

September 6, 2022 (XLV:2)

Jean Renoir, **RULES OF THE GAME** (1939, 110 min)

URL for 7:00 Tuesday discussion zoom:

<https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/93763641566?pwd=YS96cVh5c0EwS3lCcENDYzlyWm9Rdz09>



Director Jean Renoir

Written by Jean Renoir & Carl Koch (collaborator)

Producer Jean Renoir

Music Joseph Kosma

Cinematography Jean-Paul Alphen, Jean Bachelet, Jacques Lemare and Alain Renoir

Film Editing Marthe Huguet & Marguerite Renoir

Production Design Max Douy & Eugène Lourié

Costume Design Coco Chanel

Nora Gregor...Christine de la Cheyniest
Paulette Dubost...Lisette, sa camériste
Mila Parély...Geneviève de Marras
Odette Talazac...Madame Charlotte de la Plante
Claire Gérard...Madame de la Bruyère
Anne Mayen...Jackie, nièce de Christine
Lise Elina...Radio-Reporter (as Lise Élina)
Marcel Dalio...Marquis Robert de la Cheyniest
Julien Carette...Marceau, le braconnier
Roland Toutain...André Jurieux
Gaston Modot...Edouard Schumacher, le garde-chasse
Jean Renoir...Octave
Pierre Magnier...Le général
Eddy Debray...Corneille, le majordome
Pierre Nay...Monsieur de St. Aubin
Richard Francoeur...Monsieur La Bruyère (as Francoeur)
Léon Larive...Le cuisinier



Nicolas Amato...L'invité sud-américain (uncredited)
Henri Cartier-Bresson...Le domestique anglais (uncredited)
Celestin...Le garçon de cuisine (uncredited)
Tony Corteggiani...Berthelin (uncredited)
Geo Forster...Un invité (uncredited)
Roger Forster...L'invité efféminé (uncredited)
Camille François...Le speaker (uncredited)
Jenny Héliat...La servante (uncredited)
André Zwoboda...L'ingénieur (uncredited)

Jean Renoir (b. September 15, 1894 in Paris, France—d. February 12, 1979, age 84, in Los Angeles, CA) won an Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award at the 1975 Oscars. The director

was not present at the ceremony and presenter Ingrid Bergman accepted the award on his behalf. He was also nominated in 1946 for Best Director for *The Southerner* (1945) as well as a Golden Bear at the 1962 Berlin International Film Festival for *Le caporal épinglé* (1962). Renoir wore many hats and often directed, wrote and produced his films simultaneously. Of his 40 directorial films, he also wrote *The Little Theatre of Jean Renoir* (1970, TV Movie), *The Elusive Corporal* (1962), *Picnic on the Grass* (1959), *Experiment in Evil* (1959, TV Movie), *Elena and Her Men* (1956), *French Cancan* (1954), *The Golden Coach* (1952), *The River* (1951), *The Woman on the Beach* (1947), *The Southerner* (1945), *Salute to France* (1944, Short), *This Land Is Mine* (1943), *The Story of Tosca* (1941, selected scenes, uncredited), *The Rules of the Game* (1939), *La Bête Humaine* (1938), *La Marseillaise* (1938), *La Grande Illusion* (1937), *A Day in the Country* (1936, Short), *The Lower Depths* (1936), *La vie est à nous* (1936, collective documentary), *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (1936), *Toni* (1935), *Madame Bovary* (1934), *Chotard and Company* (1933), *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932), *Night at the Crossroads* (1932), *La Chienne* (1931), *Baby's Laxative* (1931), *The Tournament* (1928), *The Sad Sack* (1928), *The Little Match Girl* (1928, Short), *Marquitta* (1927) and *Backbiters* (1924, co-director). The additional five films he directed but did not write include *The Diary of a Chambermaid* (1946), *Le bled* (1929), *Charleston Parade* (1927, Short), *Nana* (1926), *Whirlpool of Fate* (1925). Additionally, in 1994 4½ hours of unused material left over from the shooting of Renoir's *Un tournage à la campagne* (1936) was edited and donated by the producer Pierre Braunberger to the Cinémathèque Française. Re-edited for a new version, much of the film is shot with

synchronized sound with Renoir's voice instructing and guiding the actors.

