then open the ball by dancing with each other, Julie dressed in black and Cara in a very similar style of dress, but white. The visual effect of the two women dancing together in this way creates an opposition similar to the one shared by Olivia and Julie when Olivia arrives at the school and highlights Julie as the central desiring force in the room. The girls then join Julie and Cara, and dance couples are, for the most part, paired off as couples with a masculine and feminine dance partner, which provides the girls the capacity to occupy both positions of desirer and desired. Georgie, for example, when she appears in the dance scene, kisses the hand of her partner. Because of her health problems, Cara must leave the dance floor, but, rather than help Cara herself, Julie’s attention is drawn to Cécile’s beauty. Julie compliments her dress and succumbs to her desire to kiss the back of her neck. Composing herself, she moves over to Olivia, asking her if she is “jalousie d’autant de beauté.” It is during this exchange that Julie lists the traits other than beauty that Olivia possesses, yet focuses on the physical attributes that please her: “un joli regard, une jolie bouche, un joli corps, et beaucoup de grâce.” Julie does not mention intelligence here, which is significant given that Julie has just kissed one of her students and tells another that she would kiss her if she could get through the veils of her costume. Julie later comes to her senses, and beauty and physical attributes are once more subjugated by reason and intelligence.
It is in this context that I read Julie’s address to Olivia about being “victorious” near the end of the film as a commentary on the triumph of reason over emotion and sentiment, rather than a denunciation of homosexual feeling. For Lucille Cairns, the choice of words indicates that, “lesbianism is connoted as dangerously destructive at the very end of the film” (122). She supports this assertion by noting that each headmistress is punished at the end. Cara is punished with death, while Julie is forced to leave the school and start anew in Canada. Carrie Tarr sees the speech as an ambiguous reference to Julie’s drive to suppress her attraction to women or perhaps only as an acknowledgment that the relationships she has with her students cross boundaries. She asks, “Does she [Julie] implicitly accept a view of her sexuality as deviant or perverse, or does she simply recognise that she must not abuse her power as an adult?” (41). While both of these conclusions can be supported in the film text, I believe that it is necessary to consider the meaning of Julie’s words with respect to changes from the literary text when looking at the film as a reading of the novel. As I have argued earlier, the film does not give explicit judgments about homosexual sentiment. Julie and Cara’s love, though faded, is portrayed without judgment. When Cara dies, Julie asserts that Cara was her friend, but uses the word “amie,” which can convey both the meaning of friend and lover. She then says that Cara was the “seule être au monde que j’aimais vraiment.” Love, then, is not conceived of in terms of sex or gender, but rather as something that happens between two “êtres.” Moreover, the film’s version of Mlle Julie’s ending is far more forgiving than the novel’s. In the film, we know that Julie will travel to Canada, but
learn no more of her fate. The novel ends with a letter from Signorina to Olivia to inform her of Julie’s death. If we are to read death as punishment, then Julie is spared the punishment of death in the film.

Jacqueline Audry’s Olivia performs a particularly delicate tightrope walk, negotiating the proverbial terrain between the creation of a popular form of cinema and the expression of female liberties and transgressions in a rigid society. Critics of the 50s bemoaned the style and genre of Audry’s film because it is a Quality film. Its emphasis on aesthetics and dialogues and its adhesion to production values rendered the film unfit for examination for years. Contemporary critics have succeeded in looking past the taboo of the Tradition of Quality, yet they have a tendency to read the film in terms of modern conceptualizations of sexuality and gender expression. Rereading the film in terms of aesthetic and adaptation choices provides a clearer framework through which to understand the complexities of the film text, particularly given its status as a Tradition of Quality film and as a film made by a woman. In this way, Olivia emerges as a compelling example of the intricate structures surrounding the various forms of expression of female gender and sexuality.

2.2 Hell Is Where the Heart Is: Manifestations of the Look in Huis clos

Audry adapted Jean-Paul Sartre’s Huis clos in 1954, leaving, for the time being, the confines of the Belle Époque genre and what Paule Lejeune sees as the “épithètes
aimablement réductrices dont elle n’a cessé d’être couverte par les critiques et les historiens du cinéma : ‘Tableaux charmants...situations douteuses à peine effleurées... Ouvrage[s] de dame’ (60). She left the genre in favor of undertaking a more dangerous theme (Ford 105). Indeed, adapting a play set in hell by the master of existentialism is, without a doubt, quite a different undertaking than filming a costume drama. Ford notes that Audry did not attract as much of an audience with *Huis clos* as she did with her Belle Époque adaptations, however, and she returned to this mainstay for her following film, *Mitsou* (1956), which was adapted again from a Colette novel (106). *Huis clos* offers a particularly appropriate point of reference for a discussion of Audry’s adaptation choices in that the film is neither a costume drama nor a comedy – the two genres to which women filmmakers were most often relegated (Tarr, “Liberation” 107). Like *Olivia*, *Huis clos* engages questions concerning female sexuality and challenges the view of the object/subject relationship between women on the film screen. As there has been relatively little scholarly work done on this film to date, the goal of this analysis is to open up a discussion about the aesthetic and adaptation choices made in this film with respect to their implications in terms of female sexuality and gender.

Jean-Paul Sartre lived between 1905 and 1980 and was the best-known philosopher of the twentieth century. He was also known as the father of Existentialism. He wrote his play *Huis clos* in 1944 and it was put on for the first time in May of 1944 at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier. The play opens with a valet who leads a man, Joseph Garcin, to a room that he will occupy in hell. The tawdry room has no windows or
mirrors and is only furnished with three couches, an ugly bronze statue and random objects like a paper weight. The style is “second Empire,” which means that they are ornate, but factory-made and typically bourgeois. Garcin asks many questions about things like toothbrushes and sleeping, only to discover that he will have no need of these things in hell. Two more people eventually join him, Inès Serrrano and Estelle Rigault, and they speculate and lie to each other about why they have ended up in hell. The three can hear conversations of people on Earth so long as the conversations are about one of the three in the room. When the living people finally forget about the three, they are no longer able to hear anything and only have one another to talk to. They discover the real reason for which each one was sent to hell, and they eventually come to realize that there is no torturer provided for them in hell. The other two act as the torturers for each one. They try in vain to kill or get away from each other, only to find that they cannot. This play is the source of the famous line, “L’enfer, c’est les autres.”

Much like Olivia, the film Huis clos starts with a sort of avertissement alerting the spectator that the film is set in hell, “tel que le conçoit Jean-Paul Sartre,” thus implying that the film would be a rather “faithful” adaptation of the play. One review of the film contends that, “Pierre Laroche’s screenplay unnecessarily ‘opens up’ the play, adding four more characters and several sequences in the ‘real’ world” (Erickson). Certainly, the question of fidelity comes up in relationship to this film, not only because of the on-screen affirmation before the film actually starts that it portrays Sartre’s view of hell,
but also because the film came out the same year that Truffaut’s “Une certaine tendance” was published. Robert Stam’s chapter on the theory of adaptation accentuates the move away from the notion of fidelity in studies of adaptations, noting that the differences in the two media should highlight the “undesirability” of literal adaptations (17). Stam emphasizes the value of the various incarnations of “intertextuality” as they concern film adaptation (26-27) and discusses the use of comparative narratology to ask questions about the additions, eliminations, and changes made in filmic adaptations (34). Rather than look at the film adaptation changes as “unnecessary,” this discussion intends to examine them as aspects of Audry’s cinematic reading and to explore how the changes serve to comment on and challenge notions concerning femininity and the female gaze.

The opening shot of the film is that of a large empty freight elevator with an attendant standing next to it. As people file in, the camera zooms in to a medium shot of Garcin (Franck Villard) and a young girl (Isabelle Pia) whom we watch as the elevator descends. The credits play over this shot and we hear a mechanical sound that gives the effect that the elevator penetrates deeply downward before arriving at its destination. While the young girl is the only person in the elevator to scream that she does not want to exit the elevator, it is evident that they are all fully aware that they are in hell. The collection of people is varied, including a general (Jean Debucourt), an old woman (Suzanne Dehelly), and a priest, suggesting contradictions to preconceived notions about who might go to hell after death. As the scene progresses, we see that the people
use very human strategies in trying either to get out of hell or to paint a better picture of themselves. The general, who balks at being the first to exit the elevator, later boasts about his war victories. The old woman tries to bribe the man behind the desk, a move whose futility is marked by the burning of her Louis d’Or on the floor. Several people insist that they are there by mistake before the receptionist behind the desk asserts that any error will be rectified: “nous avons tout le temps.”

The first scene offers the spectator a useful starting point for one major theme of the film concerning human tendencies towards pride and artifice. It deals with the image that humans project and the lies we tell ourselves and others in order to maintain a good reputation. In this scene, we see small contradictions between these lies and their realities and how they play out. For example, the first man to approach the desk fills out his form without mentioning his occupation. The man behind the desk tells him to put the truth, that he was a pimp. When he objects to the implication that he was a pimp, the man behind the desk points out that there is no reason for artifice, “à l’endroit où nous sommes.” The first scene also sets off the three main characters in that both Estelle (Gaby Sylvia) and Garcin make some kind of attempt to leave hell. Garcin tries a physical means – to leave through the revolving doors, which carry him back into the building, despite the fact that the bellboy assured him that “tous nos clients sont libres.” Estelle is one of the people who appeal to the man behind the counter, insisting that she was the victim of an error. A psychological appeal works no better than Garcin’s physical attempt, and both remain. Inès (Arletty) is the only one of
the three to accept her situation in the first scene. Furthermore, she is the first to admit to the other two main characters the truth as to why she is in hell.

This special status for Inès as the only one of the three main characters who makes any real attempt at being honest with herself and with the others sets her apart from the other two. Lucille Cairns notes that Inès “is the least steeped in bad faith; in fact, if anything, she displays remarkable honesty and self-consistency, however unappealing the majority may find her feminine atypicality (hatred of children as well as men)” (24). The question of Inès’ femininity creates an opposition between her and Estelle, who exhibits a sort of hyper-femininity with her clothing, jewels, fur, and attitudes towards Garcin and how much value she places on his attention. This opposition between the two can be read as a commentary on Audry’s attitudes concerning the construction of femininity and in light of her assertion about the defense of Woman. Inès’s femininity is treated in a very complicated way in the film. Estelle asserts several times that because Inès is a woman, “elle ne compte pas,” in reference to Inès’ attraction to her. Also, later in the film, Estelle complains that the other two should not use such impolite language with her, citing that she is a woman. Garcin asks if Inès is a woman too and both Garcin and Inès indicate that they are not sure. In this way, Inès is positioned somewhere between male and female and is presented as highly ambiguous. By extension, though, Inès is, in several ways, the most genuine of the three, which indicates that Estelle’s constructed femininity can be read as a negative.
The opposition between the two women also accentuates questions concerning Inès’ homosexuality. The fact that she is a lesbian is certainly acknowledged in both the play and the film, but the play does not pass judgment on it in any real capacity. Inès, after she tells the other two that she was a “femme damnée” on Earth, continues to paint the picture of how she tormented Florence, thus giving an explanation for her damnation. In the film, though, Inès gives no further indication that she did anything wrong. She simply states that because she was a “femme damnée,” it was not a big surprise that she went to hell. However, whereas Garcin victimized his wife and betrayed his compatriots and Estelle killed her baby and caused her lover’s suicide, in the film, Inès’ only victim was herself (Burrows 25). In this way, Inès is portrayed in less negative terms than the other two because she did not hurt anyone else while she was on Earth. The question about the way homosexuality is treated in the film, though, is the center of some debate. Cairns points out that Inès’ exclamation that, “c’est vous les plus forts” when Estelle and Garcin threaten to make love in front of her, “may evince despair about homosexual love, [but] it also reflects lucidity about her subject-positioning in her particular historical context” (24). Alain Brassart also recognizes a stereotype concerning the “droit chemin” concerning lesbian love: “le personnage de lesbienne qu’incarne Arletty apprend, en enfer, que son amie est toujours en vie après un suicide raté et qu’elle est tombée amoureuse d’un homme” (261). Although both assertions point very correctly to tendencies in film and literature to dictate “le droit chemin” for women, it is also necessary to take into account that Inès is in hell. What
better punishment for a damned lesbian is there than the knowledge that her former lover falls in love with a man and that she is to spend eternity in a room with heterosexuals who might fornicate at any moment? These two details can easily be read in terms of their effectiveness as punishment rather than an indication of an admonishment of homosexuality.

The opposition between Inès and Estelle also functions as the site of another significant question concerning feminine roles. In both the play and the film, Inès offers to be Estelle’s mirror since she cannot look into a real one. In the film, Inès invites Estelle over to her couch and coaches her on the application of her lipstick. Their relationship in terms of object and subject is evoked through a series of close-ups of each woman and then a medium shot of the two together as Inès teases her about a blemish on her face. Estelle beseeches Inès to refrain from being cruel with her and asks Garcin to look at her instead, which causes Inès to scream at Garcin for Estelle’s interest in him. Inès attempts to position herself as the subject of a gaze directed at Estelle, while Estelle squirms at this attempt and longs for Garcin’s withheld gaze. For both women, the position that they desire to occupy is denied to them by the others and they constantly reposition themselves to try to get what they want, without success.

In addition to Inès’ symbolic mirror, the physical mirror serves a particular role in both the play and the film. While the play creates an environment in which the characters have no access to mirrors, the film deals with the mirror question on an entirely different level. When Garcin arrives in the room, he asks the litany of questions...
that the garçon expects, including questions about the torturer and toothbrushes. He then runs over to the mirror at one end of the room and finds that neither he nor the garçon are reflected in it and the garçon asks, “Qu’est-ce que vous voulez voir si on n’existe plus?” Garcin asks the garçon why they would put a mirror in the room if they cannot see their reflections, to which le garçon responds, “pour faire joli.” The film here takes an important departure from the play. In the play, there are no mirrors in the room and the garçon does not have eyelids, which is the source of great anguish for Garcin: “Nous, nous battions des paupières. Un clin d’oeil ça s’appelait... Vous ne pouvez pas savoir combien c'était rafraîchissant. Quatre mille repos dans une heure” (Sartre 17-8). Furthermore, in the play, the three criminals have the ability to see and must continually see without interruption. In the film, however, they must “live” without interruption, yet they are removed from the possibility of making a projection/reflection in the mirror themselves. This not only emphasizes the fact that they no longer exist; it also accentuates their inability to position themselves effectively in the object-subject relationship, which is, as I will argue, at the root of their torment.

The mirror is not the only symbol of looking treated in the film. Unlike in the play, the three main characters in the film have a window that shows them what is happening on Earth. In the same way that the three are blocked in various capacities from gaining pleasure or power from the act of looking in mirrors, the window separates them as lookers/subjects from gaining pleasure or power from the objects in the window. The window is, for all practical purposes, a movie screen on which the
characters watch the goings-on on Earth. I read the scenes involving the window as a type of allusion to watching a film, an allusion the garçon affirms when he announces that the “deuxième séance” is going to start or when Inès and Garcin turn one of the couches around to watch the screen and the garçon says that it is like at the cinema. The effect of watching, though, is not the same for them as what a spectator experiences at the cinema. Inès’ first and second viewing of Florence, for example, illustrates this difference.

The first time Inès watches Florence from hell, she tries to incite her to throw herself out the window so that she can join her in hell. Florence instead goes to the window to throw a tip to the musician. The window is how which Florence sees life outside, unlike the projector-esque window/screen through which Inès sees Florence. Florence then smiles at the musician and Inès tells her that, “je ne veux pas que tu sourisses sans moi.” Florence goes back to her vanity and looks at herself in the mirror. We see that she has a reflection and she starts to brush her hair. Inès complains, “je ne veux pas que tu sois jolie sans moi.” Rather than giving Inès pleasure, the act of looking serves to augment Inès’ sense of separation from Florence and from life. When Inès watches Florence the second time, she hears music and states, “ah, ça, c’est pour moi.” She crosses to the window and peeks through the curtains as if she were illicitly spying on her. When she sees that someone has given her flowers, Inès throws open the curtains and the camera cuts to Florence who then reaches for a picture of Inès.

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12 One might also read the screen as a metaphor for a television screen on which the three main characters view and intrude upon the private lives of those still living on Earth.
Florence looks at the picture and then hides it under a bed before her husband walks into the room to take her with him. Inès comments during the entire scene, pleading with her not to hide the picture and not to go with him. Her insistence increases as Florence moves out the door and gets into a cab. As it drives away, Inès is on the floor in the room, screaming that “tu le suis parce qu’il est un homme.” Though the object of her gaze does exude what Mulvey calls a state of “to-be-looked-at-ness” (67), Inès is not able to engage in scopophilia or narcissistic identification. I read Inès in terms of the traditional masculine look in Mulvey’s assessment. If I were focusing on desire, I would focus on Teresa de Lauretis’ or Mary Ann Doane’s work on female and lesbian desire on screen. I choose Mulvey’s explanation of the look to illustrate the traditional structures of the subject/object relationship and to highlight that Inès takes no pleasure from looking at Florence. Though fascinated, she gets no real pleasure from the act of looking. Estelle and Garcin have similar reactions to the images they see. Instead of filmic images that please them, they are shown images that torment them. Yet when the image is gone, or worse, when the window turns into a brick wall – an occurrence marked by the garçon’s comment that “c’est fini le cinéma” – their inability to look causes more grief than looking at the unpleasant images did.

When the window/screen turns into a brick wall after Garcin’s wife dies, the last of the people on Earth who cared about the three in the room in hell stops thinking about them. The garçon’s comment about the wall highlights the fact that the cinema of life that continues on without them on Earth is over for them and that their existences
are now limited only to what goes on in the room. The three continue to torture one another: Garcin tries to convince Inès that he is not a coward while Inès insists that he is a coward because she wants him to be. Estelle suggests that he avenge her comments by kissing her in front of Inès. Inès then watches them, looks at them, and exclaims, “Je vous vois!” The camera cuts from a shot of all three of them to a close up of Inès as she exclaims again, “Je vous vois! Et moi seule, je suis une foule!” Garcin is highly aware of the power of Inès’ look. As he mulls over how everything in hell has been foreseen for them, he complains, “Tous ces regards autour de moi! Tous ces regards... mais, vous n’êtes que deux.”

Garcin’s complaints about Inès and Estelle watching him suggest a significant reversal of the power associated with the look in this film. While the women’s looks are not privileged – each person in hell has this same power to look and to torment the other two – the spectator is left with evidence of the power of the women’s looks at the end of the film, rather than that of Garcin’s. In what is perhaps a rather ironic way, the constant requirement that each person look and observe without pause and the rupture of the power and pleasure normally derived from looking cause an equilibrium in the power structures between the individual members inhabiting the room. Since the film ends with an emphasis on the effect of the women’s looks on Garcin, the ending can be read as emphasizing the equal footing that the women have concerning the power – or lack thereof – of the look in this context. Given Inès’s status as ambiguously placed somewhere between male and female, it is significant that both women constitute the
barrage of looks that Garcin feels at the end. Both feminine and masculine feminine looks have an effect on this man.

Both *Olivia* and *Huis clos* portray a world in which the attributes of the “real” world are circumvented by different sets of rules. The world portrayed in *Olivia* is one that is virtually free of men and that incarnates the “monde au féminin” that Lejeune discusses to its highest extent to allow for multiple expressions of gender as well as an alternative expression of female sexuality. *Huis clos* does not exclude men, but it does not privilege men either. Each sex is equally treated, as is any spot on the continuum of gender expression, in the film. Female homosexuality in both films is essentially downplayed and portrayed as either normal or at least unworthy of special comment. Such a representation of female sexuality and gender is decidedly unexpected in French adaptations of the 1950s, and it is certainly for this reason that Audry’s work has been ignored for so long. Yet as Ford has so aptly pointed out, “[Audry] doit être considérée comme *la* cinéaste française de l’après-guerre” (109). The role of women in French society was in severe flux after the war, and Jacqueline Audry created films that captured this conflict and challenged traditional modes of thinking about the roles and positions that women could occupy. More importantly, though, Audry’s adaptations are the result of her struggle to create films in an environment that was hostile towards women and are films that open up the possibility for discussion about the complex interplay of the relationships that women engage in the structures of a patriarchal society.
Chapter 3

Gender and Subversion in Jacqueline Audry’s La Garçonne and Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon

In the late 1950s, Jacqueline Audry’s adaptations included two films that deal with questions concerning alternative expressions of gender for women: La Garçonne (1957) and Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon (1959). Unlike her adaptations of Colette’s novels or Olivia (1951) and Huis clos (1954), which focus primarily on female characters who test the limits of their subjugation mainly through aims at sexual or economic empowerment, these two films raise questions that bring to the forefront the link between women’s gender expression and female emancipation. These two films stand out in her oeuvre because female gender expression is treated in a way that was highly uncommon in France in the 1950s and is still rather uncommon today. By offering radically challenging views of what Audry had become known for – her views into “le monde au féminin” (Lejeune 60) – these two films hold a privileged place in Audry’s reflection on the place of women in contemporary French society. In creating and representing worlds in which gender divisions are blurred, transgressed, and subverted, Jacqueline Audry is able to explore and test the limits of the roles afforded to women by traditionalist views of gender.
To frame adequately an analysis of the role of gender expression in these two films, it is helpful to contextualize this discussion in the discourse of Gender Studies. One of the first theorists to conceptualize gender as a social construction separate from biological sex was Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 with her *Le deuxième sexe*. In it, she situates the concept of gender difference as a construction that stems from male domination of women. Beauvoir contends that “on ne naît pas femme : on le devient” (v.2, 13). This phrase captures the notion that women are conceived of only in terms of Man’s Other. For Beauvoir, then, the key to curtailing male domination is in combatting these notions of oppositions, which position women as subordinate to men. Beauvoir also calls for women’s autonomy through economic independence, which would liberate them from men’s ascendancy.

Theorists after *Le deuxième sexe* continued to reconsider and problematize gender in terms of societal constructions as well as the effects of biological sex on the experience of gender. In 1990, Judith Butler wrote the best-known and most groundbreaking work on gender as a notion of performance, *Gender Trouble*. Rather than focus sharply on the social construction of gender, as did Simone de Beauvoir in *Le deuxième sexe*, Butler situates gender performance within the constraints of a “sexed” body (16-17). The book takes as its point of departure the notion that feminism erroneously attempted to categorize all women as a cohesive group with common traits and goals. Butler argues that the effect of this lumping together of all women is a reinforcement of the gender binary. Even in terms of feminism, woman is seen as a universal concept that
therefore effaces any possibility for difference, for example, in terms of race, sexuality or class (4). Each of these views points to the notion of essentialism with respect to gender, and Butler challenges this link as well as the conceptualization of gender as being a purely socially constructed phenomenon. She notes that, “sex appears within hegemonic language as *substance*, as, metaphysically speaking, a self-identical being [...] achieved through a twist of language and/or discourse that conceals the fact that “being” a sex or a gender is fundamentally impossible” (18-19). In an essay further examining gender construction and performance, Butler focuses her analysis of gender on its performative aspects as form of *corporeal style* (“Performative Acts” 521-22). She argues that it is not possible to be a gender or have a true gender identity because we do not, in fact, have true subjectivity with respect to our gendered actions. Rather, our perceived subjectivity is a construct stemming from the eternalized social norms that have been attributed to gender. It is the act of repetitively performing the gender that normalizes and perpetuates ideologies of gender and legitimizes hegemonic codes (524).

Pierre Bourdieu’s work shares some parallels with Butler’s consideration of gender and reframes them in terms of how the repetition of gender performance perpetuates male domination. Bourdieu uses his conceptualization of the *habitus*, which describes the relationship between the actions of an individual and his/her socialization, to explain the relationship of power between men and women in terms of the domination of women by men throughout history. Thus, his arguments fall between
Beauvoir’s concept of social construction of gender difference and Butler’s focus on a “sexed” body that performs a gender. Bourdieu’s conception of violence symbolique serves to explain the perpetuation of masculine domination of women in that it describes not only the domination by men, but also the acceptance of the perceived truths about the natural order of things by women (39). While men must prove their virility through macho games such as fighting in wars, women are expected to be and, consequently, are attracted to men who are successful at these games (87). While men’s existences are governed by this proving of virility, women are relegated to “l’expérience universelle du corps-pour-autrui” (70) in that they exist by and for the look of others (i.e. men). Bourdieu contends, then, that “la prétendue ‘féminité’ n’est souvent pas autre chose qu’une forme de complaisance à l’égard des attentes masculines” (73). This system is perpetuated by hierarchical structures in society, such as the Church, the State, School, and the Family, and it is in this way that women participate in their own domination (90).