From *World Film Directors, Vol. I*. Edited by John Wakeman. H.W. Wilson Co., NY, 1987. Entry by Philip Kemp



French director and scenarist, was born in Montmartre, second of the three sons of Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the impressionist painter, and his wife Aline, née Charigot....Renoir grew up in three environments: in Paris, in his mother's Burgundian village of Essoyes, and in Preovence, where the family often spent winters. Much of his upbringing was entrusted to his adored Gabrielle, Aline Remoir' young cousin, who lived with the family. "I was a spoiled child, Family life surrounded me with a protective wall, softly padded on the inside. Outside, impressive personages bustled about. I would have liked to

join them and be impressive myself. Unfortunately nature had made me a coward. As soon as I detected a crack in the protective wall, I yelled with terror."

By the time his second son was born, Auguste Renoir was fifty-three, and his paintings, scornfully rejected twenty years earlier, were becoming accepted and salable. Jean Renoir (who often served as his father's model) was brought up in comfortable, though never luxurious, surroundings, which he recalled as full of laughter, light, friendship and vivid physical sensation, "a simple environment in which nothing trashy was tolerated." His first experience of the cinema, which took place in 1898, was inauspicious ("I howled as usual and had to be taken out"), but his introduction to the Guignol theatre at the Tuileries, two years later, sparked off a lifelong enthusiasm for the stage, as well as "a taste for naïve stories and a deep mistrust of what is generally called psychology." Since his father considered all attempts to train children a waste of time, it was not until

Renoir was seven that he was sent to school—to the Collège Saint-Croix at Beuilly, where he had been preceded by his elder brother Pierre.

Unlike his brother, Renoir was unhappy at Saint-Croix. He ran away several times before his parents moved him to the less strict Sainte-Marie de Monceau, where he greatly enjoyed the weekly movie show featuring a carp-mad comedian named Automaboul. From there he moved to the École Massena in Nice, and in 1913 earned his Baccalauréat in mathematics and philosophy from the University of Aix-en-Provence. He had taken to writing poetry, and there was talk of his becoming a writer. However, “I began to realize that my father was an important artist, and it rather frightened me, and I tried to set my mind to everything that was contrary to art....I was very fond of horses, and so I wanted to be a cavalry officer.” He therefore enlisted as a sergeant in the Chasseurs Alpains. At the outbreak of World War I he was commissioned second lieutenant and sent to the Vosges front, where “a Bavarian sniper did me the service of putting a bullet in my thigh.” Hospitalized with a fractured femur, he was only saved from having his leg amputated by the intervention of his mother, by then gravely ill with diabetes. She died two months later.

Renoir’s wound healed, but he was left with a permanent limp. While convalescing, he developed a passion for the cinema, often seeing twenty or more pictures a week, almost always American pictures. On a friend’s recommendation, he sought out Chaplin’s films. “To say that I was enthusiastic would be inadequate. I was carried away. The genius of Charlot had been revealed to me.” He even persuaded his father, now confined to a wheelchair, to buy a projector so that they could watch Chaplin movies together in the studio.

In 1916, returning to active duty, Renoir transferred to the Flying Corps and became a pilot. After several successful missions, he crashed, thereby aggravating his leg injury, and decided that he had

seen enough combat. “French aviation lost little by this. I was not a very good pilot.” Securing the undemanding post of chief military censor at Nice (“There was never anything to censor”), he spent most of his time at his father’s studio, a few miles away in Cagnes. Though immobilized, August Renoir was still actively painting; his most frequent model was a young Alsatian woman, Andrée Heuschling, with whom Jean fell in love. They were married in January 1920, a few weeks after Auguste Renoir’s death. Their son Alain, Renoir’s only child, was born in 1921.

For four years Renoir worked at pottery and ceramics, in company with his wife, his younger brother Claude, and various friends, but his interests were turning towards filmmaking. Two pictures in



particular decided him: Voilkov’s *Le Brasier ardent* with Mosjoukine; and Stroheim’s *Foolish Wives*, which he saw ten times, stirred by the cinematic possibilities it revealed. “I started out in the cinema because I was interested in trick shots...purely in technique and trick shots,” he later recalled, although elsewhere he stated that “I only ventured into cinema in the hope of making my wife a star....I did not foresee that, once caught up in the machinery, I would never be able to escape!” Whatever the

reason, in March 1924 he began work on *Catherine*, otherwise known as *Une Vie sans joie*, with Andrée starring under the name of Catherine Hessling. The director was the actor Albert Dieudonné (who played Napoleon in Gance’s grandiose epic), though some surviving prints credit Renoir with codirection. He certainly produced and scripted, besides taking a small role as a lecherous *sous-préfet*.