Both Butler and Bourdieu present models of how gender difference is perceived and naturalized based on sexual difference, specifically as it relates to heterosexual and heteronormative roles and models. While Butler contends that the performative acts of “doing” gender are reflections of social and cultural norms and expectations, Bourdieu asserts that it is the repetition of these acts and behaviors that are part of these cultural and social norms that perpetuate masculine domination. Although both theorists acknowledge the social aspect of gender difference, critics have more recently argued
that the social aspect of gender needs further investigation. Stevi Jackson, for example, attempts to synthesize the various facets of Gender Studies and Queer Theory to propose that work done so far on gender does not adequately take into account the importance of the social in its analyses, particularly with respect to the structures of heterosexuality. Jackson shows how gender acts as a social and cultural division and how this type of division differs from sexuality, which is generally taken to mean the hetero-homo binary, and from heterosexuality, which she sees as a highly ordered institution that encompasses a whole range of sexual acts, desires, and identities that intermingle with non-sexual structures to produce normativity (52). Jackson demonstrates how the intersections among gender, sexuality, and heterosexuality are often blurred and advocates a rethinking of how gender is conceived with respect to the self. She contends that the constant process of reflexivity shapes and re-shapes our perception of present and past events. The way that we make sense of our surroundings and of our selves is determined by our cultural and social interaction and by our (highly reflexive) perceptions of these interactions (55). The primacy of social structures and everyday social practices reinforces and re-inscribes the gender division that is ascribed to individuals from birth.

As a social division, gender encompasses more than sexuality, which Jackson dubs a “sphere of social life, like any other (such as work, for example) and like any other it overlaps and interconnects with other areas of the social (including work) and like any other it is thoroughly gendered” (56-57). Gender difference and differences,
then, situate themselves along a sliding scale of gender division; one that allows for fluidity but that also continually reestablishes itself as a cultural and social division, wherein difference continues to exist even if the substance of difference changes. That is, while perceptions of gender difference constantly evolve to include different aspects and identities, the notion that difference exists remains constant (57). It is with respect to this notion of a gender division that influences all spheres of social life that I situate my analyses of Audry’s two films, *La Garçonne* and *Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon*. As I have indicated in Chapter 1, the French concept of and obsession with “woman” vs. “man” and “male” vs. “female” highly influence many French social and cultural spheres. My goal, then, is to discern why Audry’s adaptations of these two works at this moment in history were significant in the face of the French collective imagination concerning women’s place in society.

3.1 Post-War Anxieties and Unease: *La Garçonne* as Social Marker

In 1922 Victor Margueritte published the novel *La Garçonne*, which tells the story of Monique Lerbier, the daughter of a bourgeois couple during the early part of the 20th century. Monique’s father is an inventor whose business is in decline after the War, despite his having made a promising invention, and her mother is a society woman who prefers parties and her social life to the duties of motherhood. Monique spends her early years and adolescence in the Midi with her Tante Sylvestre, due to an illness, and
attends school at an all-girls pension before moving back to Paris in her late teenage years. Her education affords Monique a great appreciation for complete integrity and a straight-forward sense of honesty in her future relationships. She gets engaged to Lucien Vigneret, who forgoes a dowry so as to become her father’s business partner once the marriage is concluded. Lucien’s money will be the capital needed to save the Lerbier family business from financial ruin and Lucien will benefit from exploiting M. Lerbier’s invention. Monique’s love for Lucien, however, is not diminished when she learns of the business transaction that is to take place along with the marriage. Monique continues to love Lucien completely, despite receiving an anonymous letter warning her of his infidelity, until she catches him with his mistress at a restaurant. She breaks off the engagement and runs out of the restaurant to take a cab home. She shares a cab with a man that she meets in the street and they end up sleeping together. The next day, she tells her mother about the incident and her mother in turn tells her father. Monique’s father tells her that she must forgive Lucien and marry him and insists that her actions were much more egregious than his. Monique cannot bear this double standard and breaks off the engagement with Lucien. Monique’s father disowns her, but we later learn that the business merger goes on without her. Monique resolves to move in with Tante Sylvestre, as she can no longer stay with her parents. Tante Sylvestre, however, is struck down by a car and is killed, leaving Monique the sum of her fortune as an inheritance.
Monique moves out of her parents’ house and opens her own design business. Monique’s designs are used very frequently in Edgar Lair’s theater productions, which gives her work a lot of exposure. Soon, Monique is the owner of a thriving design company. She spends her evenings in jazz and dance clubs, rubbing elbows with the Parisian artistic elite. She dyes and cuts her hair short and starts a relationship with Niquette, a bisexual music-hall star who also sports a garçonne look. Characterized by a short haircut and a straight-cut chemise dress, the look was spurred on by fashion moguls such as Chanel and Patou in the early to mid-1920s (Medes & Haye 62). The garçonne look was synonymous with the jeune fille look and was, “a youthful, boyish style which, because it demanded a pre-pubescent figure, brought about a drastic change in the desirable fashionable physique and provoked a flurry of adjectives such as ‘slender,’ ‘svelte,’ and ‘sleek’ on the fashion pages” (59). Clothing à la garçonne lent itself to both mass production in standard sizes and home fabrication because the dresses were loose-fitting and patterns were easy to make (74). The emphasis on youth and the relative ease with which the style was propagated were the seeds of the look’s popularity.

When Niquette and Monique tire of each other, Monique begins a torrid affair with Peer Rys, a male nude dancer. She eventually decides that she wants to have a child with him, yet she discovers that she is barren. She falls into a depression over her inability to have a child and begins to smoke opium and use cocaine to an ever increasing extent. When she becomes reacquainted with an old friend, Régis Boisselot,
she begins to pull herself out of her depression by sharing open and honest conversations about her past with him. A spark of attraction ignites a romance between them and Régis convinces Monique to stop using drugs. Yet, Régis’ jealousy over Monique’s past flares up at every reminder of her former life. When the couple socializes with their circle of friends, Régis flies into a fury at the prospect that Monique may have had a relationship with one of them or that there is the potential for a future tryst.

Régis demands that Monique move with him to Rozeuil and that she grow her hair long because the short haircut reminds him too much of the person Monique used to be. After many fights stemming from Régis’ jealousy, he finally accuses her of being attracted to Georges Blanchet, another of Monique’s old acquaintances. Monique’s patience with Régis finally gives out and she moves back to Paris. One evening, she is at a party with friends, including Georges, and Régis enters the house to demand that Monique come back with him. When she refuses, he pulls a gun on her and she screams. As he shoots at her, Georges jumps in front of the bullet, which goes through his shoulder and grazes Monique. Régis escapes and Monique helps nurse Georges back to health. The novel ends with a scene in which Monique’s friends agree that Monique was coerced by two sets of bad influences but that the emancipation for women that she sought would eventually come about.

Margueritte’s novel has the reputation of being one of the most scandalous French books ever written; so much so that the author was stripped of his Légion
*d’honneur* as a consequence of its publication (Hewitt 37).

The book is the first in a trilogy entitled *La Femme en chemin* and was followed by *Le Compagnon* and *Le Couple* in 1923 and 1924, respectively (39). The book was also one of the biggest bestsellers in French literature. After its publication, the novel sold extremely well. Four days after its release, 20,000 copies had already been sold. In August, the book averaged 10,000 copies sold per week. By mid-September, the novel had sold 150,000 copies and by December the total reached 300,000 (Sohn 8). The scenario for Jacqueline Audry’s filmic adaptation of *La Garçonne* includes a note at the beginning of the script in which Audry recognizes the immense popularity of the novel: “Le roman de Victor Margueritte “LA GARCONNE” est un des plus grands “best sellers” de la littérature française (512.000 exemplaires vendus en France). Il a été traduit en anglais, allemand, italien, suédois, espagnol, portugais, grec, japonais, hongrois, flamand” (LaRoche and Achard 1).

Like any good scandal, it was extremely popular.

If Margueritte’s novel was considered scandalous, critics are not entirely in agreement as to why this was so. In the context of a post-World War I France, the idea that women were dressing like men and usurping male roles was a frightening one. The *garçonne* look, which became increasingly popular after World War I in France, is thought to have taken its name from Margueritte’s novel (Mendes and Haye, 59), as

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13 Ironically, Jacqueline Audry received a *Legion d’honneur* from the President of la Société des auteurs de films in 1957, just as she was finishing up work on *La Garçonne*. Cinémonde called it, “Un hasard malicieux (qui) a voulu que cette distinction vienne comme Jacqueline terminait « La Garçonne »... d’après le roman qui avait fait radier Victor Margueritte de l’ordre de la Légion d’honneur.” (4).

14 The scenario for *La Garçonne* does not give any citations for the number of copies sold. Mary Louise Roberts reports that over a million copies were sold by July, 1929 (50).
Monique is dubbed a *garçonne* in it and sports this new trend in fashion. Steven Zdatny highlights the importance of the association of the *garçonne* style with youth in his article, “The Boyish Look and the Liberated Woman: The Politics and Aesthetics of Women’s Hairstyles,” which analyzes the link between the *mode à la garçonne* and the perception of the look as a cultural revolution. He contends that the preeminence of *cheveux courts* and the *mode à la garçonne* had less to do with the blurring of gender boundaries after World War I than it did with the availability of new hair styling technologies overall (such as L’Oréal’s less-toxic hair dye or the improvements in perms) and the increase in the number of working-class women who had disposable income to pay for hairstyling (373-75.)

The effect of this change was two-fold for Zdatny. First, while the *mode à la garçonne* gave working-class women the opportunity to pay more attention to their appearance, it also changed the habits of middle-class women concerning their *toilette*. Before the war, middle-class women would maintain their long hairstyles at home, going to a beauty salon only occasionally. With the advent of the *mode à la garçonne*, women needed to go to the salon much more frequently to maintain the cut. Thus, women not only began to spend an increasing amount of money on their hair, the context in which they cared for their hair also changed (378). While the old, pre-War styles entailed women caring for their hair in private settings, the new, young, post-war style demanded a more public arena in which to maintain styles. Second, since this new style required more frequent trips to the salon, it compelled women to spend more
money doing so. This increase in the consumer aspect of fashion was marked, too, by the increase in adornments associated with the short haircuts, as advertisements for accessories increased at this time. Interestingly, the push to purchase these adornments played on women’s fears about being too masculine. Zdatny cites an ad for postiches (ornaments worn in the hair) in Vogue that “could lend ‘dignity’ to hair that was otherwise trop garçonner” (375).

If this new, androgynous and increasingly popular look functioned more as a product of increased consumerism after the First World War than as a symptom of a blurring of gender lines, why then was it considered to be so unsettling? Even if the physical attributes of the mode à la garçonne were not directly linked to a blurring of gender lines, the methods associated with how women “performed” the look certainly were. Zdatny’s Vogue citation is indicative of a consciousness on the part of the fashion industry to retain an aspect of femininity in this new look. So I contend that the disconcerting facets of the new style stemmed more from the social implications of its wide-spread application. This new condition of fashion that women necessarily had to spend more time and more money in the public sphere drives to the heart of the issue for French people after World War I. It was not so much a new performance of gender that caused unease, but rather the social implications of the look.

In the novel, this assertion concerning social implications holds true as well. Nicholas Hewitt notes that while Monique’s character does represent the first baby steps toward female emancipation in France, it is also a portrait of sexual excess as a
rebellion against the confines and double standards of the bourgeois social caste (40.)

The target of the book’s critique for Hewitt, then, is the bourgeois familial and social structures and the post-war society engendered by them, not necessarily Monique’s choices in how she manifests her rebellion. Mary Louise Roberts, however, sees the book’s treatment of gender reversal as a reflection of what Roberts terms women’s new “insider” status and men’s new “outsider” status after World War I. She notes that women increased their numbers in higher-earning jobs in the manufacturing fields, as well as in law and medicine. She also points out that women began to be able to be outside alone at night after the War, which was unquestionably not the case before the War (53). Men, by contrast, found themselves as “outsiders” in that the War prevented them from furthering their education and because they were no longer the breadwinners of their families (54). Roberts posits that Monique in Margueritte’s novel acts as a symbol not only of the “New Woman,” but also of the “No Man” or the emasculated male who is broken and depressed returning from the War (63). She specifies war veterans because they were frequently so shocked and perplexed by the world they returned to that they often fell into a life of drinking and promiscuity or were frequently sterile (62). Roberts, then, is suggesting that the cause of the scandal the novel created – despite Monique’s return to a traditional female role with her marriage to Blanchet – is rooted in its exposure of societal gender reversal after the War.

I have demonstrated how critical work on Margueritte’s La Garçonne points to deep-rooted fissures in social and cultural conceptions in gender division and blatant
criticism of bourgeois society as the unit that disseminates and maintains the gender division as the reasons for the novel’s scandalous reception rather than any one particular and overt element of Monique’s embodiment as a garçonne. By way of comparison, Audry’s filmic adaptation of the novel was not received as being scandalous after the film was completed. Before its release, the film received the same bad press as Margueritte’s novel did. However, once it was made clear that only Jacqueline Audry was authorized to be the film’s “maître d’oeuvre” and the film was completed, the film proved itself to be respectable and decent, with its “séquences scabreuses tournées avec tact [et] les situations douteuses à peine effleurées” (Ford 107). As I have argued earlier, my goal in my analysis of the film, La Garçonne, is to explore the social and cultural facets of the film’s challenge to the gender division. I will do this by examining Audry’s adaption as a reading of the original novel and also by examining its reception in contemporary French press.

The scenario for Jacqueline Audry’s film underscores the centrality of female sexual emancipation in the film, as well as society’s resistance to it, from the first page. Preceding even the nod to Margueritte’s novel as one of the all-time best sellers in French literature is a note situating both the theme and setting of the film: “L’action de ce film – inspiré du roman de Victor Margueritte – est située entre les deux guerres. Il traite l’émancipation sexuelle de la femme; c’est une description implacable des mœurs,

15 The novel was adapted to film twice before Audry made her version, once in 1923 and once in 1936. In 1923, the public commenced their outcry against Armand du Plessy’s film as soon as it was announced that it was being made. In 1936, Jean de Limur made his adaptation with Arletty in the role of the bisexual Niquette, but remained relatively unnoticed (Ford, 106-07).
dont les problèmes – comme les cœurs – n’ont pas changé, et restent d’actualité”
(LaRoche and Achard 1). It is highly significant that the note calls attention to the fact
that the film takes place between the World Wars, indicating that we should read the
film as a symptom of post-war culture in a similar way as Margueritte’s novel. As I noted
in Chapter 1, French culture in the 1950s was marked by much consternation over the
frictions caused by the new status of women in French culture. This attitude plays out in
Audry’s adaptation in a variety of ways, though I focus my analysis on three significant
departures from the novel. First, I show how certain adaptation choices made in the film
server to challenge cinematic stereotypes concerning the filmic portrayal of women.
Second, I discuss how the privileged place of theater and performance in the film act as
a means of creating bienséance in the film, thus allowing Audry more leverage in her
treatment of a potentially scandalous topic. Third, I examine how the changes made to
Lucien Vigneret’s character to make him more vilified than in the novel also make
Monique more sympathetic.

Very little scholarly work has been done on Audry’s version of *La Garçonne*, and
even Burch and Sellier lend barely a few lines to the film. They note it as being an
“adaptation ‘progressiste’ [... ]qui radicalise la dénonciation de la domination
patriarcale, et légitime le désir d’émancipation sexuelle et sociale des femmes” (358).
They further contend that while virtually all of Audry’s films deal with questions
concerning women’s emancipation or challenge sexual/gender roles as society dictates
them, “on peut faire l’hypothèse que le succès de beaucoup de ses films repose sur un
malentendu entretenu par une atmosphère légèrement érotique qui lui permet de tenir un discours critique sur les rapports sociaux de sexe sans heurter de front le machisme ambiant” (248). Indeed, what little treatment La Garçonner has received supports this argument. Charles Ford’s insistence on Jacqueline Audry’s “sensibilité féminine” as the root of her ability to make films that were both appealing and seemly to audiences affords her leeway in subject matter. He argues that

Son goût pour les situations un peu troubles et les personnages frivoles, légers, pour ne pas dire licencieux, devait conduire la cinéaste vers d’autres héroïnes qu’elle portera à l’écran avec la même retenue, la même pudeur dans l’impudeur, la même sensibilité qui, en fin de compte, font admettre chez elle les situations les plus équivoques (106).

Similarly, Jacques Sicilier’s account of the film contends that Audry ignores the themes of corruption in bourgeois culture, focusing only on what he calls themes that agree with her disposition: “affirmation de la féminité, désir d’émancipation et droit à l’amour librement choisi” (137). The traits and aspects considered to be overtly “feminine” in her films, then, are also what allow her to broach themes that would otherwise be out of reach.

One example of a theme that could be considered unacceptable is Audry’s cinematic portrayal of Monique (Andrée Debar). Monique challenges the predominant model of female on screen representation in the 1950s by positioning her as an actively desiring subject in the film. Additionally, Monique takes on masculine characteristics in
her relationships with men after she rebels and moves out of her parents’ house. For example, when Monique and her lover Peer Rys (George Reich) lie out by the pool at Rys’ house, Rys reads fan letters he’s received to her to try to provoke her jealousy. Monique, however, is unaffected by the letter and prefers to continue her conversation with Edgar Lair (Jean Parédès), the effeminate theater producer who befriends Monique. The three are shown in medium shot as a young girl comes up and asks Rys for his autograph. He gives it and the girl leaves, then Edgar leaves the couple as well. As Edgar leaves, the camera crosses the 180 degree line and shows the couple at the same distance (medium shot) but from the other side of the 180 degree line. We see that Rys becomes angry with Monique when she doesn’t get jealous of the girl. In response to his anger, Monique tells him that he is being silly/stupid (using the French word “bête”) and Rys protests that she thinks that she’s the only one with intelligence in the relationship. Monique pays him no attention, indicating that he has taken the comment too seriously and then swims while Rys pouts. The camera only changes angle again once Monique has jumped into the pool, again crossing the 180 degree angle back to the original side.

There is a clear reversal of the gender division in this scene. Monique, who owns her own design business and is self-sufficient, is portrayed as an intelligent and emotionally stable individual. Rys, on the other hand, is a male nude dancer and is thus the object of Monique’s and other women’s desire. We first see him as he comes out on stage as he is performing an exotic dance at a night club. He is shown in a long shot on stage as he drops his cape and dances for the audience. The camera cuts to a shot of
the audience, mesmerized by his moves as they watch him dance. In reverse shot, Rys is then shown again, this time in a medium close-up so as to emphasize his chest as much as his face. Monique is in the audience and is immediately attracted to him. In the pool scene, Rys is portrayed as jealous, emotionally unbalanced, beautiful and dumb. He is objectified by Monique, but he is also rejected by her for his emotional neediness. Peer Rys embodies virtually all of the negative feminine stereotypes associated with the “weaker sex.” Cinematically, the composition of the scene reflects this reversal of the gender division. While the camera seems to bear witness to events while on the original side of the 180 degree line, the crossing of the gender binary is marked by the rupture of the line.

Monique’s privileged status within the subject/object relationship is evoked in various scenes where she goes to theater or watches performances. In addition to the scene in which she first sees Rys, we see her taking a seat in a balcony seat to watch an opera. Relatively lengthy shots of the opera are shown interspersed with close up shots of Monique flirting with Max Delaume (Bernard Dhéran), who caresses her. Her role as spectator/observer, then, is intertwined with her status as an actively desiring sexual agent. In the scene that immediately follows, the group goes to a “slave auction” to bid on women prostitutes who dance seductively for the audience. In each of these scenes, the emphasis on performance, the artistic, and the exotic is considerable, yet Monique is portrayed as someone who frequently visits the theater and the slave auction.
As I’ve already noted, the film places a special emphasis on theater and performance that is not present in the novel, and this tactic can be seen as a way of distancing the spectator from realities presented in the novel, such as the fact that Monique comes from a respectable bourgeois family and, consequently, that the bourgeois family unit is corrupt. This distancing might offer one possible reason why this film was better received in the press and by the public than its predecessors and certainly better than the original novel. The prominence of the theater and of performance also opens up the possibility for an alternative reading of the ending of the film. Rather than read the ending scene in the play rehearsal as foreshadowing for events to come to pass between Monique and Georges, it is possible as well to read the ending scene of the film as a reference to the theater world and the fiction of how reality is portrayed on the stage. That is, while one could read Monique’s decision to marry Georges as a symbol of her desire to return to her typically feminine position in society, the ending shot of the film could also be seen as Jacqueline Audry’s nod to bienséance by creating a fictional happy ending. Given the ease with which Lucien renounces his hunt of the couple at the end and the fact that they both escape unharmed and virtually laugh off his assault, this reading is a plausible explanation.

Lastly, Audry’s adaptation of La Garçonne combines the novel’s characters of Lucien Vigneret and Régis Boisselot into one character: that of Lucien. In the novel, it is Régis who cannot let go of Monique’s past and becomes violent to the point of shooting at her and Georges, while in the film Lucien acts as both unfaithful fiancé and vengeful
lover at the end. The effect of this change transforms Lucien into a particularly despicable character. In several interviews, Jean Danet talked about the reception of his character by the public. In the January 24, 1957 episode of Cinépanorama, for example, he tells the interviewer that not only would the original novel La Garçonne not have made as big of a scandal in 1957, but also something like Françoise Sagan’s Bonjour Tristesse would have been banned. He continues by noting that “la garçonne n’est pas le personage scandaleux; c’est le mien.” In the April 5, 1957 episode of Rendez-vous à 5 heures, Danet continues his musings about how the film is not scandalous. He asserts, “Le scandale n’est plus sur cette jeune femme, c’est sur l’homme qui ne croit à rien, pas à l’amour, etc.” The combination of the two characters into one and the vilification of the fiancé draw attention to Lucien as an evil character, worthy of the spectator’s contempt. The spectator consequently sympathizes with this version of Monique in a much greater capacity than the Monique in the novel.

A week after Danet’s appearance on Rendez-vous à 5 heures, an interview in Cinémonde with Audry, Danet, and Andrée Dabar appeared, on April 11, 1957, in which they discussed the very same subject: how La Garçonne in 1957 was not scandalous. Audry tells the readers that she considers Margueritte’s book to be the first step of women’s emancipation in France and how the novel, “préfigurerait la jeune fille d’aujourd’hui, celle qui porte des vêtements pratiques, qui coupe ses cheveux, gagne elle-même sa vie.” Describing the 1925 setting of the film, Audry continues her thought, stating, “Cette époque lointaine est cependant la nôtre et le problème de la femme
moderne n’a pas changé.” Andrée Debar pushes this comparison between the post-World War I era in France and that of contemporary 1957 France by stating that fashion was no exception: “Nos couturiers et nos coiffeurs s’inspirent de la ligne 1925. Pour preuve cette anecdote : Un soir, je quittai le studio très tard et je fus obligée de me rendre à un cocktail avec une des toilettes que je porte dans le film. Vous me croirez si vous voulez, mais personne sur les Champs-Elysées ne se retourna sur moi et l’assistance du cocktail ne me fit aucune remarque. ”

The irony of Debar’s comment about fashion is fitting for a discussion of the relationship between a novel depicting French culture after World War I and its filmic adaptation made in post-World War II culture. Audry and Debar seem to understand an unspoken truth about the progress of women’s emancipation during the thirty-year period between the novel’s appearance and the release of Audry’s adaptation. Whereas women had made great strides in France with the acquisition of the right to vote after the Second World War and an even greater increase in their autonomy and ability to support themselves than what had been the result after World War I, the idea that “le problème de la femme moderne n’a pas changé” holds particular merit. In as much as the social and cultural climate of 1950s France was ready to accept an apparently attenuated filmic adaptation of a scandalous novel, it is at least partially thanks to Audry’s finesse in adapting difficult subject matter that the film was so well received. Conversely, Debar’s comment shows the extent to which France had changed in those thirty years. While la mode à la garçonne infuriated cultural conservatives of the 1920s,
Debar notes that no one on the Champs-Elysées or at the bar noticed her as being out of place. In the same way that *la mode à la garçonne* was symptomatic of a larger, evolving cultural sphere, the contemporary French public’s lack of reaction to the fashion in 1957 speaks to French obliviousness toward a progressive, radical denunciation of patriarchal order.

3.2 Floating Gender Markers in *Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon*

An analysis of *Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon* as a reading of an original literary or historical text poses a problem for scholars in that there is no singular text dealing with the Chevalier d’Eon. Elements of the knight’s history are disputed and stories and legends about him are varied and diverse. There is general agreement, though, about certain facts, one of them being the date and place of his birth: October 5, 1728 in Tonnere, Brittany, about 100 miles southeast of Paris. Some historians, such as Burrows, et al., ignore any claims to questions of his sex at birth, while others note that the particularities of his birth gave rise to such questions right away. Lever and Lever, for example, start their book on d’Eon with a passage describing fetal membranes that stuck to the baby at his delivery. While doctors assured the parents that the membranes would disappear in time, their presence prevented clarity on the matter. Lever and Lever cite Louis d’Eon’s statement to his wife about their newborn child that, “son sexe est caché, tout comme sa tête, mais le docteur espère que la nature se développera
bientôt et qu’il sera garçon par la grâce de Dieu ou fille en vertu de la bienheureuse vierge Marie” (17). To further complicate matters, the child’s baptism was scheduled for the 7th of October. Not knowing the true sex of their child, the parents chose a long variety of given names for the child. Thus, they named him Charles Geneviève Louis Auguste André Thimothée d’Eon de Beaumont. The authors note, though, that the addition of feminine given names to a collection of masculine ones for a boy was not without precedent. So the addition of the name Geneviève to the series was not so uncommon (18).