...In his autobiography Renoir expressed the hope “that no trace exists of this masterpiece of banality.” After its brief release in 1924, Dieudonné withdrew the film for re-editing, and re-released it three years later; in neither version did it achieve much success. But Renoir, eager to direct on his own account, proceeded with much of the same team to make *La Fille de l’eau* (1924).

Once again Hessling played a victimized heroine, daughter of a canal boatmen who drowns, leaving her at the mercy of her brutal and lecherous uncle—a villain sneeringly portrayed by Renoir’s friend Pierre Lestringuez, who also provided the scenario. Pierre Renoir, by now a leading stage actor, made a brief appearance as a pitchfork-wielding peasant. Most of the film was shot on location in the forest of Fontainebleau and on the banks of the Loing, showing Renoir, in Richard Roud’s view, “already capable of capturing on the screen the atmosphere and beauty of landscape, and of suggesting that almost pagan reverence for nature which was to run through much of his work.” Together with this pictorial realism came a strong element of fantasy, in particular some hallucinatory dream sequences.... Jacques

Brunius, who later often worked with Renoir, wrote that *La Fille de l’eau* was the first film to show “a really dream-like dream.”

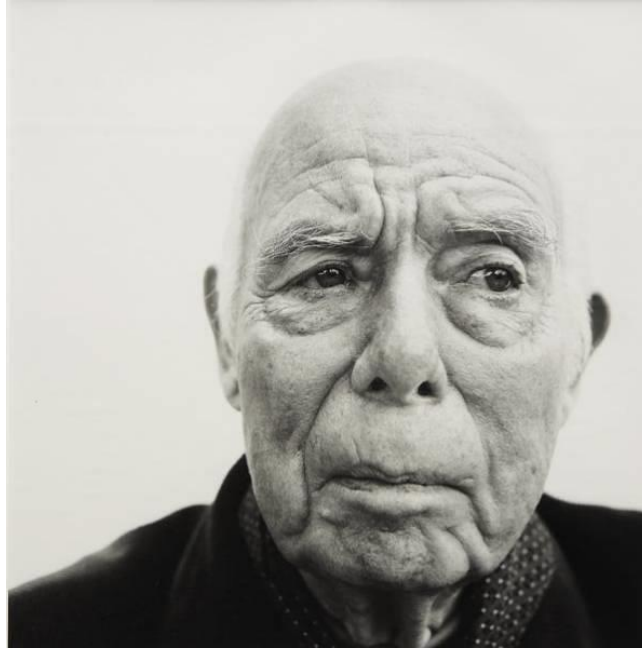
The general public, though, was not much taken with the picture, and Renoir, temporarily despairing of the cinema, opened an art gallery in Paris. Since he never had much head for business, this foundered after a few months. In any case, the pull of movie-making proved too strong, and towards the end of 1925 he began to work on an ambitious new project: an adaptation of Zola’s novel *Nana*, planned as the first Franco-German coproduction and lavishly budgeted at over a million francs. The script was again by Lestringuez, in collaboration with Renoir himself and Zola’s daughter Denise Leblond-Zola, and the sets and costumes were designed by Claude Autant-Lara, the first of several future directors Renoir helped to launch.

Renoir’s first two films introduce two of the primary themes of his work: nature and the theatre. Generally reckoned as the best of his silent movies and visibly influence by Stroheim, *Nana* (1926) traces

the rise to fame, via the stage and the bedroom, of a slum-born girl in Second Empire Paris.... *Nana* was premiered in Paris to a very mixed reception. In some quarters the film was attacked for being part-German, and Renoir himself encountered a good deal of professional hostility, being seen as a rich amateur trying to buy his way into the industry. He had, it was true, invested a million francs of his own money,

raised by selling pictures left him by his father; and when *Nana*, despite some very favorable reviews, proved a financial disaster, he had to sell a lot more to meet the bills. Realizing that. For a while at least, he would have to make commercial potboilers if he wanted to work in cinema at all, Renoir “deserted the ranks of the avant-garde for those of industry.”

...The best of Renoir’s commercial chores of the period was his contribution to the popular genre of *comique troupier* (military farce), *Tire*



au flanc (1928). A boisterously episodic account of a young man’s induction into the army, “it does for barracks life,” wrote Bernard Mylonas, “what Vigo’s *Zéro de Conduite* was to do for life in a boarding school,” and it gave Michel Simon, playing the recruit’s valet, his first substantial screen role. Richard Abel considered it “Renoir’s most underrated silent film” and “a first-rate social satire.”

...Renoir welcomed the coming of sound with delight, hailing it as “a magical transformation, as if someone had opened a secret door of communication between the filmmaker and his audience.” For a time, though, it seriously hampered his career...[as] he was seen as a director of cumbersome and costly period pieces, incapable of working with the speed and efficiency demanded by the new technology. For two years he was unable to find backing, until in 1931 his friend Pierre Braunberger set up a production company with Roger Richebé and took over the old Billancourt studios. Even then Renoir had to prove himself, and to do so shot his first sound film in six days for 200,000 francs. This was a scatological

Feydeau farce, *On purge Bébé* (1931), concerning the constipated son of a manufacturer of unbreakable chamber pots, with a cast that included Michel Simon and (in his screen debut) Fernandel. It found instant success, recouping its cost within a week of opening; the fidelity with which the soundtrack captured the flush of a lavatory was widely appreciated. ...

Having passed his test, Renoir was allowed to start work on the first of his major films, *La Chienne* (1931)...”During the making of *La Chienne*, I was ruthless and, I must admit, intolerable. I made the film the way I wanted it, with no reference to the producer’s wishes. I never showed an inch of film or a scrap of dialogue, and I arranged for the rushes to remain invisible until the film was complete.” The producer, Roger Richebé, who had expected a farce, “found himself watching a somber, hopeless drama with a murder for light relief” and banished Renoir from the studio, calling in Paul Fejös to re-edit the material. When Fejös refused, Renoir was allowed back, and the film opened to a mixed but lively reception. The dispute with Richebé, though, earned Renoir a reputation for being difficult, and various projects including a filmed *Hamlet* with Michel Simon in the title role fell through for want of backing....

“My work as a director,” Renoir once observed, “starts with the actor....I don’t want the movements of the actors to be determined by the camera, but the movements of the camera to be determined by the actors.” Rather than mold his players into a predetermined scheme, he would readily modify scenes, dialogue, even the whole drift of a film in the light of insights that emerged from a developing performance. One inspired result of such creative collaboration was *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (*Boudu Saved from Drowning*, 1932), a long-neglected film now widely considered the first of Renoir’s masterpieces; in *Sight and Sound* (Summer,

1960) Peter John Dyer described it as “a film of such fresh, simple joy and total harmony between actor, director and setting that one can only regard it as a perfect example of collective evolution.”

Taken from a popular boulevard farce by René Fauchois (who was outraged at what he considered a distortion of his work), *Boudu* is built around Michel Simon’s colossal performance in the title role. Boudu is a shaggy and disreputable vagabond, who, having lost his beloved dog, decides to throw himself into the Seine. He is observed by Lestingois, a bookseller living on the *quai*, who leaps in to rescue him. Fancying himself as a philanthropist, Lestingois decides to take Boudu into his household, there to be fed, clothed, and rehabilitated. The tramp, however, proves ungratefully resistant to the bourgeois virtues; he spits in first editions, cleans his shoe on the bedspread, seduces Lestingois’ wife and makes a pass



at his mistress, the housemaid. To regularize the situation, Boudu is married off to the maid. As the wedding party floats merrily along the river, Boudu topples overboard; while the rest mourn his death, he surfaces downstream, wades ashore, swaps clothes with a scarecrow and strolls off across the summer meadows.

Boudu has sometimes been represented as a pointed and virulent attack on the bourgeoisie (Gerald Mast referred to “the venomous energy of Renoir’s spitting...on the whole of Western civilization”), but such a reading seems difficult to sustain in the face of the film’s genial exuberance—even if no opportunity is missed of satirizing the pretensions of the Lestingois household....