Charles excelled in school and attended the Collège Mazarin and then the Collège de Quatre Nations to pursue legal studies before his acceptance to the Paris Parlement at age 19 (Burrows et al. 4). He held several administrative roles before being sent on a diplomatic mission to Russia to help improve French-Russian relations and to spy on the Prince de Conti, whom Louis XV suspected of mounting a coup in Russia. D’Eon served in a dragoon unit in the Seven Years War and was later transferred to England. Rumors concerning d’Eon’s sex started to circulate in 1770 because of British confusion over French fashions. Questions continued to circulate until a jury concluded in 1777 that he was in fact a woman (Burrows, et al. 6). The matter was not helped at all by the publication of a biography about d’Eon, which claimed to expose his secret as a woman living the life of a man. To secure his return to France, d’Eon had to play along with the fiction that he was a woman and thus had to wear women’s clothing to be released from the British. He made it back to his hometown of Tonnerre and stayed
there until 1785 when he got permission to return to London to retrieve his belongings. He had to travel there dressed in women’s clothing, however. Questions concerning his true sex persisted until his death on May 21, 1810, after which doctors verified that he was, in fact, a male (Burrows et al. 6-7).

In *Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon*, the film takes one or two facts about d’Eon and confuses them with the folklore about his life. Most notably, the film contends that he was born a woman. The film, which is a comedy, plays with the confusion that ensues by the obscuring of the fact that Charles/Geneviève (André Debar) is actually a woman. Although the spectator is aware that Charles is a woman from the beginning, the masquerade continues in the diegesis of the story for roughly the first third of the film.

While on a mission to St. Petersburg, Charles must dress in “drag” as a woman to be able to deliver a letter from the King (Jean Desailly) to the Russian Czarina (Isa Miranda). Charles travels with a fellow Dragoon, Bernard (Gabriele Ferzetti), who believes that Charles is a man. After several scenes, Bernard finally learns the truth. Bernard, who had slept in the barn in keeping with their cover story for their mission, goes to retrieve Charles/Geneviève from his room. We see Bernard walk down the hallway and stop in front of the door as he knocks on it with a riding crop. He is shown in a medium close up, and we do not see into the room at first. The door divides the space between Bernard and Charles and also obscures Charles from the spectators’ view while they converse. Bernard insists that Charles open the door and he bangs on it ever more forcefully with his riding crop. As he does so, a plank of wood loosens and Bernard can
see in. We see him put his eye up to the hole and we finally see Charles/Geneviève in reverse shot, still partially obscured by the wood. We see her putting on her dress, and the camera cuts back to another shot of Bernard still looking through the hole. Cutting back to Charles, we see the dress slip down to reveal her breasts. The camera cuts back to a shot of Bernard who can’t believe what he’s seen. He looks again and we see a lengthier shot of Charles/Geneviève, with exposed breasts. Bernard backs away from the door and Charles/Geneviève opens the door once she succeeds in getting the dress put on correctly.

This scene plays on classical cinematic notions of voyeurism, in that the gaze of the male voyeur penetrates a private space cordoned off by a door. In classical cinema, the male gaze penetrates through a keyhole, a hole that is an inherent part of the door. Bernard, however, creates the hole through which he might perceive Charles/Geneviève by the physical means of knocking with his riding crop, almost violently, on the door. Even more significant, though, is the fact that Bernard believes he is spying on his male colleague and does not at all expect to find himself peering at a woman. The circumstances of this act of voyeurism upset the classical dynamics of the look as elucidated by Mulvey. Yet as Judith Mayne points out in the first chapter of her book, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, “it has become commonplace to note that however diverse the manifestations of spectacle in the cinema, they all are – sooner or later – about men looking at women” (17). This is certainly the case in this scene. Not only is this scene about a man looking at a woman, it is about a man receiving proof that a woman is a
woman by looking at her in a voyeuristic fashion. No piece of evidence given him before this scene in the film (such as the fact that Charles wears a dress for part of the time, nor the pitch of her voice) gives him this knowledge. It is the glimpse of Charles/Geneviève’s breasts that constitutes proof of her womanhood.

If Charles/Geneviève’s womanhood is defined by her breasts, it eventually becomes defined by her clothing as well. In a scene where Charles and Bernard attempt to cross a river on the road to St. Petersburg, they are ambushed by spies. We hear a gunshot ring out and see the dead body of a man at the river fall to the ground. At the same time, we hear Geneviève’s voice off camera shout Bernard’s name and we see him take cover by the river. The camera cuts back to Geneviève taking cover in the carriage and we see the open door on the right side of the screen and the approaching spies on the left. The camera cuts to a close up of Geneviève’s hand, which pulls a pistol from under her dress. We see her shoot two of the spies before she gets out so that she can retrieve the sword of one of the dead. The camera follows her as she moves back towards the river and she shoots one more spy before engaging in a sword fight with another. We finally see Bernard again who fights off an attacker with an ax. The camera cuts back to a comparatively lengthy shot of Geneviève’s sword fight. She stabs the spy and the camera cuts again back to Bernard who succeeds in scaring off his attacker. We see the remaining spies retreat before the camera cuts back to a shot of Geneviève who is leaning against the carriage, out of breath.
Charles/Geneviève becomes faint and notes that she has never felt such emotion in killing men before. The camera starts to slowly zoom in on the two as she speaks, stopping at a medium close up of the two in front of the carriage. Bernard grabs her and reminds her that they were not men, but enemies. He then kisses her and she slaps him. He laughs and says that the Russians kiss like that and that it is the custom of such savages. He continues, “il faut t’y habituer, mon garçon.” Charles/Geneviève, however, is visibly rocked by the kiss and stares at him before getting back in the carriage.

The scene intimates that the longer that Charles/Geneviève wears a dress and poses as a woman, the more her performance of the feminine gender turns her back into a “real” woman. Even the act of fighting off the attacking spies, which she does to a much greater extent in this scene than does Bernard, is not enough to stave off the intrusion of her underlying femininity. The act of wearing a dress (and, consequently, of performing the feminine gender) trumps her actions of killing enemies (a performance of the masculine gender). Moreover, Bernard’s kiss serves to return her femininity to her, even though he still claims to think that she is a man. This scene contrasts sharply with an earlier one in which Charles/Geneviève argues with her parents when she wants to join the Dragoons. They try to reason with her by asserting that, “Tu n’es pas un homme” and she replies, “Je ne suis plus une femme.” She then asks them why they would teach her so many masculine ways of behaving, such as hunting, drinking or swearing, only to play a masquerade. While the conversation implies that environmental gender constructs have created a hybrid Charles/Geneviève that is
neither a man nor a woman, the ambush scene implies that Charles/Geneviève begins
to become Geneviève once she puts on a dress and once Bernard realizes that she is a
woman and treats her like one.

When the pair arrives in St. Petersburg, we see a series of scenes in which the
gender division becomes highly confused. First, at court the Czarina asks one young
lady, Léona (Joëlle LaTour), if she is still a “jeune fille,” and verifies that she is still
unmarried. Léona responds that she is and the Czarina (who indicates that she wishes to
be addressed by her first name, Elisabeth) takes Léona aside and tells her that she has
chosen a husband for her. Léona eagerly follows her to her chambers and sees that the
man she has chosen is in fact the Czarina’s current lover, Grisha (Gianni Rizzo), a greasy
and lazy fat man who sleeps all day. Elisabeth tells Léona that “il est à toi” and “je t’en
fais cadeau.” When Léona insists that she does not want him, Elisabeth tells her that she
must marry him or be banished to Siberia. Léona’s disgust is so great that she chooses
Siberia and guards take her away. Elisabeth is so furious over her inability to get rid of
Grisha that she starts to kick at him and whip him before throwing him out. At the same
time that she is abusing him, Grisha pleads with her and asserts that she is the only one
he loves.

In the next scene, Charles/Geneviève and Bernard go to see the French
ambassador. Charles is dressed as a woman and the ambassador tries to kiss Charles’
hand when they go to leave. Embarrassed, the ambassador asks Bernard if he has ever
made the same mistake and Bernard maintains that Charles’ (masculine) bad habits
make it hard for him to forget that Charles is a man despite the dress. Immediately after, Charles/Geneviève receives a letter from her father indicating that Uncle Antoine has finally died at the age of 100. Unable to explain easily why Antoine’s death is crucial for her, she says that, “j’irai pouvoir... redevenir moi-même.” Charles, who can now go back to being Geneviève, has great difficulty telling Bernard that she is in fact a woman. Geneviève takes a bath and tells the servant that she is sad because Bernard has never “looked” at her before. The servant suggests calling for Bernard and letting him see her in the bath to get him to notice her. When he comes back into the room, Bernard asks, “Tu m’as fait appelé, coco?” denying Geneviève an easy means of explaining the situation. Even when Geneviève makes a special effort to show off her rear end to him, he replies by laughing and saying, “J’avais pas remarqué, mais tu es un gosse.”

Finally, back at the palace Elisabeth practices her shooting and laments that shooting plates is too easy. She wonders aloud how many steps she would let a man take before killing him if they were in a duel. The marquis de l’Hospital (Jacques Castelot) tells her that he has another target for her, one that is worthy of her honor. She inquires if it is Europe or the entire world and he replies that it is the leader of the Cossacks, who will serve her. When she looks at him, she raises her discharged gun at him and pulls the trigger, as if shooting at her target. She then laughs and says that “la beauté ne mérite pas la mort.” As he bows before her, she lowers herself before him as if he were the sovereign and holds his hand while looking up to gaze at him.
In each of these scenes, the connection between gender and the Subject-Object relationship is confused at best. In the first scene, Elisabeth’s literal objectification of Grisha, by attempting to make a present of him to Léona, is a clear reversal of the typical male/subject – female/object opposition that Beauvoir discusses. Further, Elisabeth’s abuse of Grisha and his subsequent insistence that he loves only her reverses classic gender divisions of power and love. In the second scene, Bernard’s refusal to acknowledge Geneviève’s femininity creates a powerful crisis of identity for her. As if wearing a dress somehow created or manifested her femininity, her very identity seems to be contingent on Bernard’s acknowledgement of the fact. His power over her identity is so great that she is reduced to ruses to force him to look at her, physically, as a woman. In refusing to allow her to be positioned in the male/subject – female/object opposition, he denies her a true identity.

In the final of these three scenes, Elisabeth undergoes a figurative and literal exchange of places in the male/subject – female/object opposition. She embodies a typically masculine position at the beginning of the scene by shooting guns, expressing her desire to conquer Europe and the rest of the world, and then taking aim at, and by extension, objectifying beauty (the Cossack who comes to serve her). Yet when she succumbs to her appreciation of his beauty and relinquishes her interest in political power, she bends down and physically occupies a lower position on screen than he does. Each of these scenes problematizes a concise reading of the gender division in this film. As transgressions happen, so are they corrected and with brute force. The
transformation in Elisabeth in the third scene is reminiscent of that of Charles/Geneviève after she begins to wear a dress. In the same way that Geneviève faints as her femininity overtakes her, Elisabeth’s power, both politically and in terms of the male/subject – female/object opposition, dissipates as she is overcome by her own femininity.

As this film is a comedy, the floating status of gender is easily justified as a foil for the sake of humor. As such, the film can play with the gender division safely, without overt risk of offending spectators. The exaggerated reinstatement of patriarchal order is so ridiculous that I argue that it can be read as subterfuge to placate demands of the public for bienséance in a film that might otherwise prove too shocking for audiences. In camouflaging images of resistance to patriarchal order within a strict reinstatement of it, Audry is able to play with assumptions and idée-fixes concerning the gender division. Charles/Geneviève and Elisabeth both fall on different points on the sliding scale of gender division at different times, and their position on the scale is directly linked to their performance of their gender. As each falls prey to her femininity, each loses power as it relates to her position in the diegesis of the film. As Geneviève increasingly performs her femininity, she literally turns back into a woman with womanly desires (e.g. for Bernard). As Elisabeth performs her gender in desiring the Cossack, she loses interest (at least momentarily) in her plans for world domination. Yet what is particularly pertinent about these transformations is that in performing their gender, Audry’s female characters are able to position themselves outside of traditional modes
of feminine behavior. That is, her characters express their sexual desires even as women. In this way, the women are still able to position themselves, in the framework of classical conceptions of desire on the film screen, as males.16

In both films, La Garçonne and Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon, the main female characters transgress gender boundaries and find themselves reinserted into patriarchal order to one extent or another. Taken individually, it would be easy to dismiss these films as examples of submission or compliance with underlying “truths” of patriarchal order. Yet, in the context of Jacqueline Audry’s oeuvre, it becomes clear that Audry pushes the limits of gender boundaries to explore tolerance to gender transgressions within the confines of worlds in which everything returns to what it should be. Moreover, Audry successfully creates female characters that, even if they are not permitted to continue in their transgressions, are able to express their desire. Audry, then, succeeds within the context of her larger project of creating desiring female Subjects, which runs counter to the prevailing cinematic images of women shown on the French film screen at the time.

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16 The classic statement remains, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”
Chapter 4

Rereading Zola’s Women in the 1950s: Marcel Carné’s Therese Raquin and René Clément’s Gervaise at the Foreground

In chapters 2 and 3, I demonstrated how Jacqueline Audry’s oeuvre explicitly challenges the currents of creating highly sexualized, heteronormative and objectified images of women on the French film screen in the post-war period. As I have noted, much of French film imagery of women in the 1950s reflected a traditional patriarchal view of them, wherein women were habitually the object of male sexual desire or were relegated to the domestic sphere. As sex objects, women acted primarily as the sites of desire and sometimes as sources of peril for men. The latter category of woman was a particularly prominent fixture in réalisme noir films, made in France at this time. The women with whom male protagonists are involved are the root cause of misfortune in films such as Manèges (1950), Quai des Orfèvres (1947), Manon (1949), and Le Diable au Corps (1947). Consequently, female sexuality is equated with danger and the objectified, vilified female characters do not have a point of view in these and other similar films.

Yet despite the predominance of these negative images of women, certain important exceptions exist, though they have been mainly ignored by scholars. While Audry’s oeuvre has been marginalized due to her filmmaking style and also because she
was a woman, other films made by well-known, established (and male) directors and screenwriters that challenged the norms of how women were portrayed have also gone overlooked until recently. The film *Casque d’Or* (1952), for example, has only recently received its due attention from Sarah Leahy’s book, which takes a long overdue look at the significance of the film in terms of production conditions at the time that the film was made and in terms of the careers of the people who made it. She also analyzes the film and shows how Simone Signoret’s character, Marie, is able to position herself outside of gender boundaries in that she is not limited to her role as a prostitute (and therefore the object of men’s desire). Rather, Leahy sees Marie’s character as both complex and evolving (64). Leahy shows how the dynamics of the gaze (in terms of the active bearer of the look and the passive object of the look) is in flux in this film and that Marie acts as the bearer of an active gaze. As a result, Marie has a point of view, and her desire for Manda (Serge Reggiani) is articulated in this way (66).

Other exceptions to the predominant model of the onscreen portrayal of women include costume dramas set in the Belle Époque, as Geneviève Sellier’s work has begun to uncover. She lists a number of notable films set in the period and that have a female central character, such as *Madame De...* (1953) directed by Max Olphus and *Capitaine Blomet* (1947) directed by Andrée Feix. Sellier observes that the films of this genre not only tend to feature female points of view, but also allow for examinations of the relations between the sexes (48-49). What is particularly compelling about this assertion about these films is that costume drama Belle Époque films were extremely well-
received by audiences. Despite the infamy associated with the films made during this period, Sellier argues that film output of the 50s should be reevaluated due to the high number of cinema-goers who saw these films and the films’ production by highly talented filmmakers (47). Both factors contributed to the fact that these “quality” films were extremely popular.

As I noted in chapter 1, “quality” films tended to sell the most entries and were the types that were made again and again, due to their popularity with audiences. This was particularly true of film adaptations of French literature, which make up a significant portion of the films made in the 1950s in France. Government subsidies for films went to filmmakers who proved themselves capable of making a product that sold well. Alan Williams describes the move toward “Tradition of Quality” filmmaking as the French attempt to create products that were superior, both technically and materially, to their American counterparts and that set themselves apart from American films by their “Frenchness.” He explains that, “literary adaptation was a particularly prominent way of asserting national or European character. Stendhal, Zola, Maupassant and other greats of the literary pantheon belonged to the national patrimony; films based on their works shared their relation to the national Spirit” (278). Adaptation, then, along with an emphasis on production values and the vital position of the French star system, helped filmmakers appeal to a fickle French public. More importantly, the adaptation of great French literary works offered audiences a reminder of French life before the war, which contrasted with the realities of post-war France.
The intersection between the necessities of a national cinema competing with an outside force and the rather precarious position of women in society after the war offers an apt starting point for a discussion of the significance of the representation of female characters in the adaptations of two of Emile Zola’s novels, *Thérèse Raquin* (1867) and *L’assommoir* (1877), made during the 1950s. In Zola’s version of these stories, both women have explicit sexual desires and make plans to change their situations. Thérèse, miserable in her stifling existence, seeks to free herself from the confines of her pre-arranged marriage to be with the man she loves. Gervaise pursues a relationship with Coupeau after Lantier leaves her and takes charge of her destiny when she acquires enough money to open her own laundry in Paris. However, both Thérèse and Gervaise fail in their attempts at change and end up dying in the end. In his novels, Zola strove to create portraits of his characters that accurately reflected the era in which he wrote and captured, as accurately as possible, the temperaments and dispositions of his subjects. To this end, these characters can be read as commentaries on the realities of social inequalities for women in the nineteenth century, and consequently, take on new meaning in an analysis of the 1950s film adaptation of these stories in light of the situation of women in France after the war.

While the naturalist model sought to capture the scientifically exact picture of certain human types in their characters, the cinematic medium has attempted to represent different aspects of reality in a variety of ways. This common goal of the two media (literature and film) explains one reason why the relationship between novel and
film concerning adaptation is so close-knit. Particularly in the case of Zola’s novels, the question of film adaptation is central. The connection between Zola’s oeuvre and film dates back to nearly the beginnings of cinema. The first Zola film adaptation appeared in 1902 with Ferdinand Zecca’s *L’assommoir*, and since that time more than 80 films adapted from his work have been made (Gural and Singer 5). Many have argued that Zola’s work lends itself particularly well to filmic adaptation. On the one hand, he gives a wide view of social reality, which functions similarly to the long shot in cinema. On the other hand, Zola’s rendering of a detail is similar to a cinematic close-up (Braudy 74; Minogue 48). Given the nature of Zola’s writing style and the place of his adaptations in the history of French cinema, these adaptations naturally raise questions about how film as a medium renders reality on screen, and also about how it renders realist discourse. These questions become even more compelling for films whose main characters are women and whose titles are their eponyms. We are faced not only with questions about how cinema depicts women’s subjective selves, but also with how cinema renders the discourse about the preoccupations with how women’s stories fit into the realm of French cinematic history.

Reading filmic adaptations as a type of commentary on their literary sources opens up a number of questions about the renderings of the realities of women, and it is useful to ask questions about how the differences in the adaptations reflect attitudes, preconceived notions, and societal norms of a period. While the analysis of the female

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17 See chapter 2 for a more in-depth discussion of current views of film adaptation.
characters is of obvious importance for this discussion, the central position of character in 1950s film scenarios underscores the need to focus on Thérèse and Gervaise. Pierre Bost emphasized the supremacy of character development over the telling of a story with respect to scriptwriting. He contended that, “what counts is less the story than the characters [...] This is one of the essential tasks of the dialogist – telling a story is of minor interest. What is of interest is bringing characters to life. Only in this does the scenarist find himself on a level with the playwright and the novelist. Only in this does his job attain certain worth, a certain nobility” (qtd. in Crisp 297). In light of the generally accepted image of women in the 50s, both on screen and in real life, I will focus on the readings of the main female character in Carné’s Thérèse Raquin (1953) and in Clément’s Gervaise (1956) to show how the contemporary renderings of each character reflected the way in which women were beginning to come to the foreground in a new way in French society.

Significantly, these two films are conspicuously absent from most of the major histories written about French cinema, despite the fact that they were made by established and very well-known directors and scriptwriters. Burch and Sellier make no mention of either film in their La Drôle de guerre des sexes. Susan Hayward’s French National Cinema also ignores the films (although Hayward does discuss Thérèse Raquin in her book on Simone Signoret). Colin Crisp makes quick reference to two technical elements that appear in Gervaise (an overt focus change and the height of the camera) as examples of how these techniques are used in classic French cinema (398-99). Pierre
Billard’s mention of each film could be described almost as cursory, giving each a brief acknowledgment while discussing the work of their respective directors in the context of the post-war period. Yet these films are not insignificant in terms of their reception. *Thérèse Raquin* won a Lion d’argent at Cannes in 1953 and Billard lists it as one of his top “films importants” in that year (653). Similarly, *Gervaise* was the fifteenth most watched French film in the 1950s in Paris (and thirty-third most watched general film), with 371,385 entries (667). Moreover, Maria Schell won the prix d’interprétation féminine at Cannes for her role as Gervaise (656). Their lack of mention in the better-known historiographies of French cinema is a testament to the poor reputation of the Tradition of Quality and also to perceptions of the (in)significance of films dealing with women’s stories.

In each film, the female protagonist’s point of view (underscored by the eponymous nature of the titles) is given a more prominent perspective than in their literary originals. In *Thérèse Raquin*, the updated, contemporary version of Thérèse Raquin’s character exhibits a more complex set of personality traits and is painted in a more sympathetic light than her literary version, and acts as a figure of the struggles that women faced at the time. In *Gervaise*, Gervaise’s point of view is brought to the forefront by the choice of name for the film and also by stylistic choices made in the film. In each discussion, my goal is to demonstrate how the respective filmmakers privilege the points of view of the female protagonists in each film and to examine the
discourses surrounding the processes of adaptation for each film in terms of how the realist model is treated in adaptation.

4.1 The Contemporary Face of Woman: Post-War Anxieties in *Thérèse Raquin*

In Zola’s novel, *Thérèse Raquin*, Thérèse is the only daughter of a French captain and an Algerian woman. When her mother dies, her father brings her to live with her aunt, Madame Raquin, whose son, Camille, has suffered from various ailments since childhood. Because of his illness, Madame Raquin spoils Camille to the point that he becomes a frail and self-indulgent wretch. Mindful that Camille needs a wife, Madame Raquin pushes for a marriage between Camille and Thérèse when Thérèse turns 21. They move to Paris and Camille finds a job working for the Orléans Railway. At work, he encounters an old friend from school, Laurent, who comes back to the Raquin’s shop with Camille to visit. Laurent returns every week to the shop to play dominos and chat with the family and their friends. Laurent and Thérèse soon start a relationship, motivated partly by the fact that Laurent can no longer afford to pay for prostitutes.

The love affair between Thérèse and Laurent eventually overwhelms the couple. They realize that killing Camille is the only way that they can continue to see each other, and they conspire to drown him in the Seine during a boat trip. As Laurent struggles to drown Camille, Camille bites him on the shoulder and inflicts a wound that gets infected and consequently never heals properly. After the boat trip, Thérèse and Laurent
become racked with guilt and begin to imagine that Camille haunts them from the
grave. After a suitable amount of time in mourning passes, Thérèse marries Laurent, and
the couple believes that finally being together will ease their guilt. To the contrary,
Thérèse and Laurent see the phantom of Camille each night in their bedroom and
cannot bring themselves to touch each other. They see a painting of Camille that
Laurent made in their bedroom and believe it to be his ghost. During the day, Laurent is
incapable of painting anything that does not resemble Camille in some way. These
events cause the two to go insane. A stroke robs Madame Raquin of her ability to move
or speak, so Thérèse and Laurent are forced to care for her. Thérèse and Laurent
become progressively more insane and more suspicious of each other. Each plots to kill
the other and they both discover each other’s plans. At the end of the novel, Thérèse
and Laurent both drink poison and die. They fall to the floor in front of Madame Raquin,
whose paralyzed gaze penetrates Thérèse and Laurent throughout the second half of
the novel. She subsequently stares at their dead corpses for almost 12 hours after their
suicide.

In the 1953 adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*, Thérèse (Simone Signoret) is an
orphan who was taken in by Madame Raquin (Sylvie). Thérèse marries Camille (Jacques
Duby) out of a sense of obligation to Madame Raquin for having saved her, yet both
Camille and Madame Raquin treat Thérèse horribly. They constantly correct her for
what they see as her inadequate efforts to take care of Camille and Thérèse spends her
days acting as their servant. Laurent (Raf Vallone) comes into the picture when he is
delivering a truck load of supplies to the dock where Camille works. Camille insists that Laurent cannot deliver the load without proper authorization and they quarrel. Laurent convinces him to have a drink with him after the fact, and they become fast friends. Laurent takes the drunken Camille back to the Raquins’ home where Thérèse and Laurent meet. Camille invites his new friend to dinner and to play a game at their home every Thursday, and Thérèse and Laurent fall in love.

Laurent tries to convince Thérèse to go away with him, but Thérèse stays out of a sense of duty. Camille discovers their love and takes Thérèse to Paris on the train with the intention of keeping her there against her will and away from Laurent. Laurent follows them and the men fight at the back of the train. Camille is accidentally pushed off the train in the fight and Thérèse convinces Laurent to get off the train early so that the police will not know that he had been there. Thérèse is questioned by the police and eventually the incident is ruled as an accident. All seems well until Riton (Roland Lesaffre), the man who had been in the train compartment with Thérèse and Camille shows up, threatening to tell the police about Laurent unless they pay him blackmail. They give him the money, but the man is killed by a runaway truck before he can stop a letter to the police implicating Thérèse and Laurent in Camille’s death. The film ends with the sound of a clock tower tolling five o’clock, the hour appointed for the letter to be mailed.

The film was created by the collaborative process between Marcel Carné and Charles Spaak, who is also credited with writing the dialogue for the film. Carné had
little classical film training, unlike his compeers, and had been working as an apprentice cabinet maker before taking film classes at Arts et Métiers and the Ecole Technique de la Photographie et du Cinéma (Crisp 165). Though many directors often collaborated with others on their films, Carné was particularly well-known for his collaborations with screenwriters. Despite this fact, though, he was never particularly associated with the Tradition of Quality, probably due to the fact that he started making films regularly in the 1930s. He is best known for his work with Jacques Prévert on adaptations and original scenarios.¹⁸ Quai des brumes (1938), Le jour se lève (1939), and Les enfants du paradis (1945) are some of Carné’s most famous and revered collaborations with Prévert. The tremendous success of Quai des brumes and the critical acclaim surrounding it helped make the film the veritable prime example of poetic realism (Williams 233). During the war, Carné continued to work and made Les visteurs du soir in 1942. After the war, Carné released his chef-d’oeuvre, Les enfants du paradis, which was followed in 1946 by another collaboration effort with Prévert, Les portes de la nuit, an “unmitigated disaster” in Williams’ assessment (285). The duo never worked together again, yet Carné continued to make films until 1977.

Charles Spaak was a Belgian immigrant whose first film job was in 1928 as a secretary for Jacques Feyder. He worked for 35 years in France on 95 films including, Julien Duvivier’s La belle équipe (1936), Jean Renoir’s La grande illusion (1937), and Jean Grémillon’s Gueule d’amour (1937) and Le ciel est à vous (1943). In the 1950s, he

¹⁸ Truffaut mentions in “Une certaine tendance” that Prévert was a master screenwriter and did not suffer from the same deficiencies as the screenwriters of the 50s (15).
worked on Christian-Jacques’ *Adorables creatures* (1952) and several of André Cayette’s films, including *Justice est faite* (1950), *Nous sommes tous des assassins* (1952), *Avant le déluge* (1953), and *Le dossier noir* (1955) (Ciné-Ressources, “Spaak”). *Thérèse Raquin* was the only film that Spaak and Carné adapted together. Spaak contended in a 1949 account on scriptwriting that the “scriptwriter and director should have a common point of view on the subject matter of the prospective film. It’s at this point that they acquire communally their status of author” (qtd. in Crisp 305). This assertion about the role of the director and scriptwriter in the process of creating a film adaptation is useful in framing the film in terms of the critical responses to it.

Much of the work done on the 1953 adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin* calls into question the film’s fidelity to the original novel. This inclination is not entirely unexpected, given that the film is a major departure from the novel and given that Truffaut made his argument that scenarists betray original texts by adapting them to screen only a year after *Thérèse Raquin* came out. While Truffaut specifically cited the work of Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost as the primary culprits of this betrayal, he implied all scenarists when he stated that scenarists “…ont réhabilité l’adaptation en bouleversant l’idée que l’on en avait, et qu’au vieux préjugé du respect à la lettre ils ont substitué, dit-on, celui contraire du respect à l’esprit, au point qu’on en vienne à écrire cet audacieux aphorisme : ‘Une adaptation honnête est une trahison’ (Carlo Rim, ‘Travelling et Sex-appeal’)”(16). Truffaut’s view of fidelity concerning film adaptation still appears in articles written on *Thérèse Raquin* in the last decade, despite the increasing
emphasis on seeing adaptations as separate texts from and as readings of their literary originals.

Christophe Duboile and Jocya Sonntag show how Carné and Spaak’s adaptation transforms Thérèse and Laurent from the scientific portraits of vile and violent personages whose actions stem from faults in their physiological predispositions to such behavior, to sympathetic and moving characters who are more pleasing to French audiences (261-63). They emphasize changes to Thérèse’s dress and manner as central examples of how she is desexualized in the film. While Thérèse is consumed for her passion for Laurent in the novel, Thérèse dresses conservatively in gray and black clothes that cover her completely, almost in a constrained way (256). Duboile and Sonntag read Thérèse’s desexualization as a way of making her less dangerous, and offer the change in Camille’s death (which is a train accident in the film, not a premeditated murder on a boat trip) as an example. They also focus on the absence of the novel’s morgue scene as an example of changes made to render Thérèse and Laurent more sympathetic to the spectator. Duboile and Sonntag conclude their analysis by asserting that the changes that Carné and Spaak make in the film succeed in remaining faithful to the spirit of the original text, if not to the letter, given that they sought to remove the more shocking details of the novel in order to keep from offending the sensibilities of their 1950s French audience (264). In essence, then, they see the film as typical of the Tradition of Quality in that the film seeks to portray the story with bienséance.
Dubois and Sonntag’s analysis contrasts sharply with Michelle Bloom’s critique of the film. Bloom situates the film in terms of the other various adaptations of the novel, including Zola’s own 1873 theatrical adaptation. She criticizes the film for remaining faithful to neither the letter nor the spirit of Zola’s original text and indicates that Carné’s only interest in taking the novel as “inspiration” stemmed from a desire to capitalize on the fame of the novel. She takes issue with “the suppression of Thérèse’s foreignness in the form of her (disturbingly stereotypical and Orientalist) North African wildness [that] alters Zola’s text” (35). She notes that this change allows Simone Signoret to play Thérèse, and indicates that the otherness with which Zola’s Thérèse is imbued becomes displaced in Laurent, who is an Italian immigrant in the film. She sees the change of a “transformation of the savage Oriental into a passionate European Other” (35) as a significant erasure/betrayal of the original text.

Susan Hayward’s article takes Thérèse’s desire for freedom as the starting point in discussing significant changes Carné and Spaak made in their reading of the novel. While Thérèse and Laurent were motivated by lust and greed to plot Camille’s death in the novel, the film paints Camille’s death as an accident resulting from Laurent’s impulsiveness. Laurent pushes for his right to love Thérèse in peace, and Hayward sees Thérèse’s passion for Laurent as “a desire first and foremost for her own freedom including the assertion of her own rights without which (as she readily acknowledges) she is not free to pursue love” (“Adaptations” 9). Her hesitancy to seek her freedom finds its roots in her desire for financial security, as being married to Camille gives her
this security and a higher class status than what Laurent’s immigrant status would be able to afford her. In terms of Thérèse’s sexuality, Hayward acknowledges that Signoret is dressed in a frumpy way in the film. However, Hayward contends that her dress does not impede her from feeling and acting on her sexual desires. She notes that in the first kissing scene between Thérèse and Laurent, Thérèse returns Laurent’s kiss, “with intense fulsome ness” (8). In Hayward’s assessment, then, Thérèse is not deprived of her sexuality. Rather, her sexuality is merely one aspect of personality, and her intelligence is also an inherent part of her character.

Each of these articles focuses on the film’s lack of fidelity to Zola’s original novel. Indeed, the fact that the film is set in modern-day France and the fact that neither of Thérèse’s parents are Algerian are major departures from the original novel. Susan Hayward notes in her book on Simone Signoret that the changes to the setting of the film Thérèse Raquin and to Thérèse’s heritage mean that we can and should read this film as a commentary on the situation of women in modern-day France (“Signoret” 103). She clarifies her argument made in her article concerning Thérèse’s desire for freedom that the primacy given to her husband’s authority over her impedes her from leaving with Laurent or from making any other changes in her life. Similarly, in my analysis of the film I see the changes made to Thérèse in the film version of Thérèse Raquin as markers of a post-war concern with the ideas of obedience and punishment, particularly as they apply to women during the period, rather than a question of freedom, foreignness, or sexuality.
From the opening scene to the end, the film deals with the ways that Thérèse is expected to obey her husband and her mother-in-law (who acts as both representative and disseminator of patriarchal power). This change in how Camille and Madame Raquin treat Thérèse is a stark contrast to how they treat her in the novel. Thérèse in the film is much more a victim of the two Raquins than her literary predecessor. The expectations of obedience take a variety of forms and include how Camille and Madame Raquin show their disapproval of how Thérèse wants to spend her time. For example, Camille complains about Thérèse’s lack of enthusiasm for the game of boules and her desire to look at the Rhône instead of taking an interest in the game. Later, Madame Raquin criticizes Thérèse for not anticipating a change in the weather that might threaten Camille’s health. As Thérèse explains that she had suggested that they go a to movie instead, Madame Raquin attacks the idea by saying that theaters are full of germs and that movies are bad for her since she dreams too much.

These subtle reproaches prefigure the ways that the requirement of obedience for Thérèse is treated in the film. Furthermore, the power that Camille and Madame Raquin hold over Thérèse is replaced by the power that the law holds over Thérèse and Laurent after Camille dies and Madame Raquin has a stroke. Therefore, when Thérèse transgresses her position as Camille’s wife, the law acts as the means through which punishment shall be doled out. However, scenes dealing with the questions of obedience and punishment are ambiguous and can be read as examples of how traditional models of obedience and punishment for women were in flux at the time.
Using a close reading of the scene in which Camille confronts Thérèse about Laurent, the train scene and the ending, I will discuss how they exemplify changes made to the characters in the film to show the complexities in the position of women within patriarchal order.

With the exception of the opening scene mentioned above, the scene in which Camille confronts Thérèse about her feelings for Laurent is the first time we see Camille attempt to exert his will over Thérèse. The scene begins downstairs in the shop. Camille enters through the front door in an atypical rush, swinging the door open and demanding to know where Thérèse is. He penetrates through the room and the camera follows him as he ascends the spiral staircase to their apartment upstairs. The scene cuts to the top of the staircase and we see Camille surface. He stops and looks at Thérèse and the camera cuts to a long shot of her collecting dishes from the cabinet to set the table. She pays him no attention. The camera cuts back to Camille, still on the other side of the room, who is visibly annoyed as he hangs his coat and hat up. He asks her, “tu n’entends pas que je suis là?” as the camera cuts back to her and we see a shot of her back, still collecting dishes. Visually, this shot reinforces the emotional distance between the two with their physical distance in the room. The camera cuts to Camille as he continues to question her, and when the camera cuts back to Thérèse, the angle changes to show her face. This time, she is visibly annoyed with Camille’s line of questioning concerning Laurent and she turns to set the table. Camille moves across the room to the table and into the shot with Thérèse and begins to attack her verbally.
As Camille penetrates into the shot of her setting the table, we are reminded of how he forces his way into Thérèse’s affairs. He tells her that she owes them a great deal for taking her in and that she is no longer Thérèse Dubois, but Madame Camille Raquin, effectively effacing her own identity. He also insists upon the fact that the law obliges her to do as he says, but none of these assertions distracts Thérèse from her task of setting the table. Camille demands that she look at him, yet she continues her task. Becoming more frustrated, he yells, “j’exige que tu me regardes.” She does look at him and the shot changes to an American shot of the two. He smiles in a self-satisfied way as he begins to dress her down anew for loving a trucker from Italy, evoking classist and xenophobic sentiments at the same time. He vacillates between aggressive and pathetic postures, attacking Thérèse and lamenting his health in the same breath. Thérèse moves in and out of the shot as she continues to set the table, but the camera stays on Camille while he threatens Thérèse that he would die without her.

Finally, the camera moves to show Thérèse at the cabinet again and Camille moves behind her to plead with her to go to Paris with him for a few days to win her back. The two are shown in a medium shot as he asks her to go, and the change in camera distance mimics Camille’s penetration into Thérèse’s physical and emotional space. Once Thérèse finally succumbs to Camille’s wishes, Madame Raquin comes upstairs and Thérèse leaves the room to get the food. As Camille and Madame Raquin discuss Camille’s plan to deprive Thérèse of phone, letters, and money at a relative’s house in Paris, there is no change in camera distance between a medium shot of Camille
and his mother at the table, a medium shot of just him. While the camera work in the first part of the scene reflects the turmoil of Camille’s struggle to control his wife, the relatively calm and unchanging camera angles used in the second part of the scene seems to suggest that as soon as Thérèse succumbs and leaves the room, Camille is able to take back his place as patriarchal head of the family.

In light of the significance of the confrontation scene, the scene in the train where Camille is thrown/falls off becomes problematic to this discussion. Camille surprises Thérèse and Laurent in the train hallway, and we are reminded of the confrontation scene where Camille penetrates into Thérèse’s space in a shot. Here, Camille literally penetrates into the hallway and reproaches Thérèse for being with Laurent, noting that Laurent can do as he pleases, but not for Thérèse. As Laurent and Camille physically struggle for possession of Thérèse (Camille tries to lead her back to her seat, while Laurent takes Camille’s hands off her and grabs his collar), the two men argue. Laurent asserts that Camille should let them be, and Camille insists that the law is on his side and that he will use the police to find them wherever they go. Laurent tires of Camille’s threats and opens the door of the caboose, where he accidentally pushes Camille off the train.

It is significant that Camille rants about his legal rights as Thérèse’s husband as he tries to get her back in this scene. In the 1950s, women still had relatively no control over their own lives after marriage. Although women did receive the right to vote after the war in 1945, Napoleon’s *Code Civil* continued to act as the basis for the
subordination of women. Women remained subject to the will of their husbands in terms of civil life until the 1960s (Burch and Sellier 219). Despite Camille’s correct reasoning that the law would be on his side, the visual altercation between Camille and Laurent undermines the power of Camille’s assertion. It is the sickly, impotent Frenchman who asserts his rights under patriarchal order. The virile immigrant is the man who, at least to a certain extent, stands up for Thérèse’s right to choose her lover and therefore make decisions about her life. It is even more significant that the man who rants about his legal rights over his wife is the one who gets thrown from a train and dies. Given the number of changes made to the characters in the film version of Thérèse Raquin, we might read his death as a sort of punishment for holding on to dated, patriarchal values. In the novel, Camille dies because Thérèse and Laurent conspire to kill him in order to satisfy their lust and their greed. In the film, Thérèse agrees to go to Paris with Camille in good faith, if not to save their marriage, then at least to give Camille a chance to sway her. Laurent is not the greedy, conniving character that he is in the novel, and he expresses nothing but a desire to be free to love Thérèse in peace. Although Camille’s death is essential to the plot, it is also possible to read his death in terms of punishment for his attitudes.

This reading of Camille’s death as punishment is also supported by the ending of the film. The revenant of Camille’s ghost/painting of the novel is replaced by the soldier, Riton, who blackmauls Thérèse and Laurent for 500,000 francs to keep him from going to the police about the man he saw in the train before Camille’s death. Laurent
wants to kill the blackmailer, but Thérèse takes the money she receives in a settlement from the rail company to pay him off. Moreover, Thérèse makes Riton sign a document stating that he received his blackmail money and guaranteeing that he would seek no more. The exchange of money toward the end of the film marks another significant break with the novel. In the novel, both Thérèse and Laurent are equally haunted and driven crazy by the revenant of Camille. In the film, though, it is Thérèse who acquires the money and thinks of making Riton sign a document. She is the conduit through which the money passes and, by extension, it is through her actions and planning that the couple might escape the blackmailer. As Hayward notes, Thérèse uses her intelligence to fight against the situation caused by the blackmailer (“Signoret” 102). In this way, Thérèse acts very much counter to her role prescribed by patriarchy.

At the end of the film, Riton is killed by a runaway truck before he can get back to the hotel to stop the maid from mailing an incriminating letter, written as insurance against retribution from Thérèse and Laurent. As a clock chimes the five o’clock hour, we see a close up of the letter in the maid’s hand as she walks up to a mailman. He is collecting mail and she asks him to take one more. He replies that the letter will not get lost and we see the letter go into the bag and the bag go into the back of the mail truck. The final shot of the film is a panning shot in which we see the truck drive off before the camera stops over a long shot of the city. As the camera lingers, we hear a police siren and the film ends.
There is little question that the letter will be delivered to the authorities and the siren at the end of the film certainly indicates that the police will be searching for Thérèse and Laurent. The pan shot over the city, though, suggests an ambiguous ending at best. Even if the police look for Thérèse and Laurent, the spectator is left to wonder about the outcome. This ending stands in stark contrast to the novel’s ending wherein the two lovers go insane and plot to kill each other before finally committing suicide together under the watchful gaze of Madame Raquin. For the spectator’s part, Thérèse and Laurent do not die at the end of the film, and they certainly do not commit suicide. We do not even know if they are caught. This ambiguous ending can be read in terms of punishment for Thérèse and Laurent. Rather than condemning them to death, as in the novel, the film allows them possibly to be free and escape punishment for the death of Camille.

The changes made in the film version of *Thérèse Raquin* offer the spectator much to ponder concerning the place of women during the 1950s and their obedience and punishment. The film deals with the question of obedience by citing Fourth Republic laws that would give Camille domain over his wife in her civil life. Thérèse transgresses the requirement of obedience when she falls in love with Laurent. However, she still goes with Camille to Paris, in an attempt to give Camille the chance to prove to her that he can be a good/desirable husband. The film calls into question the traditional values that require female obedience to their husbands with ambiguous scenes that suggest a rupture with patriarchal order. In terms of Thérèse’s character,
Carné and Spaak’s contemporary version of her incarnates several changes that can be read in support of this rupture.

The casting of Simone Signoret as Thérèse necessitates that Thérèse be of French descent rather than a child of a French father and Algerian mother as she is in the novel. While this is a break with the original text, I see this change as a reflection of anxieties over the role of women in French society after the war. For Zola, the nineteenth-century obsession with orientalism was clear in Thérèse’s status as other. In the film, we might read the change to Thérèse’s nationality as a commentary about the twentieth-century obsession about women’s supposed otherness. Similarly, the film’s reading of Thérèse’s sexuality departs from traditional views of female sexuality. While Thérèse’s sexuality is toned down to accommodate expectations of the 1950s French audience, Thérèse is clearly an actively desiring agent on screen as Hayward contends (“Adaptations” 8). Yet, her sexuality cannot be read like that of the *femme fatale* in *réalisme noir* films, as I noted at the beginning of this chapter, since the fate of Thérèse and Laurent is left open at the end of the film. Her active sexual desire and her application of her intelligence indicate that Thérèse is to be read as a subject in this film, rather than as an objectified image. These changes to Thérèse’s character allow her to exemplify the situation of women in post-war France. Although Thérèse is victimized by the agents of patriarchal power (Camille and Madame Raquin), she is also an active agent in her own right. The struggle to which Thérèse is subjected can be read as a metaphor for the modern struggles of French women in the 1950s. In the same way
that the rules of obedience and punishment are called into question and redefined in
the film, so were expectations for women in French society beginning to change shape.

4.2 Regarding *Gervaise*: Cinematic Construction of Female Point of View

Zola wrote *L’assommoir* in 1877 and it is the seventh in the Rougon-Macquart
series. The story opens with a description of Gervaise Macquart waiting up all night for
the return of her lover, Lantier, only to find at sunrise that he has still not returned
home. After spending two more hours at the window and falling into despair about him,
Lantier arrives at their home only to eventually pick up his things and leave again,
abandoning her and her children. Gervaise eventually marries Coupeau, a sober roofer,
who is at first a stark contrast to Lantier. After the marriage, Gervaise is able to raise
enough money to open her own laundry. Gervaise gives birth to Anna (whom they
nickname Nana) and all appears to be well for the couple. The happy life they share
together takes a turn for the worse when Coupeau falls from a roof on which he is
working and is severely injured. In the time it takes him to convalesce, he becomes a
spiteful and malicious alcoholic and refuses to find work. Gervaise takes steps to keep
the shop and home life in order, but fails in repeated attempts. Lantier soon returns to
Gervaise’s home. Coupeau welcomes Lantier and they begin to drink in earnest while
Gervaise continues to try to keep shop and home afloat. The financial burden and
disorder at home eventually overwhelm Gervaise and she loses the laundry shop.
Several chapters are devoted to Gervaise’s decline into alcoholism and Nana’s running away from home to escape the chaos. The novel ends with Gervaise’s death from severe alcoholism and starvation, as she would use whatever money she made (from unfortunate errands or bets that she would eat filth) to drink. She ends up so completely stupid from the alcohol that she cannot even muster her own suicide. Zola tells us that, “la mort devait la prendre petit à petit, morceau par morceau, en la traînant ainsi jusqu’au bout dans la sacrée existence qu’elle s’était faite” (517). While her daughter, Nana, ends up living in the streets and eventually begins a life of prostitution, the final image of the novel is of Gervaise’s corpse being lowered into her coffin by Bazouge, another drunk, who concludes the “burial service” by telling her, “fais dodo, ma belle!” (518).

The film *Gervaise* opens in the same way as in the novel, with Gervaise Macquart (Maria Schell) waiting for her lover, Lantier (Armand Mestral) to return home. He comes back well after sunrise and stays only long enough to collect his belongings before leaving again to go to Virginie’s (Suzy Delair) apartment, and it becomes apparent that everyone except for Gervaise knows that Lantier is having an affair with Virginie. Gossip that surrounds the affair is the motivating factor in the fight that Gervaise and Virginie have in the laundry. Later, Gervaise marries Coupeau (François Perier) and they have a child together, Nana (Françoise Hery). The couple seems happy until Coupeau falls from a roof and becomes bedridden. Many expensive doctors’ visits drain the family’s money, but Gervaise is able to open her own laundry thanks to a loan from Goujet (Jacques
Harden). Lantier returns and acts as a bad influence on Coupeau, encouraging him to drink excessively. Gervaise tries to keep the home and laundry together, but fails and the film ends with a shot of Gervaise, obviously drunk, with a glass of wine in her hand and then a shot of Nana walking off into the street, which alludes to her future life of prostitution.

The film was directed by René Clément and adapted by Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, the scriptwriting team lambasted by François Truffaut in his article condemning the Tradition of Quality. Clément’s career as a director began with a cartoon short film called *César chez les Gaulois* (1933). He worked with Jacques Tati in 1936 on *Soigne ton gauche* before the war and worked as technical assistant to Jean Cocteau on *La belle et la bête* in 1946. He also directed *Le père tranquille* that same year. Clément discovered that he had a taste for filmic adaptations of novels, and, in addition to *Gervaise*, he directed *Barrage contre le Pacifique* in 1956, adapted from Marguerite Duras’ novel (Ciné-Ressources, “Clément”). Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost worked together for the first time on Claude Autant-Lara’s comedies, *Le mariage de chiffon* (1941) and *Lettres d’amour* (1942). In 1943, the two were hired again by Autant-Lara to write the script for *Douce* (1943). For this film, Aurenche is credited with writing the script and Bost wrote the dialogue. From this collaboration, the “Aurenchébost” system of scriptwriting was born (Ciné-Ressources, “Aurenche”). This system of scriptwriting would result in many adaptations including those of several of the most
well-known French literary texts. Included in this list are *Le rouge et le noir* (1954), *Le joueur* (1958), and *Le diable au corps* (1947).

Much of the critical work done on the film *Gervaise* and on the original text *L’Assomoir* deals with how the character Gervaise was adapted for the film screen and how Clément, Aurenche, and Bost render her point of view. Russell Cousins discusses the nature of Gervaise’s first-person point of view in the film, which is partially constructed by voiceover commentary. He takes the opening scene as an example of her status as first-person narrator, before questioning how the camera work in the scene represents her point of view. Cousins maintains that the audience is not asked to identify with Gervaise in a literal fashion because the camera angle is placed too high above street level. He then argues that the film audience receives privileged information about Lantier’s whereabouts that remains unknown to Gervaise, and that this privileged information increases audience sympathy for her. He continues his analysis of the function of three other instances of Gervaise’s voiceover in the film to establish that the audience becomes “locked into [Gervaise’s] version of events” (7). He sees Gervaise’s point of view as a limited first-person narrator, created with camera angles, close-ups and foregrounding to make the audience identify with her emotionally.