The anarchistic irreverence of *Boudu* owes a good deal to the political climate of the time; a similar spirit suffuses the Prévert brothers’ :”*L’Affaire est dans le sac* and (in a cooler mode) Clair’s *À nous la liberté*. Renoir, though never formally a member, had close contacts with several people in the left-wing agit-prop Groupe Octobre, including the Préverts

(Pierre Prévert had lent a hand with *On purge Bébé* and *La Chienne* and Jacques Brunius. Brunius, in turn, was among those who during the thirties formed part of Renoir's informal stock company, acting or otherwise assisting as occasion demanded. Other frequent collaborators (or "accomplices" as Renoir preferred to call them) included Jacques Becker as assistant director, Claude Renoir (Pierre Renoir's son) on camera, the composer Joseph Kosma, and the editor Marguerite Houllé. The latter, also sometimes called Marguerite Mathieu, was Renoir's regular companion for most of the decade; though they were never married, she took the name of Marguerite Renoir, which she used for the rest of her professional life....

Madame Bovary (1934), the tragedy of a romantically discontented woman in a nineteenth-century provincial backwater, is a difficult film to assess, since no prints of Renoir's original version seem to have survived. ...The failure of *Bovary*, following three films which had enjoyed only modest box-office success, left Renoir's career at its lowest ebb. He was rescued by Marcel Pagnol, whose filmed productions of his own plays *Marius* and *Fanny* had proved hugely popular, and who now offered Renoir financial backing and the use of his Marseille studios. Following Pagnol's own example in *Angèle*, Renoir decided to film exclusively on location, using direct sound and largely non-professional actors....

With *Toni*, Renoir anticipated the Italian neorealists—and may even have directly influenced them through Luchino Visconti, who worked as his assistant on this and several other pictures. ...On his return to Paris, Renoir found himself caught up in the surging exhilaration of the Popular Front, in which many of his closest friends were involved, and whose aims and aspirations were to color all his remaining films of the decade. In later years, particularly after taking up residence in America, Renoir tended to play down his political commitment at this period—as have

several of his critics, such as Truffaut—in favor of the serenely detached humanism of his postwar films. Indeed, Pierre Leprohon went so far as to say that "any 'commitment' is an abandonment of freedom, of that freedom without which there can be no art." By this logic, either Renoir was not, at this time, a politically committed filmmaker, or the films that he made from *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* to *La Règle du jeu*—on most counts, the finest work of his career—are not art. Either position seems hard to sustain.

Though nearly all films are works of collaboration, and Renoir's more than most ("When I make a film, I am asking others to influence me"), *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936) is especially so; it

bears Renoir's signature as director but should perhaps be credited to the Groupe Octobre, whose first film it was. Aptly enough, the plot celebrates collectivity.... Predictably enough, *Lange* was vituperated by the right-wing press, but otherwise warmly received. Renoir, now considered the leading cinematic spokesman for the Left, was invited by



the Communist Party to make a propaganda film in preparation for the forthcoming national elections. His exact role in the making of *La Vie est à nous* (*People of France*, 1936) has been variously defined: "supervising director" probably comes closest. Even more than *Lange*, *La Vie* was a collaborative project, made (according to the credit titles) "by a team of technicians, artists and workers." Scenes were shot by half-a-dozen other directors beside Renoir, including Jacques Becker, Jacques Brunius and Henri Cartier-Bresson....

In its brief, seemingly artless simplicity, *Partie de campagne* must be the most perfect unfinished film ever made. The action, based on Maupassant's short story, takes place in the 1860s....One of Renoir's most personal works. Filmed at Marlotte on the Loing where Auguste Renoir used to paint, *Partie de campagne* was shot almost *en famille*. Alain, Renoir's

son, took a small role, as did Marguerite Renoir and the director himself, hamming throatily as the *patron* of the inn. Claude Renoir was cinematographer, and most of the stock company lent a hand with the filming. For all this, the atmosphere on the shoot seems to have been poisonous. Sylvia Bataille, whose hauntingly vulnerable performance as Henriette holds the film's emotional center, recalled days of miserable waiting, bitter quarrels, drunkenness, and recrimination—none of which shows in the film's mood of elegiac nostalgia and bittersweet regret.... *Les Bas-Fonds* became one of Renoir's biggest box-office successes. It also earned him the Prix Louis Delluc, and he was made a Chevalier of the Légion d'Honneur by the socialist government of Leon Blum. With this prestige, and the support of Jean Gabin, Renoir finally managed to secure backing for a project he had been working on for three years. *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir explained, is a war film without heroes or villains, in which "the villain is the war." But not simply the war as such; all the divisive barriers of nation, class, race, or religion which preclude fraternity, and which lead to wars, are equally indicted.... "I made *La Grande Illusion*