Newton and Jackson discuss this same question as it pertains to the novel in their article on point of view in *L’Assommoir* and Gervaise’s vision. In dealing with the representation of what Gervaise sees and the way in which she perceives what she sees, they demonstrate how Gervaise’s point of view plays a more central role than those of
any of the three male characters in the novel. Though male vision is addressed in the novel, Newton and Jackson point out how Gervaise’s vision holds a privileged position thanks to the way in which her thoughts are treated: “this total concentration on Gervaise stresses the subjectivity of her vision and isolates her still more from those around her, while at the same time bringing her closer to the reader, who sees only what Gervaise sees” (316).

Jennifer Wolter’s article on the film notes that Clément saw the contemporary relevance of L’Assommoir and stated that “Gervaise is not isolated in its period. I can take you to a Coupeau house in about ten different parts of Paris and you will find all the characters. This relevancy attracted me” (qtd in Wolter, 214). We can, then, read the film in terms of a commentary on the modern preoccupations with women’s place in French society. Wolter goes on to analyze the privileging of female spaces in the film. She notes that the boutique is a special place wherein Gervaise is la patronne and that the boutique takes up much more space than the family home in their residence (217). The public lavoir is another female space that is privileged in the film. In the film version, only women speak in the laundry scene. The character of Charles, who makes erotic commentary about the fight between Gervaise and Virginie, is effaced in the film version. Finally, Wolter notes that the ending of the film spares Gervaise her deep decline into alcoholism and instead shows merely one scene where she is drinking wine, staring glassy-eyed into nothing. For Wolter, then, the adaptation of the character of Gervaise is one that evokes much more sympathy than she does in the novel. Moreover,
the privileging of female spaces in the film reinforces the notion that the film specifically
tells Gervaise’s own story (as opposed to a story about Gervaise).

The critical focus on Gervaise’s point of view and physical sight in the film offer
an apt point of departure for a discussion of the way that Gervaise’s point of view
functions in the film. In my analysis, I compare and contrast sections from the original
text with their corresponding film scenes to examine the filmic rendering of Gervaise’s
point of view. I discuss the use of shot-reverse shot and camera angle to establish
Gervaise as a first person narrator and then examine the composition of scenes that are
narrated, as it were, by a third person omniscient narrator. Often, one can see a parallel
between the novel and the film in the use of the gaze of the characters as a means to
underline the relationship between observer and object. In comparing the function of
these scenes in the film with their equivalents in the novel, several conclusions about
the role of Gervaise as main character can be drawn, particularly as to how her image is
constructed, but also how she sees and how she is seen by various subjects.

Mulvey’s discussion of the role that the male gaze plays in the construction of
the filmic representation of woman sheds light on the problem of subjectivity in
*Gervaise*. In this film, it is the gaze of the female protagonist, though, that creates her
subjectivity. Therefore, it is the construction of Gervaise’s vision in the film that is of
particular significance in this discussion. Gervaise is the bearer of the look in the film,
and with very little exception, her character’s is the only privileged point of view in the
film. In light of Clément’s desire to make a film about the condition of women, it is
significant that he and Aurenche and Bost create a Subject whose voice is, literally and figuratively, that which tells the story. To understand how her character is rendered on screen, a close reading of key scenes in both the novel and the film is necessary.

The differences in Gervaise’s representation are apparent from the first scene, and the use of the narratorial role is different in each medium. The novel begins with the commentary of a third-person narrator who recounts what Gervaise sees in the street and in the room, and it is in this way that the reader understands Gervaise’s judgments of what she sees: “de ses yeux voilé de larmes, elle faisait le tour de la misérable chambre garnie, meublée d’une commode de noyer dont un tiroir manquait, de trois chaises de paille et d’une petite table graisseuse, sur laquelle traînait un pot à eau ébréché” (20). The boulevard de la Chapelle is described in a similar fashion, and emphasis is placed on the physical element that Gervaise sees: “elle regardait à droite […] où des groupes de bouchers, devant les abattoirs, stationnaient en tabliers sanglants” (21). These descriptions of milieu are representative of this cinematic quality that Zola’s writing tends to incarnate. In the same way that a camera can capture an image of the room or the street, Gervaise’s look frames the scene. Next, Gervaise looks left before following with her gaze, “le mur d’octroi, derrière lequel, la nuit, elle entendait parfois des cris d’assassinés” (21), which describes what she physically sees, and is also indicative of an emotional response to her surroundings: she is afraid of finding Lantier’s dead body at this place. The reader then has a privileged access to her thoughts through these descriptions.
The link between the vision and the thought of a character, however, isn’t limited to Gervaise. Zola treats Lantier’s vision in a somewhat similar manner. At the moment that Gervaise’s actions are illustrated through Lantier’s point of view: “il parut examiner ses bras nus, son cou nu, tout le nu qu’elle montrait, comme si des comparaisons s’établissaient dans son esprit. Et il eut une moue des lèvres” (28). Zola indicates Lantier’s thoughts by showing the physical gesture made with his lips; however, the reader does not read his thoughts, as it were, in the same way as Gervaise’s. His thoughts are instead shown with the phrase “il parut examiner” and with this gesture. The reader, therefore, does not have the same level of privilege with Lantier as with Gervaise. However, in a way not unlike that with Gervaise, Lantier’s gaze serves as a kind of camera that captures an image of the scene. In mixing the gaze of these two characters with the descriptions of their reactions – which are not necessarily seen by the other – the spectator sees that the narrator stays in third person, yet has the power of perception furnished by the free indirect style.

The narrative role in the film, though, does not follow this model. To evoke Gervaise’s thoughts, Clément uses a voiceover, which makes it evident that she acts as narrator. In the first scene, Gervaise describes the street in voiceover, and then we see Gervaise at a window, looking out at it. Though her words, “le matin était revenu. Il n’était toujours pas là. Pas rentré de la nuit. C’était la première fois. J’étais tellement fière d’avoir le plus beau garçon du quartier, moi, la boîteuse,” give the spectator the reason why she has been watching, Cousins maintains that “her commentary is not
attached to any of the images in particular” (4). He also argues that the spectator’s link with the character is established through an emotional empathy created through her words rather than any reconstruction of her point of view via the camera. That is, the argument is that the camera angle cannot literally be seen as a representation of her point of view and that the voice-over is the instrument through which her role as narrator is established. However, we need to look further before relegating Gervaise’s point of view to the limits of voice-over. An analysis of the first four shots of the opening scene will show the complexities of the treatment of point of view in the film.

On the one hand, it is apparent that each camera shot cannot be read exclusively as belonging to Gervaise’s gaze, given that there are shots that show either her or things that she does not see. On the other hand, the link between the camera angle and the reference made to the weight of the characters’ gazes in the novel cannot be ignored. The first two shots following the credits that show action in the street cannot be seen from Gervaise’s point of view, as she is limited to her position at the window on the second floor. The voice-over begins with this second shot, and when she says « il n’était toujours pas là, » we see the third shot, a low-angle shot, of Gervaise who is looking at the street. The spectator sees her turn her head from left to right as she does in the novel. As she does this, the voiceover ends and the spectators hear the diegetic voice of Mme Boche. Gervaise turns her head to look at the person speaking and we see a reverse shot, in high angle, of Mme Boche. In using shot-reverse shot, this sequence establishes that the camera changes perspective from time to time. Whereas for the
most part, the camera serves as a sort of external witness of events, I argue that it sometimes represents the actual look of a character and that in this film the look of Gervaise is constructed in a privileged way in this film.

This change in perspective is essential in understanding an underlying technique used in the adaptation of the novel, but more importantly, in the presentation of the character Gervaise. Firstly, the camera’s ability to change point of view resembles that of the narrator in free indirect style. In the same way that the narrator enters into the thoughts of the characters yet maintains a distance of observation, the camera watches from the outside and yet enters into Gervaise’s point of view. In the opening scene, the spectator doesn’t see what Gervaise sees to the left and right in the film, but the reader of the novel sees it through descriptions. Yet other images in the novel, which might be at times somewhat unexpected, lend themselves very easily to cinematic interpretation. For example, Mme Boche engages Gervaise in conversation, but Zola places an emphasis on the physical distance between the two women in saying, “et une conversation s’engagea, de la fenêtre au trottoir” (23). In the film, the use of high and low angle shots paints this image in much the same way as in the novel. Therefore, the spectator understands this emphasis placed on physical distance and point of view via this technique. The way that the film relates free indirect style not only places an emphasis on Gervaise’s importance as a subject in the narrative, it also shows that the character is to be read both as subject and object. The use of shot-reverse shot and voice-over in the opening scene clearly demonstrates Gervaise’s role as narrator and,
consequently, as subject. However, the composition of this scene also establishes her as the object of two other characters’ looks.

The camera’s role as exterior witness of events is made evident by Gervaise and Mme Boche. At the end of their conversation, a close up shot of Mme Boche is shown in neither high nor low angle and it is here that the point of view of the camera becomes that of third person witness again, a witness whose look follows that of the wall of the building up to the window of Virginie and Adèle’s room. The shot then cuts to Virginie who, conversely, is watching Gervaise watch the street. We do not see, however, what Virginie sees, as if the camera were acting as her eye. This special relationship between camera and look is reserved only for Gervaise. Thus, in the same way as in the novel, Gervaise’s gaze holds a privileged place. However, in the same way that Lantier’s gaze serves a different purpose than that of the point of view of a limited narrator, Virginie’s gaze in the film gives the spectator information that Gervaise does not have. Therefore, in this case, the spectator is aware of the limits of Gervaise’s point of view, and moves away from a literal identification with her.

The wash house scene is another example of how Gervaise’s gaze and the gaze of other characters function as important indicators of perception. The descriptions of the wash house in the novel are not related to the film in the same way as those of the street and Gervaise’s room in the first half of the first chapter. Although Zola describes the building with much detail, there is no reference to Gervaise’s vision as we see in the descriptions of the street and room. In fact, there is no reference made whatsoever to
sight until Virginie arrives at the wash house. When she does enter, we learn that “Gervaise avait vivement levé la tête” (38). Virginie, on the other hand, “pinça les paupières, ayant l’air de chercher ; puis quand elle eut aperçu Gervaise, elle [...] s’installa sur la même rangée, à cinq baquets de distance” (38). Instead of acting as a type of camera, the gaze of the characters simply mark the act of perception. Moreover, it is in interpreting this act of perception that Gervaise – and by extension the reader – perceives the situation.

The reader is first aware of this perception in the way in which Gervaise learns about Lantier and Adèle’s affair. Mme Boche tells her “j’ai regardé dans l’escalier. Le particulier était déjà au deuxième étage, mais j’ai bien reconnu la redingote de M. Lantier. Boche, qui faisait le guet, ce matin, l’a vu redescendre tranquillement” (42). Since Gervaise didn’t see what happened, she has to learn about it through the vision of another character. Mme Boche tells the story, and in this way her vision replaces Gervaise’s as metaphorical camera. But, even if the point of view of this camera changes during this revelation, the internalization of meaning is made through Gervaise’s point of view. This internalization is shown in Gervaise’s response to Virginie’s gaze. On the same page, Mme Boche notes that “[Virginie] rit de vous voir pleurer.” Gervaise, on the other hand, “quand elle aperçut devant elle Virginie, au milieu de trois ou quatre femmes, parlant bas, la dévisageant, elle fut prise d’une colère folle” (42). Therefore, whereas Mme Boche’s gaze acts as a metaphorical camera, Virginie’s gaze acts as a catalyst to advance the plot. Since cruelty and jealousy are directed toward Gervaise in
this scene and in the entire novel, we can see how the function of Virginie’s gaze mirrors to a certain extent that of Gervaise as a metaphorical camera. Even if this gaze doesn’t record images, it provokes a reaction from Gervaise, whose thoughts then examine it. Therefore, the effect is similar to way in which the reader receives the description of an event or of an image.

The function of Virginie’s gaze in the film illustrates how Gervaise’s sight and point of view are privileged. Whereas the scene in the film rather closely follows the events of the novel, the spectator’s experience in watching the scene is quite different from that of the reader in reading it. The spectator has prior knowledge of Lantier and Adèle’s affair before Gervaise knows what has happened. On page 30 of the novel, Gervaise wants to know why Lantier doesn’t want her to do his laundry: “Mais pourquoi ? reprit-elle, pâlissante, effleurée d’un soupçon terrible ” (30) Yet, in watching the film the spectator sees what Gervaise can only suspect. Because of this difference, the spectator no longer shares Gervaise’s point of view, but instead sees the scene from that of the third-person omniscient narrator. Therefore, there is a parallel between the narrative role in the film and that in the novel, and the choice of shots underlines this parallel.

When Virginie enters the wash house, she looks around with the same “air de chercher” that Zola mentions. Instead of showing in reverse shot the object of her look, the camera follows her as she walks toward Gervaise. After a brief shot wherein we see Virginie on the left who looks at Gervaise on the right of the screen, and who is in the
foreground, we see the reverse shot of the opposite orientation. It’s clear, then, that the shot, showing Virginie’s back, does not represent her vision. The shots that follow show Virginie and her friends who look at and talk about Gervaise. This sequence ends with a close-up of Gervaise who looks at Virginie before she throws water at her. This series of shots shows how the function of the look is that of catalyst rather than of metaphorical camera, yet allows the spectator to identify easily with Gervaise despite not sharing her gaze. In this way, the film constructs Gervaise as the female equivalent to Mulvey’s male protagonist/bearer of the look. In a similar way to that in the novel, it is through Gervaise’s point of view, in one way or another, that the spectator perceives the internalization of events.

The movement in the point of view of the camera from a specific character to that of a third person narrator that manifests itself as a witness of events, and vice versa, illustrates one way of interpreting the free indirect style in a film. Whereas the use of the look of the camera doesn’t follow the exact model offered by Zola in L’Assommoir, the different points of view shown in Gervaise reflect the complex relationship between observer and object and problematize the traditional model of the male gaze in cinema, as elucidated by Mulvey. The dual role of the character of Gervaise, who is at the same time observer and object, demonstrates one effect of free indirect style in that the narrating voice is able to hold both positions. Gervaise’s function in the film as both observer and object exemplifies the complex position of women in post-war French society. As Clément saw the “relevance” of Gervaise’s story
to contemporary France in the 1950s, Gervaise’s character and the subject/object positions she holds in the film evoke the complexities of the societal and domestic positions women embodied after World War II.

In differing yet equally effective ways, both *Thérèse Raquin* and *Gervaise* portray and reflect a contemporary model of the challenges faced by women in 1950s France as they struggled to negotiate the intersection of new-found duties and freedoms as a hold-over from the war and the traditional roles that society expected of them. Each of these films is the story of their respective female character, as illustrated by their eponymous titles. More importantly, each film is a reading of their literary original in that the directors/scriptwriters construct female characters that break or challenge patriarchal concepts of women’s position in society and at home.

In *Thérèse Raquin*, the choice to change Thérèse’s heritage displaces her otherness. Rather than being “other” as the child of a Frenchman and Algerian woman, Thérèse in the film is seen as “other” due to her status as victim, thus foregrounding the struggles of women against the confines of traditional patriarchy in 1950s France. In *Gervaise*, the cinematic construction of Gervaise’s point of view privileges Gervaise’s position as subject in the film. It also calls into question assumptions about Tradition of Quality filmmakers, Aurenche and Bost, whose work has been systematically rejected due to Truffaut’s attack on them. Despite their reputation, however, I have shown how the modes of adaptation, scriptwriting, and production for which the Tradition of
Quality is known succeed in rendering socially significant and problematic images of women.
Chapter 5
Edwige Feuillère: Grand Dame of the French Cinema, Modern Figure of Femininity

The field of Star Studies has evolved over the past several decades to bring to light the phenomenon of the star persona. At its origins, the field focused primarily on American stars and Hollywood. More recently, though, work on the French star system and on specific stars has shown how certain French stars are seen in terms of the star’s image, promulgated by the actor and the industry, and the way that their image is actually seen by the public. In the American star system, this relationship centers around aspects such as the stars’ marketability and marketing and the consumption of the star by the public. American filmmaking has traditionally been deeply-rooted in the practice of producing both film and star products, while French filmmaking has, as a general rule, sought less to mass produce films. From its inception, the French film industry has lacked enduring large studios, and, particularly in the 30s and the 40s, French film producers typically made only a small number of films with a given star (Vincendeau 11). Given that the relationship between stars and producers has been limited, French star images are not the property of production companies, and stars are not marketed in France in the same
way as American stars have been. French star images, then, have not received the same
attention from scholars as their American counterparts. The work that has been done
on French stars’ personae, however, has shown that French stars’ images are inherent
elements in the film industry in France in terms of not only economics and national
identity, but also as cultural markers of how gender and sexuality are viewed by the
French (Vincendeau; Hayward, “National”). Certain stars such as Jean Gabin, Brigitte
Bardot, and Simone Signoret have been rigorously studied, and several scholars have
examined how gender is represented and constructed on the French film screen with
respect to star image. Edwige Feuillère’s star persona lends itself to this type of analysis
because her image corresponds in some ways to generally accepted expectations of
femininity. Indeed, she has, on occasion, been lumped into the “femme-objet” and
“garce” categories that permeate analyses of French representations of women in the
1950s (Leahy 55). At the same time, however, she frequently played in roles that
challenge and problematize these expectations. While several biographies,
filmographies, and memoirs have been published, Edwige Feuillère’s star persona has
yet to be adequately treated. She starred in many well-known and highly esteemed
films and she was beloved by audiences, which is why her star persona merits attention.

In this chapter, I trace the types associated with her star image and then show
how her roles in post-war film, and specifically in L’idiot (1946), L’aigle à deux têtes
(1947), Adorables créatures (1952), Le blé en herbe (1954), and En cas de malheur (1958)
illustrate how her image defies easy classification. I show how Feuillère’s performances
in these roles were, in some instances, reflections of societal anxieties concerning the
status of modern woman. At the same time, however, these roles challenged the boundaries of this image. Finally, I examine public and critical reception of Feuillère’s performances, both generally and in her role as Julie in *Olivia* (1950), as a means of evaluating why Feuillère was particularly well-suited to these roles.

Feuillère was beloved for her work both on screen and on the stage, and her career encompassed periods where she focused more on one medium than on the other. In the 1930s and 1940s, she concentrated more on her film career than on her theater work. Robert Kemp notes that her early roles, such as her part as Suzy Courtois in *Topaze* (1932) or as Diane in *Les Aventures du roi Pausole* (1933) did not leave a lasting impression of Feuillère (99). By 1935, though, she began to land parts that allowed her to embody more interesting and memorable characters. She played Claudia Procula in *Golgotha* (1935), which Kemp describes as the first role in which she “incarnait un personnage chargé d’une âme nuancée, un être de qualité” (100). That same year, she played Giacinta in *Barcarolle*, which was the first role for which she felt a sense of pride (101). She acted alongside Pierre Richard-Willm, who would later star with her in the play *La Dame aux Camélias*, the role for which Feuillère is most famous.

1935 was also the year in which she played the title role in *Lucrèce Borgia*. The character of Borgia was a departure for Feuillère, and it was thanks to this role that she began to acquire a reputation as a “femme fatale” (Kemp 102). Indeed, this was not the only role to paint her as what Burch and Sellier have termed “la Femme forte” and “une femme à abattre” or “la Mégère-à-apprivoiser” (54). Roles such as her Véra in *J’étais une aventurière* (1938), Marthe in *Marthe Richard, au service de la France* (1937),
Edwige Eino in Feu! (1937), Catherine in L’Honorable Catherine (1942), and the duchess in La Duchesse de Langeais (1942) exemplify how Feuillère embodied the image of the capable and potent woman who is punished in the end for pushing the limits of her prescribed position. In these films, as in others, Feuillère plays a spy, a criminal, or a woman of nobility, stepping into arenas in which men typically reign. Frequently, she receives some form of punishment in the wake of this transgression. In the case of La Duchesse de Langeais, for example, her sexuality is central to the power that she exerts over men. Punishment takes the form of death after she flees to a convent. Other times, her offense involves the use of her intellect, such as in Marthe Richard, au service de la France. Rather than suffering the punishment of death at the end of the film, though, for having intruded upon the male domain, she loses the affection of the man she loves and is forced to flee. In some cases, Feuillère’s character does not receive a punishment per se. In L’Honorable Catherine, Feuillère’s character finishes by sharing in a mutual declaration of love with the male protagonist. Even when transgressions go unpunished, then, Feuillère’s character is put back into the requisite position for a woman in the structure of patriarchal order. In virtually every case, Feuillère’s characters in the 30s and early 40s are limited in their power to function outside of the roles designated for women at the time.

Although the number of films that Feuillère made in the 1950s is much smaller than the number she made before World War II, her post-war roles are distinct from the roles that she played before the War. As Burch and Sellier have noted, Feuillère’s “Femme forte” was nearly always punished for her transgressions against her place
within patriarchal order. Her roles in the 1950s, however, took on an additional element. Still the “Femme forte” in the majority of her roles, Feuillère’s characters sometimes escaped without necessarily being punished for their misdeeds. In terms of her characters’ control in love relationships, Feuillère often incarnated women who hold power over their lovers or husbands or who finish comparatively well in the end. Other times, her characters were women who should find a tragic end for one reason or another, yet are able to make choices to affect their destiny. Her roles in *Le blé en herbe*, *Adorables créatures*, and *En cas de malheur* illustrate the different ways that Feuillère’s power in a love relationship helped nurture her image of cool sophistication, elegance, independence, and intelligence. Her roles in the films *L’aigle à deux têtes* and *L’idiot* are examples of characters who position themselves so that they are able to fight against their destiny. In the end, they are not able to escape their fate, but they choose to embrace it and bring it about by their own actions. In my first discussion, I will examine how the power that Feuillère’s characters wield as lovers distinguishes theirs from typical representations of women at the time.

5.1 Power in the Game of Love: Feuillère versus the Boys

As many scholars have pointed out, the cinematic treatment of women in the 1950s gave them more exposure than they had ever had previously on the French film screen and also objectified them to an ever-increasing extent (Hayward; Vincendeau; Leahy). The feminization of the French film product bolstered two principal
representations of women: that of eroticized femme objet and that of the femme-enfant (Leahy 55.) The notion of the femme-objet describes the way in which the eroticized image of woman acts as the object of the male gaze in cinema, but also in virtually all forms of representation. The idea of the femme-enfant explains the fetishization of an objectified woman who acts like a child and needs to be cared for. Brigitte Bardot is the classic example of the femme-enfant. Susan Hayward has shown, though, how exceptions to this dichotomy of image types for women existed in the 50s. Simone Signoret’s star image, for example, acts in direct conflict with both categories of images. Other exceptions exist as well. Edwige Feuillère’s star image is one that does not fit easily into the femme-objet classification and does not fit at all into the femme-enfant one. While Feuillère is objectified and eroticized in several of the films that she made, it is incorrect to say that she functions merely as an object in them. Rather, her roles point to the sometimes ill-defined position of women’s desires with respect to men’s desires. That is, Feuillère’s characters frequently express their desires and needs in relationships with male protagonists. More importantly, her characters make choices to bring about change in the relationships when their dynamics fail to bring her characters satisfaction. Feuillère’s characters make the defining decision to end the relationship with the male protagonist in Le blé en herbe, En cas de Malheur, and Adorables créatures, and, in this way, her characters ultimately take charge of the course of the relationship.

In Le blé en herbe, Feuillère plays the character of “la dame en blanc” and is billed without a name, though we eventually learn that her name is “Mme Dalleray.”
The film opens with a scene in which a sixteen-year-old boy, Phil, is rowing a boat in the ocean during a wind storm. He falls in the water and nearly drowns. He saves himself and returns home where Vinca, his girlfriend, takes him to her room to give him dry clothes. We learn that the young couple spends every summer together because their parents vacation at the same beach and everyone expects that they will eventually get married. One evening, Phil finally gets up the nerve to kiss Vinca, but the kiss is underwhelming for them both. Phil expresses his discomfort with the idea that their relationship is changing, and Vinca become disheartened with Phil’s lack of enthusiasm for their budding romance. Phil meets la dame en blanc at the beach and later finds an excuse to visit her at the house she rents. The visit causes the woman’s demeanor toward Phil to change to piqued interest. It is apparent that she is attracted to him, but he flees out of naïve fear of a first sexual encounter. Phil and the woman have another semi-awkward meeting before he finally spends the night with her. After Phil leaves the woman’s house, he sneaks back into his room, stopping by Vinca’s to kiss her as she sleeps. The next day, he goes back to the woman’s house and asks her if he could meet her now and then in Paris. The woman explains to him how it could hurt a woman – not her, of course, but another woman – to be asked that question. She asks Phil if he loves her, but his silence indicates that loves Vinca. The woman sleeps with him again, though, noting that what she has done for him will help him and Vinca.

Vinca suspects that something is going on and refuses to go out with Phil, even though there are only a few days of vacation left. Instead of staying in to fight with Vinca, Phil goes back to the dame en blanc, expecting to spend the night with her again.
She tells him that she has other plans for that night and explains that they had a fling and nothing more. He tries to kiss her twice to convince her that it was more than that for him, but she physically stops his advances. Phil returns back home where Vinca confronts him, and they fight about his affair with the woman. Then, they make love on the beach. The next morning, they spend the day together and go to church where they pretend to exchange rings as if getting married. Vinca tells him, though, that she had received a message that the dame en blanc was leaving, and Phil races out of the church to catch her. He gets there too late, and the last scene we see is of Phil and Vinca standing on the beach as their families prepare to leave. The parents call to them, and Vinca notices how their names, “Phil et Vinca” have morphed into one word: “Philévinca.” The last shot of the film is of the couple walking on the beach as they leave.

Feuillère’s character is presented as mysterious not only because she is essentially anonymous, but also because she is much older than Phil. For Phil, she represents the secrets of sexuality and adulthood, a threshold that Phil crosses with her guidance. For the woman in white, however, the relationship represents both the transgression of taking a younger lover and the expression of her own desires for love, or at least for companionship – a desire that Feuillère’s character divulges when she asks Phil if he loves her. Phil cannot respond yes to the question, though, and the woman realizes her mistake in desiring love from someone so much younger. Phil is not only “pas libre,” as he is in a relationship, however ill-defined, with Vinca, but he is also too immature to understand the significance of asking her to be an occasional lover.
Even if the woman loses her composure concerning her emotions during this conversation, she regains it at their next meeting. The woman in white thwarts Phil’s advances and tells him that he was only a passing fancy. Phil tries to force a kiss on her and she physically restrains him – twice – and tells him to stop playing his part. Feuillère’s character’s age does not preclude her sexual prowess, but allows her to regain the control in a relationship that will not bring her satisfaction.

In *En cas de malheur*, Feuillère’s character exerts a less noticeable power in her marriage, though she does maintain a level of control in it. The film is about a young prostitute, Yvette (Brigitte Bardot), who is arrested for her part in a holdup of a jewelry store. She engages the help of André Gobillot (Jean Gabin) to defend her, even though she is penniless and can only pay him in sexual favors. André declines her offer and defends her for free, risking perjury charges to clear her name. After the trial, she continues to see André at the same time that she dates a young medical student, Mazzetti (Franco Interlenghi). André becomes infatuated with Yvette, so much so that he pays for a hotel room for her and visits her there despite his marriage to Viviane Gobillot (Edwige Feuillère). Viviane understands before André does that Yvette wants to sleep with him, so she drives him to her hotel and drops him off. André and Yvette start an affair, but Yvette is unable to be faithful to him, as she continues to see Mazzetti as well. André does not ask her for fidelity. Mazzetti, however, upon realizing the control that André has over Yvette, demands that she leave him. She refuses and he goes to her hotel room and shreds all of her dresses in anger.
André sees Mazzetti’s display as a threat not only to Yvette but also to his relationship with her. He buys an apartment for her to hide her from Mazzetti and tells his wife not to object, lest he take it as a declaration of war. Viviane agrees reluctantly because André tells her that getting Yvette an apartment is a step towards ending the affair. André and Yvette then spend a few weeks together in quasi-bliss. Yvette, however, cannot content herself with the affection of only one man, and she eludes André and her live-in maid (Nicole Berger) to find Mazzetti. They spend the afternoon making love, but when she tries to leave him to go back to André, he murders her. The film ends when André goes to identify the body at Mazzetti’s hotel. As the police officer pulls back the blood-soaked sheet concealing Yvette, we see a shot of her lifeless face, which is surrounded by blood. The police take the body, and we see André leave before the screen fades out.

Feuillère’s role in this film may be a secondary one in that, as the wife, she is the one to whom André is being unfaithful. She spends a long time in the film enduring André’s cheating, even though she is hoping for him to leave Yvette and come back to her. When she drops him off at the hotel, the sounds of squealing tires as Viviane pulls away mark her displeasure at his desire to go in, and she later admonishes him when she discovers that he has spent the night with her at the hotel. As the affair progresses, she continues to aid André to a certain extent. She calls the apartment to inform him of the impending perjury charges against him, yet she refuses to speak with Yvette. She instead calls back repeatedly and hangs up each time until André understands that he needs to come home. She bears the burden of being the deceived wife, even if she
knows about it from the beginning. At the end of the film, though, it is she who makes the final declaration of war. Viviane receives flowers from André that are addressed to Yvette, and Viviane throws them on to his desk as a symbolic gesture that she is fed up with his cheating. The final shot that we see of Viviane is after André leaves in a panic because he learns that Yvette is missing. Viviane asks André’s secretary, Bordenave (Madeleine Barbulée) if anything is wrong. Bordenave responds that she hopes not, yet we see Viviane who stands in a medium shot and declares, “j’espère bien que si.”

Even though Feuillère’s character has a limited amount of power in this film, it is still she who makes the decision to no longer accept André’s cheating. Moreover, the final shot of her is emblematic of her expression of her wants. Finally unwilling to be further talked in to accepting André’s whims, she speaks her mind. More importantly, Viviane is put into sharp contrast with Yvette in this film, and the composition of shots supports this distinction. While Yvette represents the archetypal femme-enfant (in this, as in many of Bardot’s roles), Viviane is painted as the mature woman who maintains her grace despite the adversity of a cheating husband. Yvette is murdered by stabbing and is shown dead in her final shot in a close-up of her head and neck with blood on her face and surrounding her. Viviane, by contrast, is shown in medium shot in her final shot, creating more distance between her and the spectator. This position of the camera also distances her from her potential for objectification (which is a sharp contrast to the final shot of Yvette). Viviane also remains alive and, presumably, free to eventually pursue a future relationship. The ending offers Yvette the customary punishment for a
sexually promiscuous woman (Burch and Sellier 277). Yet, for the older woman who stands up for herself, no punishment is imposed.

In *Adorables créatures*, Feuillère’s character is again an older woman who expresses her wants in her relationship. This time, however, she wields even more power than in *En cas de malheur*. Feuillère is one of three women with whom André (Daniel Gélin), an ad-man and artist, falls in love. First, he starts an affair with a married woman, Christine (Danielle Darrieux), who has two children. André goes to Christine’s house to tell her husband, Jacques (Daniel Lecourtois), that they have been having an affair and that he intends to run away with her and the children. André arrives, though, to find Christine preparing to go to Greece with Jacques for two months to placate Christine who suspects her husband of cheating on her. André then meets a very blond and very spoiled Minouche (Martine Carol), who is left at an expensive restaurant by her lover when she throws a temper tantrum over the food. André and Minouche date until they cross paths with Evelyne (Marilyn Buferd), an old friend of Minouche’s, and her sugar daddy, Gaston Lebridel (Louis Seigner). Minouche and Evelyne exchange lovers, but Evelyne quickly drops André to find a richer man. André then meets Denise Aubusson (Edwige Feuillère), a rich widow who prides herself on her generosity to the less fortunate. Denise moves André into her home and all goes well until Alice (Renée Faure) tells André that Denise is much older than he might suspect. When Denise finds out, she has Alice arrested for theft and breaks up with André under the guise of him being too young for her. André eventually marries the neighbors’ daughter, Catherine,
but the spectator is left with the impression that life with Catherine will not be entirely marital bliss.

All three of the women that André dates are painted as modern figures of femininity in that they act like men in certain ways. At the same time, they all have a marked interest in spending money, be it their husband’s, André’s, or their own. Burch and Sellier classify this film as one in a series of films that were collections of sketches of women for the purpose of comedy. They note that Adorables créatures can be put into the same category as other films that claim to offer a representative sampling of women to show how women “were” in the 50s: Destinées (1954) by Jean Delannoy, Belles de nuit (1952) by René Clair, La Ronde (1950) by Max Olphus, or Monsieur Ripois (1954) by René Clément (250). These films are all by well-established male directors whose careers began during, if not before, the classical age of French cinema, and Christian-Jacque is no exception. However, whereas Burch and Sellier focus mainly on the “tendance lourde” of the 50s to make films that are, by and large, misogynist samplings of increasingly blond and increasingly objectified women, I would like to suggest that Adorables créatures shows us other, more complex aspects of relations between the sexes. I will argue that there are a myriad of stereotypical models of femininity in the film, and that gender is neither a completely fixed construction nor entirely a marker of societal position.

On her way to meet André at his home, Christine (Danielle Darrieux) is delayed thanks to what the narrator ironically tells us are “de graves empêchements.” The camera cuts to a shot of a sale at a fabric store, where we see a table full of fabric bolts
that are being tossed around and a sign that says, “solde” bobbing around in the middle of the fracas. The camera pans up quickly to show the entirety of the store, and we see that the fracas extends to all of the tables in the store. At each table, women are crowded around, fighting for bolts of fabric, and they pull and thrash the material around while yelling at each other. The camera cuts to a pan shot of a long table, and we see only arms and fabric pieces flying about. We see Christine pick up a piece of fabric that is rudely ripped from her hands. Her hat is then knocked off when another shopper elbows her in the head to get a better grip on a certain bolt of fabric. Christine has a small quarrel over a plaid pattern with another shopper, who exclaims that it is hers because she is holding it. Christine finally succeeds in securing a piece of fabric for herself, yet loses her hat one more time in the process. We then hear the narrator comment that women will fight each other to save a tiny bit of money on something that they don’t need, as the camera cuts back to André’s apartment.

The short scene at the fabric store sets the tone in this film for how women are portrayed. It plays on every stereotype imaginable about women shopping at a sale. The women are petty and almost violent in their struggle to get the fabric, and the verbal exchange is catty. It is not by accident that the women are shopping for fabric, as sewing and shopping are highly gendered activities. Christine treats shopping like a pastime that she should not necessarily admit to André to having pursued. When he asks her why she is late, she tells him that it was impossible to find a cab (an excuse she later uses on her husband for her tardiness.) Yet, if shopping and sewing are decidedly female activities, carrying on an affair is not. When Christine gets home, she finds evidence that
her husband, Jacques, has been cheating on her. Even though Christine is having her
own affair with André, she is incredulous that Jacques might be doing the same to her.
She confronts him, and they reconcile by deciding to leave for Greece for two months (a
trip paid for by the husband). This representation of marital infidelity on Christine’s part
is a clear reversal of the double standard that exists for many French men who see no
problem with their own infidelity but take great exception to their wives’ straying.\textsuperscript{19}

André’s next conquest, Minouche (Martine Carol), typifies negative stereotypes
associated with women. She insists on changing tables several times before sitting down
to eat at a fancy restaurant. She throws a fit over the meal, refuses to eat it, and then
complains to her lover that she hasn’t eaten when he asks for the check. Sick of her
antics, the boyfriend leaves the restaurant without paying the check. André comes to
her rescue, and the two begin dating. During their courtship, Minouche misses no
opportunity to use André for his money. He pays for all of her shopping trips because
she continually “forgets” to bring money. They go on a ski trip, and Minouche brings
enough luggage to fill the entire train compartment yet conveniently has no money to
tip the porter or the cab driver. After getting ready for bed, she is stricken suddenly with
a migraine so as to avoid sleeping with André. André gives her his pillow and blanket,
too, and thus is too uncomfortable to sleep. He is ultimately deprived of space, sleep
and sex on the trip.

\textsuperscript{19} It is worth noting that the theme of a wife/ fiancée’s repayment for infidelity is treated in a similar
manner in at least two later films, \textit{La Garçonne} (1957) by Jacqueline Audry and \textit{Gazon maudit} (1995) by
Josiane Balasko. The French husband or husband to be cheats and cannot believe that his wife/fiancée
does the same thing in revenge. In \textit{La Garçonne}, the woman who cheats does so with a man, but there is
innuendo that she might possibly sleep with the lesbian character as well. In \textit{Gazon maudit}, the wife gets
back at her husband by sleeping with a woman.
When they arrive at the ski lodge, Minouche continues to thwart André’s attempts at getting her into bed because she says that she loves him and abhors the idea of being someone’s mistress. Minouche runs into her old friend Evelyne and eventually becomes jealous of all of the jewelry that Evelyne’s rich lover gives her. Minouche, however, convinces Evelyne that she is happier and richer because André has sex with her at all hours of the day and night, which in turn makes Evelyne jealous. Evelyne seduces André while Minouche flirts with Gaston. The couples break up and Minouche moves into Gaston’s room, while Evelyne moves to André’s room. Though we see no more of Minouche, Evelyne declares that she gave up her rich lover for something that was not as good as it was touted to be and sets immediately to looking for a new rich lover. These women embody the worst stereotypes of a “modern” woman, in that they use men for their money and jump from lover to lover based on what they get from them. In the end, they both leave André for richer men, but more importantly, they both exchange lovers for money or (better) sex.

Luce Irigaray discusses the concept of women as objects of exchange that are circulated and consumed by men as a fundamental part of society. She uses Marx’s view of value to show how women’s status in society is that of a commodity that holds value in terms of accumulation and exchange. For Irigaray, the worth of women in society is determined by their ability to produce and reproduce, and she juxtaposes theirs with men’s worth, which is based on labor. Women are limited to one of three possible social roles, all of which are based on their sexual worth: mother, virgin, or whore. A mother has no possibility for exchange among men, though she has use value, as she is...
indispensable in (re)production and maintenance of the social order (185). A virgin, by
contrast, is the zenith of exchangeability in that she incarnates the potential of use by
men. Once used, she is excluded from exchange. The whore is the exception to the
dichotomy between potential for exchange and use of women as a commodity. Unlike
the virgin whose exchange possibility is effaced when she is used or the mother whose
exchange potential has already been effaced for the same reason, the whore represents
what Irigaray terms “usage that is exchanged” (186). In none of these scenarios is a
woman’s own pleasure a question; each scenario is conceived of in terms of men’s
pleasure or benefit. Irigaray illustrates how women embody a number of qualities that
other commodities bear, and to what extent they are thus subordinated and suppressed
by men’s use of them as commodities. She asserts that women are unable to
comprehend their own value outside of man’s conception of them, and, as a result, they
cannot engage in exchanges among themselves (187-88).

Seen through the lens of Irigaray’s conception of the status of women as
commodities and as objects of exchange, Minouche and Evelyne’s exchange of lovers
takes on new light. Even though the men are more than happy to switch partners, it is
Minouche who sets the exchange in motion by making Evelyne think that André is an
excellent lover. Evelyne, as a result, makes an appointment with the doctor for shoulder
pain that coincides with André’s appointment for his injured ankle. They cross paths and
end up going on a hayride together, which gives Minouche the chance to seduce
Gaston. This type of exchange is a different take on the standard form of exchange of
women as noted by Irigaray. In this case, it is the women who control and perpetuate
the exchange, even if they still use their bodies as the commodities to be exchanged.

More importantly, though, the women are not deprived of pleasure. Evelyne is willing to trade jewels and riches for sexual gratification. When she fails to receive it, she puts herself back on the market by calling a new potential suitor from André’s room. While they do not exactly take a step in the direction for women’s autonomy, even the most stereotypical female characters in this film position themselves to elicit better gains within the system of exchange.

The third woman that André dates is Denise Aubusson (Edwige Feuillère), a twice-widowed and very rich woman who enjoys giving her money to those who need it. She attends galas, dinners, dances and goes to the symphony and theater, all in the name of helping the less fortunate. She believes that she has the power to cure criminals of their tendencies, and she employs her live-in maid, Alice, a convicted thief who spent three months in prison. Denise makes Alice recite to guests how Denise helped her reform her thieving ways. Denise is portrayed in a rather ridiculous fashion in terms of her social life, but she is also the most independent woman that André dates. Since she is rich herself, she has no need to depend on André or anyone else for money, though her wealth is in thanks to her late husbands. When Denise moves André into her home, he lives in the lap of luxury. He calls in sick to work for several days, having relapsed several times from the same fabricated illness and eventually stops drawing for work and does so only for his own pleasure. The couple is very happy, and the spectator gets the impression that André is a kept man in Denise’s house. They remain happy until Denise discovers a drawing of Alice made by André. Denise becomes jealous and asks
Alice to leave for Cannes under some pretext. Alice discovers that Denise is merely trying to get rid of her, so she avenges herself by telling André Denise’s real age. When Denise finds out, she gives Alice one of her bracelets and then calls the police to have her arrested for robbery. In the end, Denise breaks up with André before he can tell her that she is too old, asserting that he is too young.

Denise’s modernity manifests itself not only in her independence both financially and emotionally, but also in her ability to exact revenge for the wrong that has been done to her. Whereas Christine and Minouche manipulate their lovers, including André, to get what they want (i.e. a long vacation to Greece or the jewels that another woman was receiving), Denise’s manipulation of events does not involve her lover until she breaks up with him in the end. Instead, she uses the police to get rid of her rival, thus removing Alice from her home. Sending Alice to jail also has the added effect of taking away the help previously given to Alice to make a fresh start after her conviction. In this way, Denise steps beyond the limited role of power that women in the film and in society typically have in that she is able to bring about change and also remove its effects. She is able to do so for two reasons. First, she has money and is entirely independent of anyone else for her livelihood. Secondly, she is older than Alice, or even than Christine and Minouche. Age becomes a critical factor for Feuillère’s characters in the 1950s, as I have noted as well for her roles in *Le blé en herbe* and *En cas de malheur*. In the case of *Adorables créatures*, Denise’s age may be seen as hindrance in that she loses her lover who is younger. However, it also allows her to position herself in a way that the other two women cannot. Christine and Minouche replace André with either a
previously spurned husband or with another lover. Denise, however, simply breaks up with him. We do not know who Denise’s next lover will be and, in our last glimpse of her, she remains both single and independent, yet free to take another lover if she chooses.

If the women in this film are presented as crossing boundaries by acting like men in terms of power or wealth, it is necessary to note too that André is presented like a woman in some respects. I have argued that the female characters are not objectified to the same extent that women often are in 1950s film. However, at the beginning of the film, André is presented more like an object than any of the women. At the beginning of the film, the narrator interrupts the opening credits to introduce André, who comes out on stage from behind a curtain. The narrator tells us that we don’t care about the author of the film or who the script girl is but that we want to take a look at the lead actor. As André stands on stage, he is shown in a long shot, while the narrator asks if this is the guy who is going to love so many adorable creatures. The narrator then notes that he seems like a nice guy, but he hardly seems like a Don Juan. The camera moves to a medium-close up, and the narrator notes that he has soft eyes and asks him to show his profile. The narrator says that the profile is nothing special and suggests that he might look better in evening wear. The camera moves back to a long shot and cuts to André in a tuxedo. The narrator notes that this is not much better and asks him to show us his pectoral muscles. André appears in nothing more than a swim suit, to which the narrator responds that it was what we’d expect it to be. The narrator then tells him that he can get dressed and declares that André is a “garçon comme les autres.”
André is objectified in the most literal sense during the opening scene. Not only is he reduced to his allure based purely on physical appearance, but he is also stripped mostly naked so that the narrator and spectator might look at his pectoral muscles. The reference to his pectorals is an obvious stand in for a woman’s breasts, thus feminizing André. He is further feminized later in a scene where his boss, the Director of the ad agency (Giovanna Galletti), looks at him in a sexually desiring way. The Director is a lesbian and exhibiting all of the stereotypes associated with lesbians. We first glimpse her hands caressing a very feminine woman as André looks into the Director’s office. When André finally enters the office, we see that the Director is wearing something that closely resembles a man’s suit. She then offers André a cigar, which he declines because it makes him cough. As André takes a call, the Director lights the cigar and stares fixedly at André. She continues to stare at him as he exits her office and says to herself, “De beaux yeux, du cœur... Quelle dommage que ce soit un homme!” One might argue that the Director’s attraction to him could be read as André’s inexplicable allure that makes even lesbians want to sleep with him. I argue, rather, that the Director’s attraction to him means that we can and should read André like a woman in this film.

To say that gender is a floating marker in this film is an understatement. Reading André as a woman makes Denise’s actions come into clearer focus. Before André, her live-in lover (Jean-Marc Tennberg) is a pianist, whom we learn is just the latest in Denise’s long line of live-in lovers. The fact that Denise prefers artists might reflect her appreciation of the arts. Playing on stereotypes, however, it is also an indication that she prefers men who are less manly. Moreover, she chooses lovers who are...
interchangeable, and one replaces another very quickly. Denise, therefore, cannot be classified as anything other than an active agent with respect to her love life, as in all aspects of her life. Similar arguments can be made concerning her characters in *Le blé en herbe* and *En cas de malheur*. Both characters, as I have already argued, take active steps to bring about change in their relationships, and, by extension, in their lives. This type of active character, who in two cases is also a sexually desiring character, helps shape the star image of Edwige Feuillère as more than merely a “Femme forte,” but rather as a “Femme vainqueur.” Whereas the “Femme forte” of the 30s and early 40s was consistently punished for stepping beyond gender boundaries, Feuillère’s post-war “Femme vainqueur” emerges as victorious in her transgressions.

5.2 Choosing Death: Feuillère versus Fate

Despite the numerous roles in which she comes out as victorious, Feuillère’s typing as a “femme à abattre” (Burch and Sellier 54) does not escape her entirely in her post-war films. Though still an active agent, I see Feuillère’s characters in *L’aigle à deux têtes* and *L’idiot* as examples of how Feuillère’s characters still must bear the brunt of punishment for extreme reaches beyond gender boundaries. In *L’aigle à deux têtes* Feuillère is a queen who continues to rule ten years after the death of the king, despite the fact that his death should have officially effaced her power. In *L’idiot*, Feuillère’s character is a fallen woman who readily changes lovers and who is also brazen enough to speak the truth about how she came to be a fallen women when she asserts that she
was raped when she was young. In each of these films, Feuillère’s characters do more than push limits. For making these bold moves, Feuillère’s characters are punished by death. In each film, though, her characters make choices that actively bring about her death. In this way, her characters choose to accept their fate rather than merely to fall victim to it.

In L’aigle à deux têtes, Feuillère plays the Queen of Wolmar, Natasha, who has hidden behind a veil and refused to show her face to anyone but her personal reader since the King died the night that they were married. The Queen gives a ball at the castle Krantz to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the King’s death. As she toasts the King’s memory, alone in her chambers we hear a giant clap of thunder as Stanislaus (Jean Marais), an assassin sent to murder the Queen, appears in her window. The assassin very closely resembles the King, so much so that the Queen thinks that it is he, but then realizes that he is there to kill her. Stanislaus is delirious from wounds he received while being hunted by the police and is unable to communicate with her. She decides to have his wounds treated so that he may carry out his mission. She gives him three days to kill her or she will kill him. During the time that Stanislaus is in the castle, the couple falls in love and vows to fight against their pursuers. The Queen makes plans to take back her capital and to unveil herself to her public. Stanislaus, in turn, resolves to flee the police who are looking for him so that he can meet with the Queen in secret. Stanislaus is summoned by Count Foehn who tries to convince Stanislaus to betray the Queen. Stanislaus refuses goes back to the castle to take a slow acting poison to avoid being a burden to the Queen. She discovers that he has taken the poison and chastises
him for his cowardice. She convinces him that she never loved him and he kills her, yet we learn as they take their dying breaths that the two do love each other. The film ends with a voice-over telling us that the police may have changed the story, but that the events happened just as they were recounted.

The role that Feuillère plays in this film typifies her elegant image for the very evident reason that she is the Queen. In typical Cocteau fashion, the décor for this film is exceptionally lush and extravagant, much like the settings he used in *La belle et la bête* (1946). The same is true for Feuillère’s wardrobe. Her gowns are meticulously detailed and Cocteau himself attended to the final touches. In addition to the elegant aspect of her image, though, the film also plays into her image as cool and detached, and even mysterious. She lives in a self-imposed isolation that dates back ten years to the King’s assassination, and as evinced from the opening scene of the film, no one is allowed to see the Queen’s face. The opening shot is a long shot of the Queen, Edith, and Félix from behind. Even when we eventually see the characters from the front, the Queen’s face is concealed by a veil. The Queen always wears this or another veil in front of everyone except her reader and her personal servant, Tony (Ahmed Abdallah). Even the spectator is denied an unobscured glimpse of her face for the first fourteen and a half minutes of the film. We only discover her face when Félix sneaks upstairs to spy on the Queen and steals an unsanctioned look at her, without her veil.

The Queen is portrayed as being completely detached from the people whom she rules. Not only does she refuse to show herself to her people, she is also ignorant of their wishes. The disconnect between the Queen and her people is put into focus when
Stanislaus thwarts her attempts to silence him while they are talking in her library. He comes into the library as she is taking target practice, and she places him at a desk so that he can read to her as she shoots. She calls him a coward for refusing to take her life, despite the loaded pistols that are available to him in the library. She reminds him of the pact that they made – that he should kill her in three days – and he tells her that he made no pact. He asserts that she simply decided that they would have the pact, and that she always decides everything without taking anyone else into account. Despite the Queen’s attempts to forbid him from talking, Stanislaus continues and, in turn, forbids her to speak. In addition to highlighting the Queen’s detachment from her people, this scene is also the turning point at which the dynamic between the Queen and Stanislaus is established. While his mission was to kill her, he did not succeed in taking her life. Rather she points out later that he did succeed in killing the Queen inside of her by forcing her to accept rude treatment, thus making her a different person.