because I am a pacifist," Renoir affirmed, although he also suggested that the film owed its initial success to being a prison-break movie.... The film was widely acclaimed, both in France and abroad, as a masterpiece. In New York it ran for twenty-six weeks; it was nominated for an Oscar, and President Roosevelt declared that "all the democracies of the world should see this film."... At the Venice Biennale, pressure was put on the jury not to award it the top honor, the Mussolini Cup; a special award, the International Jury Cup, had to be created instead, after which the film was banned in Italy. It was also banned in Germany, and in Belgium.... During and immediately after the war the film suffered various

cuts (although it had been suppressed by the Nazis, it was attacked after the liberation for being pro-German), but the complete version was restored in 1958, in time to be voted fifth greatest film of all time at the Brussels World Fair.

In recent years the reputation of *La Grande Illusion* has slipped a little, supplanted as Renoir's supreme achievement—at least in most critics' estimation—by *La Règle du jeu*.... Renoir was now generally recognized, even by those who disliked his political stance, as one of the foremost directors in France. Despite this, he could rarely find anyone willing to back the films he wanted to make. "Even after *La Grande Illusion* had made a fortune for its producer I had difficulty in raising money for my own projects. I was not, and still am not, 'commercial.'" The failure of *La Marseillaise* having done little to further his box-office standing, he accepted an assignment from the Hakim brothers' company, Paris Film, to direct Jean Gabin in a 1938 version of Zola's *La Bête Humaine* (*The Human Beast*)—mainly he later insisted, "because Gabin and I wanted to play with trains."...



Of all Renoir's films, *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*, 1939) is the richest and most complex, the most subtly composed both in the interweavings of its narrative intrigue and in its wider implications.... It is, Penelope Gilliatt wrote, "not only a masterpiece of filmmaking, not only a great work of humanism in a perfect rococo frame, but also an act of historical testimony." Renoir himself, describing the film as "a sort of reconstructed documentary... on the condition of a society at a given moment," added: "It is a war film, and yet there is no reference to the war. Beneath its seemingly innocuous appearance the story attacked the very structure of our society."...

"The failure of *La Règle du jeu* so depressed me that I resolved either to give up the cinema or to leave France." As things worked out, Renoir chose the latter option. It would be fifteen years before he made

another film in France. In July 1939, shortly after the disastrous premiere of *La Règle*, he left for Rome, where he had been invited by the Scalera company to direct a film of Puccini's *Tosca*. His relationship with Marguerite Renoir having ended, his companion on the Italian trip (and henceforward) was Dido Freire, Cavalcanti's niece, who had worked with him as his secretary and continuity assistant.

When war broke out in September 1939 Renoir returned home. For the time being, Mussolini remained neutral, and a few months later Renoir was persuaded by the French Ministry of Information, anxious to maintain good relations with Italy, to go back and resume filming in Rome. He did so, but had directed only a few shots when in June 1940 Italy declared war on France and Renoir departed hastily, leaving the film to his assistants Carl Koch and Luchino Visconti. *La Tosca* (1941) finally appeared with Koch credited as sole director.

As the Germans advanced on Paris, Renoir and Dido Freire joined the trek southward, finally reaching Auguste Renoir's old house at Cagnes, where Renoir's brother Claude now lived. While there, he received an invitation, couched in seductive terms, to make films for the German government. "So attractive and dazzling did their offers become...that I felt it might be better for me to leave." Through the influence of Robert Flaherty and Albert Lewin, who had met him in Paris before the war, Renoir was granted an entry visa to the United States. In December 1940, having travelled via Algiers, Casablanca, and Lisbon, he and Dido took ship for New York; Renoir found himself sharing a cabin with Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Renoir arrived in Hollywood in January 1941 and signed a one-year contract with Darryl F. Zanuck at Fox—a relationship characterized, on both sides, by well-meaning incomprehension. Renoir suggested various subjects, including Saint-Exupéry's *Terre des*

hommes, which the studio turned down as "too European."