The dynamic between the Queen and Stanislaus is privileged because he is the one person who truly holds power over her. Despite the attempts of the Count and the Archduchess to bring about her downfall, they are not able to do so. The Queen has help from her servant to discover that Edith is allied with Foehn against her and was sent by the Archduchess to spy on her. With the knowledge of what the three are conspiring, the Queen is able to make plans to stop them. Stanislaus, on the other hand, is not only able to strip her of what makes her a queen, he also convinces her to stage a coup to get her capital back and thus reclaim her reign. The night before she plans to take back the capital, she asks him to anoint her as the queen. In this way, it is he who
can create and destroy her identity as Queen. Stanislaus’ power over the Queen is not a malicious power, but rather the power that comes over a person who is in love. The Queen consents to Stanislaus’ plan so that they might be able, ultimately, to be together. However, when Stanislaus takes his own life to save himself from capture, the Queen in turn tricks him into killing her.

Burch and Sellier cite this film as a key example of how Feuillère is typed as a “femme à abattre” in the roles that she played between 1936 and 1948. The Queen is, without a doubt, the prime target in the film. It is significant, though, that the Queen has been facing her own death for ten years. She mentions that she died the night that the King died, and her refusal to show her face in public acts as a stand-in for her death. Until the arrival of the assassin, though, the Queen never has to face the reality of her death. When Stanislaus appears in her window, she makes the decision to keep him alive, noting that he is her angel of death. When he kills himself, he does so not only to save himself from a trial, but also to save her from Foehn. Rather than accepting life and carrying out her plan to take back the capital, she chooses to embrace her death. It is she who tricks Stanislaus – the only true force with power over her – into killing her. In this manner, she takes charge of her destiny. Making the choice to end her own life is, at the same time, a fulfillment of her inevitable destiny and an expression of personal free will. The decision can be read in either light. When compared with a similar decision her character makes in L’idiot, however, I will argue that we should not read her death as a punishment or the inescapable outcome of fate. Instead, I see the choice that Feuillère’s
character makes to take her own life as a way of struggling against powers that try to control her.

In *L'idiot*, Feuillère plays Nastasia Philipovna, a fallen woman who is kept by Totsky (Jean Debucourt), her godfather, who took advantage of her at a young age. Totsky wishes to rid himself of Nastasia and marry Aglaé (Nathalie Nattier), the youngest daughter of Général Epantchine (Maurice Chambreuil). The General’s wife (Marguerite Moreno) is a relative of the Prince Muichkine (Gérard Philipe) who arrives from Switzerland. The Prince arrives at the same time that Totsky meets with the General and his assistant, Gania (Michel André), to convince Gania to marry Nastasia. Totsky offers Gania 75,000 rubles to take Nastasia off his hands. The Prince sees a picture of Nastasia and becomes obsessed with her face because she seems so troubled. He is invited to a party at Nastasia’s house, where she is expected to give her response to Gania’s offer of marriage. During the party, Rogogine (Lucien Coëdel), a flour merchant, offers 100,000 rubles for Nastasia. The Prince, in turn, offers to marry her and share his fortune of 2 million rubles with her. Nastasia declines his offer and leaves with Rogogine, noting that she has fallen too low to be with someone who would show her pity.

Rogogine takes Nastasia to his house, where he lavishes her with diamonds. She yearns for something more than riches and becomes increasingly unhappy with him. She asks the Prince to visit her, under the guise of thanking him for his concern for her. Rogogine flies into a fit of jealousy and the two men fight. The Prince then leaves, but Rogogine discovers that Nastasia has left him during the fight. Rogogine tracks Nastasia down in the country and tells her that she must come back with him, or he will kill her.
She agrees, but leaves to tell Aglaé’s parents that Totsky has financial troubles to save her from marriage to him. Her parents decide that Aglaé will not marry Totsky, and the Prince is able to begin courting her. They get engaged, but Aglaé flees when the Prince cannot choose her when she asks him to choose between her and Nastasia. The Prince and Nastasia then get engaged, but it becomes apparent that the Prince truly loves Aglaé. Nastasia leaves and the Prince goes to Rogogine’s house to find that he has killed her. The film ends with a close-up of the Prince’s face as he is laughing maniacally, driven insane by Nastasia’s death.

It would be easy to dismiss L’idiot as yet another film in which a sexually desiring woman of ill-repute is punished in the end for her immorality by death. Throughout the film, Nastasia is ridiculed and judged by numerous characters – usually by other females, such as Aglaé or Gania’s sister, Sophie (Elisabeth Hardy). Moreover, Nastasia’s death comes after she nearly marries the Prince, a marriage for which she dressed in white, “comme les autres,” indicating that she tries to be married respectably as if she were a virgin. The status of women in this film closely conforms to the limits elucidated by Luce Irigaray concerning the social value of women as objects of exchange. Aglaé, for example, typifies the model of the high-value virgin who waits to be exchanged from father to potential husband. Blond and beautiful, Aglaé is courted by Totsky, but it is Aglaé’s father who negotiates the engagement. Nastasia, by contrast, does not fit well into the status of prostitute. She does circulate among lovers (e.g. from Totsky to Rogogine to the Prince back to Rogogine, etc.), but she defies the status of prostitute in two ways. First, even though she circulates among various men, she manipulates events
so as to be able to choose when and how to change lovers. Second, we learn that
Nastasia had been living with Totsky because he had been given charge of her as her
godfather when her parents died when she was young and he had begun raping her at
the age of 16. Nastasia’s ability to name both the rape and the rapist is tantamount to
asserting personal ascendancy over her situation. These two facets of Nastasia’s
relationship to her sexuality are evident during the party scene.

Nastasia gives a party at her home under the guise of giving her response to
Gania’s marriage proposal. In reality, though, Nastasia uses the party as an opportunity
to escape the situation that Totsky creates to get rid of her. In the first part of the party
scene, Nastasia offers two metaphors to describe her situation to her guests. First, when
the General insists that Nastasia give her response to Gania, she makes reference to a
condemned woman asking an executioner for a moment before she is taken away.
Later, she tells them the story of a doe that has been fleeing from hunters for hours and
encounters a god who asks her why she is making the hunters work so hard and tells her
to stop her game. Nastasia tells them that the doe then lay down, and she demands to
know with whom they at the party would have her lie. At this moment, we hear a bell
ring, and Nastasia asks them to wait just a few seconds more. We see Rogogine and his
gang appear at the doorway and then in reverse shot we see the party goers stare at
them in awkward silence. Since Totsky has offered Gania 75,000 rubles to marry
Nastasia, she in turn has persuaded Rogogine to attend the party to offer 100,000 rubles
for her. When Rogogine enters the house, he immediately places the 100,000 rubles on
a table and announces that he brought more if she wants them. We see a low-angle
American shot of him, thus giving the effect that Rogogine towers over the others.

Nastasia explains that Rogogine had been pursuing her for some time prior to the party and that he would make a good participant in the auction that was going to take place that evening. Nastasia then announces that the auction is open and restates each man’s price offered for her. When she asks Totsky if he’s given his last price, he responds that she’s lost her head. She counters, however, by declaring, “je parle de l’affaire pour une fois. Il s’agit de ma vie, ma peau.” She continues her thought by leaning in close to Gania, and states, as if she were trying to sell some type of good or product to someone, “une jolie peau, Gania. Fraiche en été, chaude en hiver. Totsky ne te l’a pas dit?” Her assertion about the quality of her own skin is reminiscent of a merchant who gives customers assurances of previous customer satisfaction.

Nastasia’s auction of her own body problematizes her position as a woman to be exchanged among men in this film. While her body, or “peau,” physically acts as the thing being auctioned off to the highest bidder in exchange for cash, she controls and oversees the auction. In acting as both the item of the exchange and the manipulator of the exchange, Nastasia literally takes up the role of both man and woman in this scene. Burch and Sellier see Feuillère’s role as the “femme vendue” to the flour merchant in this film as a repetition of the trauma she suffered at a young age when she was sold to Totsky to be his concubine after her parents’ death (253). They maintain that the trauma suffered by Nastasia was so enormous that she cannot escape the identity of “femme vendue” created for her. I would argue, however, that her own manipulation of the auction suggests that she does succeed in repositioning herself outside of this
identity. By inviting Rogogine to the party, she sidesteps Totsky’s plan to get rid of her by marrying her off to Gania. Additionally, Nastasia makes it clear to everyone in the room, and to the spectator, that Totsky’s actions have never been honorable when she names him as her rapist.

As she negotiates her price, she notes that Rogogine might bid the highest price, but the others can offer her other things that are out of his reach. She cites the benefits of the reputation associated with being part of a bourgeois family and having a general for a father-in-law as examples. These fringe benefits of marrying into a bourgeois family are thrown into sharp contrast, however, with the reality of being in one when the General asks to take his leave from the room due to the scene Nastasia is making. Nastasia exclaims that it is far too late for modesty and that the General is guilty of trying to get rid of Nastasia so as to be able to marry his daughter off to a man without scruples. The General argues that he merely wanted to help his friend, Totsky, make amends for his wrong-doings. Nastasia then demands to know how much a rape with scruples is worth.

Nastasia’s ability to manipulate events to circumvent ruses by others who wish to control her gives her agency in a role that would otherwise afford her none. Even at the end of the film when Nastasia returns to Rogogine, who kills her for having left him for the Prince, Nastasia does so because she refuses to marry a man who is in love with another woman. She is completely cognizant of what is in store for her when she returns, yet she chooses to go back despite the Prince’s attempts to convince her that he was merely reminded of Aglaé by Nastasia’s dress color. Nastasia’s choices are
certainly limited, yet she maximizes her capacity to maneuver within these limits. In the same way as in her role as the Queen in *L'aigle à deux têtes*, Feuillère’s character in *L'idiot* occupies a position that should severely limit the amount of control that she has over her own life or over others’ lives. As a queen whose king is dead, she should not be able to wield any power whatsoever. Similarly, as a fallen woman, she should be considered an outcast according to societal mores. Indeed, several other characters – women, mostly – insist that Nastasia hold that place in society. Yet in both films, Feuillère’s characters succeed in pushing the limits of their roles and create new rules by which to play. Further, they succeed in making others play by those new rules as well. The punishment proffered by the death of each character in these films is undermined by the fact that Feuillère’s characters actively provoke their deaths. They challenge limits in life and in death.

It does not suffice to consider *L’aigle à deux têtes* and *L'idiot* in terms of disobedience and punishment, nor does it suffice to analyze her roles in *Le blé en herbe*, *Adorables créatures*, and *En cas de malheur* as individual examples of Feuillère’s characters’ decisive successes in matters of the heart. These five films, rather, point to how Feuillère’s work in post-war French film evinced the contrast between the ever-increasing and societally-sanctioned definition and conception of how women would appear on screen and in life, and the veritable realities of the feminine domain as it evolved in the 1950s. Edwige Feuillère consistently played parts in which she straddled the lines of demarcation of the limits defining women’s roles. In the following section, I
will discuss Feuillère’s star persona in more general terms to try to discover why she was so well-suited to the roles and why audiences loved her for them.

5.3 (Re)reading the Image of *La Grande Dame*

As already noted, the frequency with which women appeared on the French film screen during the 1950s was a marked increase as compared with their on-screen appearances before the war. Geneviève Sellier has correlated this increase in female representation with an increase in the popularity of the Belle Époque costume drama (Sellier, “Belle Époque”). Sellier views the rise in these costume dramas during the period as indicative of emerging cultural anxieties surrounding the emancipation of women (47, 53). Susan Hayward’s analysis of the costume drama in the 1950s is centered on the importance of the genre as a historical document. She focuses on the historical significance of these films not because of the emphasis of filmmakers on French history, but rather because the films themselves acted as reflections of immense changes taking place both in the French film industry and in France at the time. France saw extensive transformation on economic, political and social levels after the war and Hayward notes that in the midst of these changes, the French desire to reestablish its sense of national identity post-war culminated in the 1950s (“Reviewing quality” 231). In the struggle for and with women’s emancipation and the restitution and/or restructuring of the French national identity, the myth of the star as cultural icon, as elucidated by Ginette Vincendeau, is particularly pertinent to a discussion of a star
whose image evolved, as I have already argued, in her post-war work. Vincendeau notes that, “the star’s ‘myth’ helps reconcile contradictions that exist in the social roles expected of men and women at key historical moments, and ‘naturalizes’, thereby validating historical constructions” (35) and she links several stars’ identification with national identity with an expected and well-known gendered model. Men are generally identified with famous historical and political figures, while women refer either to allegory or to the body (36). In the following discussion of Feuillère’s star persona, I will show how the mythology of Edwige Feuillère’s place within the collective reconceptualization of the French nation straddles the divisions between feminine icon and masculine icon.

To begin to answer the question of how Feuillère’s star image in the 1950s functioned outside of expected limitations of gender, it is necessary to understand how her star image was perceived. One way that Feuillère’s star image had been cultivated was through the press and other media and certainly by the coverage of fan magazines and other periodicals. In the post-war issues of Cinémonde, there was an increase in the number of articles dedicated to how actors and actresses spent their time off-screen. Feuillère’s off-screen image mimicked her on-screen image in several ways, and Cinémonde offered multiple illustrations of her comings and goings off-screen. At Cannes in 1954, Cinémonde’s April 2nd issue showed a photo of Feuillère wearing a dress that made her resemble a walking porcelain bell with roses and other flowers painted on it (21). In the 10 December 1954 issue, this caption appeared above an image of
Feuillère: “Edwige Feuillère habillée à la ville comme à l’écran par Pierre Balmain.” The image features a picture of her body, head to toe, in a dress, not unlike what Balmain would have designed for her to wear on the stage for La Dame aux camélia. She was dressed in what she has termed her “port de rein” (Feuillère, “Rêveuse éveillée”). In the 11 March 1955 issue, Cinémonde examined the “24 heures de la vie d’Edwige Feuillère,” in which it detailed the minuitia of her day to give readers a sense of who Feuillère is in ‘real life’:

C’est une règle : Edwige Feuillère a besoin de huit heures de sommeil pour réparer les fatigues de la veille. Ce matin-là, elle se sentait particulièrement de bonne humeur, malgré le petit papier qui trônait, ironique et féroce, au bord de sa table de chevet. Chaque soir, elle note un à un les rendez-vous pour être certaine de ne rien oublier. C’est ainsi que vous allez la suivre au studio d’enregistrement, chez le couturier, chez son impresario, au théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, chez le photographe et enfin... au cinéma. « Il me faudrait des journées de quarante-huit heures », dit notre « Grande Dame ». (16-17)

The list of errands that she runs in a typical day is not as telling to the reader, though, as the image that accompanies the description. The image shows Feuillère in bed, presumably in the morning, wearing a quite frilly nightgown. She has an entire tea set on her lap and bed, and she is holding a saucer with a spoon in one hand and is raising a

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20 Balmain was known for what had been termed “the New French Style” in his design of women’s fashion. His look was designed for the active, exuberant woman who was both elegant and a bit flippant (Hivelin).
tea cup with the other. Though certainly meant to be tongue-in-cheek, her look is one of earnest refinement. In as much as she succeeds in her air of refinement, though, one can also sense that she is detached from anything that is below her. Her look is tinged with a hint of aloofness. On another actress, this look might appear ridiculous. In her case, however, it is emblematic of her elegance and the importance she placed on attention to detail in her appearance.

If Feuillère’s image, on screen and in life, centered on the figure of her refinement and elegance, it also was highly influenced by her beauty. Feuillère notes that her choices in the way that she dressed were, “pas la coquetterie, c’est la politesse” (“Rêveuse éveillée”). Yet she was decidedly enticed by the attentions she received from her fan base. Her fans were long standing in their admiration of her. In a 1981 TV special on her life and career, she talked about how during the heyday of her stage and cinema career, she would receive several fan and love letters a week (“Rêveuse éveillée”). At the time, her “amoureux” had formed a club. She stated that she continued to receive letters from some of her more amorous fans to that day. As with all actors, Feuillère enjoyed the attention she received from her fans, which explains her preference for the theater when working. She reiterated her love for the theater in this same interview, noting that the “salle de théâtre répond à ce que vous faites.” Yet some of this same energy translated to the bond she had with her cinema fans, and the media picked up on this energy and helped perpetuate the image of Feuillère as a regal, yet cool and detached grande dame who was beloved by her audiences and whose talent was
immense. One headline even suggested, “Edwige Feuillère aurait aimé être un Jean Gabin féminin” (“Rêveuse éveillée”).

On the one hand, this assertion implies that Feuillère thought of herself as holding a prime spot in the French Star System. On the other, it suggests a link between the gender implications associated with Jean Gabin’s star persona and those associated with hers. Gabin consistently played roles in which he was the working-class hero and was also frequently portrayed as the underdog in the face of a villain (Vincendeau, 59-81). Cinematically, Jean Gabin was often shown on screen in a fragmented way, meaning that part of his body was highlighted before the rest of him was shown. Fragmentation is typically used in the portrayal of female (and objectified) characters on screen and so Gabin’s frequent representation in this manner complicates his on screen persona. Given this element of Gabin’s persona, Feuillère’s assertion takes on new light.

Feuillère’s popularity with audiences was mirrored by the magazines that wrote about her. Robert Chazal penned a glowing piece about Feuillère’s performance in Olivia, also referencing her work up to that point. He noted that:

L’extraordinaire aventure de cette femme, partie de rien, qui réussit peu à peu et presque insensiblement à imposer non seulement son jeu mais encore sa personnalité. Et l’aventure est d’autant plus extraordinaire qu’Edwige Feuillère est devenue ce qu’elle est, c’est-à-dire la première, avec (on pourrait presque dire malgré) un nombre assez considérable de films médiocres. (11)
Chazal continues his praise of Feuillère’s triumph and brilliance as an actress in *Olivia* and claims that she “semble encore se surpasser elle-même.” He views Feuillère’s performance as one that would have been impossible for another actress, as it required so much tact and delicacy. Chazal credits Feuillère’s “intuition féminine dont... peu d’acteurs doivent être capables” as the defining reason that Feuillère was the only choice possible for the role. This praise mimics that of Robert Hatch in his review of *Le blé en herbe* when it was released in the United States. Hatch acknowledged Feuillère’s “remarkable perspicacity and taste” in completing the difficult task of playing the role of the older woman who seduces the boy, “without appearing either depraved or foolish” (557).

Much like Charles Ford’s praise of Jacqueline Audry for *Olivia* (see Chapter 1), Edwige Feuillère seems to be lauded as much for her ability to use tact in her performances as for her screen presence, declamation or any other of the myriad qualities she possessed that made her an excellent actress. Feminine intuition is used to describe both Jacqueline Audry’s delicacy in shooting films and Edwige Feuillère’s tact in playing in them. But the overuse of this phrase in the various articles and press written about *Olivia* and other works in Feuillère’s repertoire suggests that the term is used more as a blanket statement to call attention to the feminine, thus stripping the subject matter of its weight. That is, by calling a subject that might potentially offend viewers “féminine,” it distances the viewers from the subject thus making it safe for public consumption. This distancing also negates any chance that the subject in question might be considered seriously. Perhaps more significantly, labeling these women’s success as
the outcome of their “intuition” effectively denies them any credit for their own intelligence or hard work. In only one review of *Olivia* could I find reference to anything other than Feuillère’s beauty, grace, or elegance with respect to her performance in the film. An unsigned commentary in the 23 October 1950 edition of *Cinémonde* comments on the shame associated with the film *Olivia* in the history of French cinema: “La honte que nous éprouvons aujourd’hui à n’avoir pas vu sélectionner ce film pour le Festival de Cannes” (3). This review not only agrees with the merits of *Olivia* brought up by other reviewers but it also goes beyond by suggesting that “« Olivia » est un grand film. « Olivia » aurait été le grand film du Festival. « Olivia » est aussi le meilleur film de Jacqueline Audry et le meilleur rôle d’Edwige Feuillère.” Unlike other contemporary reviews, though, this article acknowledges Feuillère’s grace and beauty after her intelligence: “Mlle Julie (Edwige Feuillère) est une maîtresse qui est en même temps l’intelligence, la grâce et la beauté faites femme” (3).

This emphasis on the “feminine” and on “feminine intuition” with respect to *Olivia* and Feuillère’s performance in it and the relative lack of attention given to more masculine-identified traits such as intelligence pose an interesting point of reflection for this discussion of Feuillère’s star image. As I have argued in this chapter, Feuillère has successfully played numerous roles in which she pushes the boundaries afforded to women in the post-war era. She portrayed women who were sexually-desiring, independent, intelligent individuals who were often successful in their endeavors or who held some level of control over their destinies. These performances were not seen as scandalous or inappropriate because Feuillère was able to comingle successfully her
masculine-identified traits (such as financial power, strength, or detachment) with her “feminine” traits. Feuillère’s performances acted as a subtle resistance to underlying currents that sought to reinforce patriarchal order as female emancipation was beginning to take shape in France. Her performances in the 1950s reflect the delicate ebbing and flowing of resistance and backlash in the struggle for women’s emancipation.

At a time when French culture seemed particularly interested in recreating and reinforcing a particular image of woman in cinema, print media, and other forms of media, the inclination to draw blanket conclusions about the relationship between French cinema and the way it represented and treated women is problematic. While the tendency in French cinema in the 1950s was indeed to present objectified images of women, many notable exceptions existed. Edwige Feuillère is one such exception. While her feminine qualities were those which were most praised and admired throughout her career, she represented an alternate image of woman in France. Feuillère’s iconic value centers on her feminine beauty but is also heavily accentuated by masculine-identified traits that actualized several aspects of her star persona (including her image as imperious, cool and detached). Feuillère’s ability to enhance, or perhaps camouflage, her sometimes masculine demeanor with a very feminine physical appearance allowed her to play roles that would have been off-limits to other actresses. More importantly, it allowed for “permissible” alternative images of women to appear both on screen and in print.
CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how gender and sexuality are useful areas of analysis in the Tradition of Quality. In the history of French cinema, the 1950s have received little scholarly attention due to François Truffaut’s condemnation of “quality” films. This lack of attention by scholars is paradoxical, however, because the popularity of the films made at the time are proof that these films were significant in the history of French cinema. In my analyses I have demonstrated that in looking at this period through the lens of gender and sexuality, the blanket assumptions about it that have lingered become problematic. These assumptions include ones made not only about the cinematic worth of the work produced during this time, but also about those making the films in question.

The most compelling example of these assertions about lingering assumptions concerning the Tradition of Quality is the oeuvre of Jacqueline Audry. While Audry received very little critical attention while she was making films, she received a profusion of media attention over her work because she was a woman. Yet, this attention is remarkable, given the fact that Audry was not the first woman filmmaker. Alice Guy Blaché began making films almost as early as the beginning of cinema. She
made an abundance of short films and later longer films between 1896 and 1920. Similarly, Germaine Dulac made twenty films between 1916 and 1930, not counting her short films. French women filmmakers who produced a large number of films, then, were far from unheard of. What makes Audry unique is that she made films with a distinctive style, one that reflected her personal creative vision.

As I argued in chapters 2 and 3, Audry made films that challenged norms for the representation of female gender and sexuality. In *Olivia* and *Huis clos*, the lesbian characters’ sexuality is treated as practically insignificant and any judgment made of Julie or Inès stems from other offenses they commit. Judgment of Julie revolves around her attraction to her students, not to women. Judgment for Inès comes in the form of damnation for the attempted murder of her lover rather than for her homosexuality per se. In *La Garçonne* and *Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon*, Audry explores and pushes the limits of gender boundaries for women. Patriarchal order is reinstated at the end of each film and thus female gender transgressions are made “right” again. Yet, it is worth noting that the endings to these films are perhaps too convenient in how tidily gender roles fall back into place. This application of *bienséance* is a crucial element of her filmmaking style.

While Audry’s style was obviously a traditional one, her films often have a theatrical flair to them and several include scenes in which performances are featured. She used theater and performance scenes frequently in her films, but even the style of acting in the films themselves use theatrics and give the spectator the sense of watching a story being told. While a seamless montage and an “invisible” cinematic style were the
goals of classical cinema, Audry’s films go beyond a question of continuity editing. In
privileging theatrics and performance both in content and style for many of her films,
Audry seems to comment on her own filmmaking as a storytelling mode. Thus in
distancing her subject matter from an overtly sensitive 1950s film viewing public, she
was able to explore questions of alternate modes of female gender and sexuality that
might otherwise be controversial. At the same time, I would like to suggest that Audry’s
films also function as her own commentary on the processes of adaptation and of
storytelling, as well as on the telling of women’s stories. Her films consistently featured
women who acted as sexually desiring agents, and her heroines rebelled against
patriarchal order. The sensitivity with which she treated her subject matter allowed her
to make reasonably popular films about sexually liberated and autonomous women in a
cultural climate in which film screens were permeated with highly objectified images of
women. Audry’s cinematic vision is apparent in her work and evinces the fact that she
was, in reality, an auteur.

Despite the tendency of French critics to ascribe auteurism to males, Audry is
one example of its female practitioners. My research shows that Jacqueline Audry was
an auteur even though critical discourses of auteurism at the time construed it to be an
impossibility. Feminists more recently have adapted auteurist theory to talk about
women auteurs, such as Catherine Breillat, Claire Denis and Laetitia Masson, in recent
French cinematic history. However, in the classical definition of what emerged from
discussions in Cahiers du cinéma, female auteurism was not theorized. In my discussions
of Audry’s work, I have shown that even if female auteurism was not theorized in the
1950s or with the emergence of the New Wave, popular discourse shows Audry’s conferred upon auteur status.

Audry’s oeuvre includes representations of female gender and sexuality that were unquestionably innovative at the time. This is significant because there have been assumptions by film scholars since Godard’s work that truly innovative representations of gender are expressed with reinventions of the cinematic language. When we look critically at the Tradition of Quality, we see that this is not necessarily the case. The cinematic language used in the films of the Tradition of Quality might not have the dynamic, radical style of the New Wave, but these films are open to gender innovations. This is apparent to a lesser extent outside of Audry’s oeuvre, as I have shown in my discussion on two adaptations of Zola’s novels made in the 50s: Thérèse Raquin and Gervaise.

I have shown how the cinematic composition of Thérèse Raquin and Gervaise supports a reading of the female protagonists that positions them as both subjects and objectified victims (which reflects the shifting place of women in post-war French society). More importantly, the cinematic composition of Gervaise in particular illustrates a conscious attempt on the part of the filmmakers to create the cinematic gaze of a female protagonist. In light of the theoretical work that came later, specifically Mulvey’s analysis of the psychological underpinnings of classical Hollywood constructions of the male look in films, this treatment of Gervaise’s gaze is significant.

Moreover, it is significant that the film Gervaise was written by Jean Aurenche and
Pierre Bost, as their names have become equated with the most moribund of traditions of cinema. There is more to say, however, when gender is take into account.

While I have focused on the ways that filmmakers’ work challenged the assumptions associated with the Tradition of Quality, my last chapter explores the star persona of Edwige Feuillère. Feuillère’s on-screen output was certainly not limited to the 1950s, yet scholarly work has tended to restrict its appraisal of her performances to her work in the 1930s and 40s, given that her film output was much greater at that time than it was in the 50s. I have shown that while the quantity of the films she made in the 50s decreased (at the same time that her theater performances increased), the quality of her on-screen performances changed after the war. In looking at several parts she played in the 1950s, I have shown how her characters consistently push the limits of the boundaries afforded to women, both sexually and in terms of their autonomy.

Her characters distinguish themselves from other images of women on the French film screen in that they either finish well in the end, as I have noted for Le blé en herbe, En cas de malheur and Adorables créatures or they manipulate events to control how they embrace their (adverse) destiny, as in the case in L’aigle à deux têtes and L’idiot. I have shown how the discourses about these films and about Feuillère’s performances in them tended to focus on Feuillère’s femininity and how she played up her feminine image to make permissible the sometimes masculine-identified traits accentuated in her demeanor.

In much the same way as has been shown concerning Simone Signoret’s star persona, Edwige Feuillère cultivated a star persona that remained with her from film to
film. In watching her films, the spectator has the impression that Feuillère embodied a sort of detachment from her roles. From this detachment, it appears that Feuillère was commenting on her roles as she was performing (as is the case as well with Simone Signoret’s performances). The presence of these types of female stars, then, whose star images stand in stark contrast to the predominant model of the portrayal of women in the 1950s and whose performances are commentaries on their own roles, suggests that these stars acted as *auteurs* as well.

The Tradition of Quality and the 1950s in France, I have shown that women’s roles in cinema were not limited to objectified images on screen. They were, in fact, portrayed in a variety of ways, and female characters did have agency in discernible ways. I have also shown that women were not excluded from the popular discourse of *auteurism*, even if the theorization (and thus valorization) of women *auteurs* did not take place until much later. The notion of *auteurism* can be extended to describe the ways that Edwige Feuillère’s and Simone Signoret’s performances were commentaries on their roles, and in this way, the women who made up the component parts of the films of the 1950s (i.e. their actresses and their directors) lent their unique voices and perspectives to the film texts themselves. While French cinema of the 1950s has been saddled with a longstanding negative reputation, it is apparent that this view of the Tradition of Quality hides significant underlying counter currents.
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Appendix A: Detailed Summaries of Two of Jacqueline Audry’s Films

Given that it is difficult to see Jacqueline Audry’s films outside of France, I have chosen to supply detailed summaries for two films that are particularly difficult to see and for which a detailed summary is helpful.

A1: La Garçonne (1957)

Cast (in order of appearance):

Monique Sorbier ................................................................. Andrée Debar
Lucien Vigneret .............................................................. Jean Danet
Ginette Morin ................................................................. Elisabeth Manet
Danièle ................................................................. Evelyne Gabrielli
Unknown Man ............................................................... Jacques Castellot
Tante Sylvestre ............................................................ Suzanne Dehelly
Nichette ................................................................. Colette Mars
Edgar Lair ................................................................. Jean Parédès
Peer Rys ................................................................. George Reich
Max Delaume ............................................................. Bernard Dhéran
Summary:

The film opens in the new flat that the engaged couple, Monique Sorbier and Lucien Vigneret will soon inhabit. Lucien makes advances at Monique, who eventually cedes to his wishes. At the same time, a contract is being drawn up in the Sorbier household for the business merger between their respective fathers. Everyone meets at a rummage sale where Lucien flirts with a Ginette Morin despite the comment from the saleswoman next to them, Danièle, that she thought that Lucien was already engaged to Monique. Lucien responds that his engagement doesn’t preclude him from appreciating the beauty of other women. Later, Monique receives an anonymous letter warning her that her fiancé has a mistress and has no intention of breaking up with her. She rips it up and asks Lucien about it, who denies everything. After she receives a second warning, though, she follows him to a night club and bribes the maître d’hôtel to walk in on him in his private room so that she can see what is going on. She is horrified to see him in the arms of his mistress and she flees the club.

In the street, Monique gets into a cab and a well-dressed man who had been chatting up a prostitute gets in with her. Unlike in the novel, which glosses over the happenings in the cab, we see the exchange between the two. He tries to kiss her and she slaps him, but ends up kissing him when he tries a second time. She goes back to his apartment with him, and we see the scene after their love-making as Monique is putting her stockings back on. The man insists that it was better for her this way because it would have either been with him or some cretin. But when he asks her to stay for a bit because, “le meilleur moment de l’amour est après,” she bursts into tears and flees his
apartment, leaving her gloves. He sighs, notes that this is one more pair “de plus” and opens a chest in which he has a large collection of women’s gloves, presumably from his previous conquests.

In the next scene, we see Monique being scolded by her parents for wanting to break up with Lucien. She tells them what has transpired the night before as Lucien arrives. She confronts him about his affair and admits to her own. He demands to know the name of the man and she tells him that she doesn’t know as it was someone she met in the street. Lucien is almost appeased by this knowledge, seeing it as an inconsequential fling. Monique asserts that she will never marry him or anyone else as the maid rushes in to tell Monique that Tante Sylvestre has been run over by a car. Crushed by her loss, Monique bursts into tears and camera zooms in to a close up of her face as she declares that, “maintenant, je suis toute seule!” There is a fade out and in the next scene, Monique is sitting in a jazz club, smoking a cigarette and sporting her new hair style. Her companion, Nichette, approaches her and asks her to dance. They flirt with each other as Ginette, Danielle, and Edgar Lair, a theater director, comment on how great Monique looks and they speculate on the relationship between the women. We learn in the following scene that Edgar Lair uses Monique’s design expertise for the sets of his plays, and thanks to his influence, Monique’s business flourishes. Monique and Nichette visit the same night clubs as Lair and eventually go to “L’Oasis” where they see Peer Rys, the male nude dancer. Ginette, Danielle, and Edgar Lair fawn over him and Nichette notices Monique’s attraction to him. Monique later goes to a party where she
meets Rys and they leave together. After a scene in which Monique and Rys spend time at his pool, Monique goes to the theater.

At the theater, Monique runs into Lucien who joins her and her friends in their box. Max Delaume caresses Monique seductively during the performance and Lucien is noticeably jealous. They then go to a “slave auction” where female prostitutes dance around exotically and are auctioned off for the evening. Lucien is shocked when the man who is auctioning off the women says “Bonsoir” to her and then addresses her using the word “tu.” As the auction continues Nichette bids 1000 francs for a brunette and when they leave, Lucien takes the opportunity to talk privately with Monique about what he thinks are her poor life choices. Lucien tells her that her penchant for empty one night stands is evocative of the way men approach sex, to which Monique responds by asking him if he is calling her a man. Edgar Lair interrupts their conversation and interjects that Monique is definitely not a man. Monique and Lucien then finish their conversation and Lucien accompanies Monique home, only to be left standing at the door.

Monique and Lucien eventually begin to sleep together again, though they are not in a committed relationship. He accompanies her to her garçonnière, where he sees proof of her sexually free lifestyle and drug use. When she offers him some opium he throws her opium pipe on the ground and kisses her forcibly, indicating the violence that Lucien will manifest toward Monique. We then see Georges Sauvage go to Edgar Lair’s dressing room to pitch his play that he has just written. Lair is slowly persuaded to put it on, and we see rehearsals and the set for the last scene where the main characters ascend a huge stair case while extremely loud church bells, which are
reminiscent of wedding bells, ring. Even though it is not expressly stated, it can be assumed that the couple will get married. It then becomes apparent that Georges has written the play based on Monique. Lucien is also watching the rehearsal and realizes that Georges has included a scene based on his infidelity to Monique and that Georges is in love with Monique. After several fights, Lucien finally throws down the gauntlet and insists that Monique stop spending time with her friends and with Georges specifically. When he realizes that Monique and Georges keep staring at each other at dinner, he throws a tantrum and leaves. Monique goes after him and Lucien confronts her about Georges. Monique insists that Georges is merely a friend, but Lucien insists again that she stop seeing him. Monique then runs out.

We learn in the next scene that Monique has been gone for two weeks. Lucien shows up at her design firm, looking for her. He is unkempt and his beard is unshaven. He is desperate to find Monique and steals the address from a piece of mail that her secretary intends to send her. We then learn that Monique has rented a room and is hiding from Lucien who is stalking her. Georges comes to the boarding house and they admit their love for each other. Georges takes her to see the house that he has been working on, indicating that it will soon be their house. Lucien has followed them, though, and threatens them with a gun. He fires several shots then runs off. Neither Monique nor Georges is harmed and the final scene shows the couple walking up a large staircase at Versailles and church bells ring, mirroring the ending scene in Georges’ play.
A2: Le Secret du chevalier d’Eon (1959)

Cast (in order of appearance):

Geneviève ................................................................. Andrée Debar
Pascal d’Éon de Beaumont ....................................... Bernard La Jarrige
Blanche d’Eon de Beaumont ................................... Gisèle Grandpré
Le comte Antoine d’Eon ............................................. René Lefèvre
Bernard Turquet de Mayenne ................................. Gabriele Ferzetti
Comtesse de Pompadour ........................................ Simone Valère
The King .................................................................................. Jean Desailly
Elisabeth, the Russian Czarina ................................. Isa Miranda

Summary:

The film opens with the birth of Geneviève, the eighth girl to be born to the family of Eon. Pascal d’Éon de Beaumont and his wife, Blanche d’Eon de Beaumont, needed to produce a son to inherit the fortune of Blanche’s uncle, le comte Antoine d’Eon. Rather than admit to the uncle that the eighth child is a girl, Pascal declares that they will tell the uncle that she is a boy. The mother asks him how long the child must be a boy, to which the father responds, “jusqu’à la mort de ce vil imbécile.” The uncle, who is overtly sexist and rude to the seven daughters, is so overjoyed to finally have a boy that he exclaims that he will call him Charles and that he will raise him himself to make a good soldier out of him. We then see Charles 20 years later when, at a party...
thrown by the Eon family, their daughters dance with members of the king’s regiment, the Dragoons. One soldier, Bernard Turquet de Mayenne, tries to kiss one of the daughters and becomes aggressive with her. The daughter complains and when Bernard asks who will stop him, Charles responds, “moi!” and challenges him to a duel. The commanding officer tries to stop them because it is dishonorable for Bernard and dangerous for Charles, as Bernard is the regiment’s best swordsman. Charles easily wins and embarrasses the soldier, though, and the commanding officer asks Charles to join the Dragoons.

As Charles/Geneviève packs for her departure, her parents try to stop her. She responds that if they forbid her from going, she will tell the uncle the truth and that they will lose their inheritance and the sisters’ dowries and that they will all live in misery. The father declares, “A qui la faute ? J’ai toujours voulu un fils,” to which Charles/Geneviève responds “Vous l’avez!” They try to reason with her by asserting that, “Tu n’és pas un homme” and she replies, “Je ne suis plus une femme.” She then asks them why they would teach her so many masculine ways of behaving, such as hunting, drinking or swearing, only to play a masquerade. She insists that she must continue and leaves with the Dragoons. Charles/Geneviève must prove her virility with the regiment by racing Bernard to the inn where they will stay and then proves herself further when she defends the Comtesse de Pompadour from the advances that Bernard makes at her later. Charles/Geneviève impresses the Comtesse further by successfully helping her escape spies who are chasing her for a secret document that she is carrying for the King. The Comtesse later sees the King and gives him the document, which is a
letter from the King of Prussia that insults the Czarina of Russia, Elisabeth. As both France and Prussia are trying to secure a treaty with Russia, the letter will convince Elisabeth to side with France.

To exploit the usefulness of the letter, the King needs a soldier to give it to Elisabeth. Elisabeth, however, has an extreme mistrust of French men, and so the King then laments that he needs someone with the strength of a man and the finesse of a woman for the job. The Comtesse tells the King that the Chevalier d’Eon was able to help her escape the spies by posing as her in her carriage. She suggests that he engage the Chevalier because “il est plus femme que moi.” The King calls the Chevalier and decides that Charles will go to St. Petersburg as Mademoiselle de Beaumont, a seamstress from Paris who will open a dress shop. Her orders are to find the Czarina and give her the letter personally. The Comtesse de Pampadour then comes into the room to help the knight with the dresses. The Comtesse is obviously very attracted to Charles/Geneviève, who in turn kisses her hand and says that she loves her and that she wants to consecrate her life to her. When the Comtesse suggests that they take advantage of the moment that they have together, though, Charles/Geneviève responds that she would not want to be fulfilled before having accomplished the mission and that the Comtesse will be her “plus douce recompense.” As the Comtesse does not understand why Charles/Geneviève does not accept her offer, Charles/Geneviève says that she wouldn’t be able to part with her to go on the mission to St. Petersburg afterwards. The Comtesse tells Charles that “vous êtes si différent que les autres hommes” and that Bernard and the other knights are always trying to get her into bed.
She then tells Charles/Geneviève that she could have given in to him, but that the memory of Charles’ heroics helped her resist. Charles/Geneviève then decides to take Bernard with her on the mission to keep him from stealing the Comtesse while she is gone.

On the road to Russia, Charles is dressed “en travesti” as Mademoiselle de Beaumont and Bernard acts as her driver. At the first stop, Bernard looks at Charles through a crack in the door and sees her breasts as she is putting on her dress. Up to this point none of the other indications that Charles might be a woman, such as the ease with which she fits into a dress or the pitch of her voice, have been sufficient to indicate the truth to Bernard. When Bernard sees this, he keeps it to himself and does not admit that he has seen her. The dynamics between the two change at this point and Bernard is now the one who is keeping information from her. Bernard retaliates against her guise by claiming that a wheel of her carriage is broken so that she has to walk in the snow, and by insisting on sleeping in the same room as her (playing along that there would be no impropriety as they are both men) and snoring loudly so as to keep her awake. On the road, Charles is still in drag and they are ambushed by spies while trying to cross a bridge to St. Petersburg.

When they reach St. Petersburg, we see that the Czarina, Elisabeth, rules with an iron fist and displays an irrational hatred of the French. She permits none of her subjects to show any sort of support for anything French. Elisabeth surveys her subjects at a competition event and notices that all of the women are wearing Parisian dresses. This infuriates her and she rips the front of one dress off a woman who in turn must hide her
breasts. She says that she cannot abide by her subjects wearing such revealing dresses. Elisabeth then goes to see Geneviève and buys all of her dresses not only to keep her subjects from purchasing them, but also to wear in front of her new love interest. As she is admiring herself in the mirror and waiting for her beau to come, she learns that the woman who sold her the dresses is actually a French spy dressed in women’s clothing. Elisabeth immediately orders Geneviève’s arrest. Geneviève, for her part, has since realized that by letting Elisabeth leave the dress shop, she has failed in her mission to give her the letter. Bernard takes the letter from Geneviève with the intent of seducing the Czarina and giving her the letter then. At that moment, Russian guards break in and arrest Geneviève. Bernard hides the letter and flees to the French Embassy. Elisabeth confronts Geneviève, who tells her that she is actually a woman and that the King of France sent her there. Elisabeth does not accept Geneviève’s story and orders the guards to strip her to see if she is man or a woman. Geneviève concedes that she is a man, though it is unclear why this is important, and Elisabeth tells her that she will allow her to get the letter and meet her at midnight to show it to her.

Geneviève goes back to the Embassy to find Bernard waiting for her. Bernard finally tells Geneviève that he knows that she is a woman and that he is in love with her. They kiss and in this way, Geneviève reclaims her “true,” feminine identity. Geneviève explains the dilemma with the Czarina and Bernard suggests that they both go and when Elisabeth turns out the lights, he can sneak in and take her place. Geneviève, of course, does not like this idea because it means that Bernard will sleep with Elisabeth. Bernard promises to be faithful to Geneviève, though, and they kiss once again. In the
Czarina’s chambers, Geneviève slips out when the lights are out and Bernard sneaks in.

The next morning at court, we learn that Bernard gave Elisabeth the letter which convinces her to sign the treaty with France. We also learn that Bernard made love to Elisabeth all night long, thus prompting Geneviève to leave the palace in annoyance.

Bernard admits his love for Geneviève to Elisabeth and then follows after Geneviève. He gets into the carriage with her, despite her insistence that he leave her alone. He declares his love for her again and she yields to him. The last shot is of the two kissing, presumably before they make love in the carriage.
Appendix B: Supplementary Biographical Information for Edwige Feuillère

Edwige Feuillère was born Edwige Louise Caroline Cunati on October 29, 1907 in Vesoul to a French mother and an Italian father. She was an only child and, at the age of three, her family moved to Dijon, though she spent part of her childhood in Italy as well. She attended the Conservatoire d’art dramatique in Dijon, and in 1928, she won a premier prix de comédie for her role in Le Malade imaginaire. She soon left for Paris to apply to the Conservatory, where she studied both declamation and singing. Using the stage name Cora Lynn, an anagram of her middle name, Caroline, she launched her theatrical career in Paris in 1930 and played several secondary roles. In 1931, she joined the Comédie-Française and made her official debut in Paris on November 2, 1931 as Suzanne in Le Mariage de Figaro. On screen, her career would start with the 1931 short film, La Fine combine, for which she again used the stage name, Cora Lynn. She made one additional film using that name, the feature film Cordon Bleu, in 1931. She started using the name Edwige Feuillère after her marriage to Pierre Feuillère, whom she had met at the Conservatory that same year. Their marriage lasted only a few years, but she kept the last name and used it for the rest of her career.

The limitations suffered by Feuillère’s characters made no difference to the public in terms of how they viewed and appreciated the actress’ work. Critical and
audience reception of Feuillère’s performances in the films that she made before and
during the war was, for the most part, very positive. Audiences loved Feuillère’s
sophisticated demeanor, and she was extremely well-known for her elegant image. In a
television special on her life and career, Feuillère noted that newspaper headlines used
to laud the way that she dressed. For example, one headline read, “Une nouvelle reine
pour la ville de Paris : Edwige.” Another read, “Edwige Feuillère est l’actrice la plus
eûtante du monde” (Feuillère, “rêveuse éveillée”). For Feuillère, elegance was not a
question of dress or of couture; rather, it was a state of mind. She had modeled her
posture on that of her paternal grandmother, who was a peasant with nine children.
When her grandmother would come back to her village carrying wet laundry on her
head, Feuillère would watch her and tell herself that she had to stand and hold herself
as straight as her grandmother did (Feuillère, “rêveuse éveillée”). Feuillère remarked
that the attitudes of French critics and audiences concerning her “port de rein” were
diverse, however. While some praised her image and appreciated the extravagant
dresses she wore, others ridiculed it.

Feuillère’s demeanor was not merely sophisticated and elegant, though. She was
also seen as having a cool, detached, and imperious style in her acting. For Louella
Interim, as discussed in an article in the *Cahiers du cinéma*, Feuillère’s elegance is closely
related to her “distinction et humour féroce” that serve as essential qualities of her on-
screen presence and her acting (13). Films such as *L’Honorale Cathérine, Il suffit d’une
fois* (1946), and even *Lucrèce Borgia* highlight the humor in her exchanges with other
players. Interim notes further that her humor is infused with a knack for pointing out
the ridiculous and trivial in other characters’ commentaries or actions. Feuillère was able to mock the ridiculous while cultivating her elegant image through the high level of her performances, the finesse of her elocution, and even her gestures. Interim adds that, “railleurs et fantaisistes, hautains ou exigeants, les personnages que crée Edwige Feuillère se distinguent toujours par la plus grande lucidité et c’est de cette parfaite intelligence que nait la fascination qu’ils exercent” (13). The combination of cool and detached elegance with a knack for derision drives to the heart of what makes Feuillère’s star image unique: she incarnates lucid, independent, and intelligent women who are also set apart by beauty, elegance, and charm.

By the end of the 1940s, Feuillère had established herself as a distinguished and well-respected film actress, to the point where she had acquired the reputation of being the “Grande Dame du cinéma français” (Ciné-Ressources, “Feuillère”). Yet in the 1950s, she began to work more regularly in the theater. In the 50s and 60s, she worked very frequently with Paul Claudel and Jean Giraudoux, and she spent relatively little time working on film projects. The theater was especially dear to Feuillère, who suffered from bouts of depression, anger, and self-doubt throughout her career and was often plagued by migraines. Acting was her way of escaping her maladies, and the admiration of her public never failed to bring her out of whatever was ailing her. She had known from a very young age that she had wanted to act. As a young girl, when her father or a teacher would ask her what she wanted to do in life, she would respond, “je ferai du théâtre!” (qtd. In Giroud 85). Even in Paris, she reminded her fellow boarders while she attended the Conservatory, “Je viens faire du théâtre.” She did not want to be a
“vedette,” she wanted to be “une grande actrice” (86). Though she loved acting in film, her preference for the theater was noticeable. In 1968, she told the television show *Monsieur Cinéma* that she didn’t particularly care to watch her films because it made her very uneasy to see herself on the screen. She preferred to be on the stage because she enjoyed what she called “l’échange continuelle,” in which the dynamism between actors and audience members allows both parties to fuel each other. While one can feel a lot of emotion in the theater, cinema is more superficial (Feuillère, “Monsieur”).

Feuillère has had remarkable success in the theater, both in France and in England. She made regular performances in Parisian theaters like the Théâtre de Paris, the Théâtre Marigny and the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt. Her most famous performances include her roles as Lia in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*; the Queen in the theater version of *L’aigle à deux têtes*; and her most famous work, the role of Marguerite Gautier in *La Dame aux camélias*. She made several trips to London to act in a variety of plays between 1951 and 1968. Her first performance in London was in Claudel’s *Partage du Midi*. Her performance so captivated audience members that they were “mesmerized by a beautiful woman who had the power to communicate the most complex words and thoughts to a foreign audience” (Stokes 162). Such was Feuillère’s impression on English audiences that Harold Hobson, a well-known critic for the British *Sunday Times*, was compelled to call her “the greatest actress in the world” (qtd. in Stokes 159). Yet despite this immense success in the theater, Feuillère still felt a need to make films as well. Even though she preferred the energy of the theater, she noted in her interview with *Monsieur Cinéma* that she greatly appreciated the sense of team spirit in filmmaking.
and the numerous congenial people she met while working. She clearly wanted to return to making films.

Despite the amicable working relationships she fostered in the cinema, Feuillère’s productivity on the screen would never again attain the level that it did before the War. Between 1951 and 1961, Feuillère made only eight films, as opposed to her thirty-one films made between 1931 and 1941 or her fourteen made between 1941 and 1951. In a 1961 television interview, Feuillère noted that it was extremely difficult to work on film and in the theater at the same time. At that time, she was preparing for her role in two sketch films for Paul Gordeaux, which she told the interviewer was to be her “retour au cinéma.” Feuillère, however, would make only seven more films after 1961. Her theater career continued to flourish until 1992, and she worked in television for several years. She made appearances in several sketches, television shows and “made-for-TV” movies between 1967 and 1995. Her last television appearance was only three years before she died on November 13, 1998.