Fox, for their part, came up with a range of action-packed melodramas which Renoir politely declined. Eventually agreement was reached on *Swamp Water*, a script by Dudley Nichols based on a recent novel by Vereen Bell, set in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia. In its subject—a man falsely accused of murder and driven to take refuge in the swamp—Renoir may have seen the opportunity for an exploration of the relations between man, society, and nature. As things turned out, he felt that he had "passed by a great subject without penetrating it...but it is still something to be able to direct a film with a story that is not completely idiotic."

"What bothered me in Hollywood wasn't interference," Renoir later explained. "I love interference; it produces discussion, and discussion

frequently helps you improve your work....People believe that Hollywood producers are very greedy and think only of earning lots of money, but that's not true. The defect is much more dangerous: they want their films to be technically perfect."

The shooting of *Swamp*



Water (1941), he had assumed, would allow him to escape from the studio and film on location in the Okefenokee itself. Zanuck maintained that Fox could build a swamp as good or even better than Nature's in the controllable environment of the studio. In the end, Renoir was allowed to film a few exteriors in Georgia with his lead actor, Dana Andrews, but with none of the other players, not any sound equipment. Swamp sound effects would be created back in the studio, along with the rest of the film.

Renoir completed *Swamp Water* in a state of misery. Though he got on well with his cast and crew, the Fox approach to filmmaking baffled and depressed him. "I ask you not to judge my work in America by this film, which will be Mr. Zanuck's and not mine," he told Dudley Nichols. "I would rather sell peanuts in Mexico than make films at Fox." He was further

hampered by his limited English, and by worries about his son Alain, who was still in Vichy territory....Despite Renoir's unhappiness, *Swamp Water* got good notices and received the New York Critics Award.

Having severed his Fox contract, to the relief of both parties, Renoir found himself out of work but under no urgent financial pressure. Towards the end of the year he managed to secure his son's passage to America; Alain Renoir arrive in December and soon afterwards enlisted in the US Army. In February 1942 Renoir signed a long-term deal with Universal, but after a few days work on a Deanna Durbin vehicle, *Forever Yours*, he asked to be released from his contract....

When, after the war Renoir's American films were eventually released in France, none of them aroused much enthusiasm. The most hostile reception greeted *This Land is Mine* (1943)....With its pasteboard studio sets, well-nourished Hollywood faces (Maureen O'Hara, Kent Smith), and ringingly sententious dialogue, *This Land is Mine* seems now absurdly remote from any kind of reality. All that saves it from inanity is the passionate sincerity of Renoir's intentions, detectable even through Laughton's barnstorming peroration. The same emotional commitment can be felt in *Salute to France* ((1944), a half-hour propaganda film co-directed by Renoir and Garson Kanin for the Office of War Information. Alternating staged sequences with documentary footage, it was intended to offer GIs some understanding of the country they were about to liberate. (Renoir also recalled having worked, uncredited, on other propaganda films around this time, but never identified them.) In February 1944, while *Salute to France* was in preparation, Renoir and Dido Freire were married.

Looking back on his Hollywood films, Renoir reflected that "while not regretting them, I'm all too well aware that they come nowhere near my ideal."

The least unsatisfactory, he felt, was *The Southerner* (1945); many critics have agreed....The film was based on a novel by George Sessions Perry, *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, about the struggles of a poor farming family in Texas. Renoir wrote his own script (with some uncredited help from William Faulkner), and was given complete freedom to film as he wanted, largely on location with a small crew and relatively unknown actors. His set designer was Eugène Lourié, who had worked on *La Grande Illusion* and *La Règle du jeu*...."Physically," James Agee wrote in *The Nation*, it is one of the most sensitive and beautifully American-made pictures I have seen....It gets perfectly the mournful, hungry mysteriousness of a Southern country winter." He was less happy with the actors, most of whom he found "screechingly, unbearably wrong. They didn't walk right, stand right, eat right, sound right or look right, and...it was clear

that the basic understanding and the basic emotional and mental...attitudes were wrong, to the point of unintentional insult."... *The Southerner* was picketed and boycotted throughout the South and banned in Agee's native Tennessee. Elsewhere, though, it was warmly received. Winning an Oscar nomination (for best



director) and several other awards, and becoming the only commercial hit of Renoir's American period. ...

For the last film of his American period, Renoir returned to RKO, for whom he had made *This Land is Mine*. As with *Madame Bovary*, it is difficult to assess *The Woman on the Beach* (1947), since the original (which no longer survives) was heavily cut and reshot. This time, though, no heavy-handed executive can be blamed; the butcher was Renoir himself....

For Renoir, as for other European exiles with a history of prewar leftist sympathies, the political climate in the USA was starting to turn cold; for this and other reasons, he was coming to feel himself alienated from Hollywood. "Since the death of

Lubitsch,” he observed sadly, “the idea of a filmmaker, as such, has vanished from Hollywood. It happens all too often that the post of director consists of little more than a folding chair with his name on it.” California remained his second home; his son Alain was studying at Santa Barbara, with a view to an academic career, and just after the war Renoir had become a naturalized American, retaining dual French-US citizenship. But America no longer seemed a good place to make films in, although some unspecified reluctance prevented Renoir returning directly to France. Instead he embarked on a long detour, by way of India and Italy.

While still struggling to salvage *Woman on the Beach* Renoir had come across Rumer Godden’s *The River*, a semi-autobiographical novel based on her own Anglo-Indian childhood, and had secured an option on it. Backing proved hard to come by....Working closely together, Renoir and Godden devised a script which, with each successive draft, diverged further from conventional narrative structure to incorporate documentary and lyrical episodes, ending up as (in Renoir’s words) “an Occidental meditation on the Orient....I wanted to bear witness to a civilization which wasn’t based on profit.” The picture was to be shot entirely on location in India, and in color—the first color film that either Renoir or his nephew Claude, the cinematographer, had ever worked on....

In July 1951 Renoir arrived in Italy, a few days before *The River* won the International Critics Prize at the Venice Biennale. This was fortuitous; he had come to direct an Italian-French-British coproduction, *The Golden Coach* (1953), originally planned for Visconti. (It was released in three languages, but Renoir always considered the English version to be the original, since the other two were post-synched.)...

With *French Cancan* (1955), Renoir made his long-awaited return to the French film industry, and

also to the Montmartre of his boyhood. Conceived as a riposte to the Hollywood view of Bel Époque shown in Huston’s *Moulin Rouge*, the film offers a



romanticized account of the founding of the Moulin by Ziegler (called Danglard in the film, and played, in his fourth and last role for Renoir, by Jean Gabin)....Like *The Golden Coach*, *French Cancan* is frankly and unashamedly theatrical, its Montmartre an idealized studio construction complete with crescent moon....Renoir’s preoccupation with theatre

at this period was not limited to the subjects of his films; he was also branching out as a playwright and stage director. On 10th July 1954 he directed single open-air production of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* in the Roman arena at Arles to commemorate the 2,000th anniversary of Caesar’s founding of the city....

In making *Elena*, Renoir was fulfilling a long-standing ambition to shoot a film with Ingrid Bergman, and especially one in which she could be seen “laughing and smiling.” Filming, as it turned out was less happy experience due to linguistic problems; neither Bergman nor Ferrer spoke French, and the rest of the cast knew little English. Despite this, the warmth and gaiety of Bergman’s performance glow from the screen, and almost contrive—with the help of Claude Renoir’s vibrant color photography—to carry the film over its dramatic and political inadequacies. At least, they do so in the French version; the American version, which Warners truncated, partially reshot, and released under the title *Paris Does Strange Things*, is probably beyond redemption. Renoir, furious, disowned it.

“I’ve spent my life trying to raise money for my productions,” Renoir once ruefully remarked. “With a few exceptions, I’ve never succeeded—and then only thanks to the intercession of Providence.” The commercial and critical failure of *Elena*, which had been far from cheap to make, exacerbated his difficulties; during the remaining twenty-three years of his life, he was able to direct only four more films....

Disliking what he saw as a pursuit of bland technical perfection in the contemporary cinema...Renoir began to investigate the potential of a younger medium. Television, he believed, was “in a technically primitive state which may restore to artists that fighting spirit of the early cinema, when everything that was made was good.” In the hope of revitalizing the cinema through the introduction of fast, cheap TV techniques, he planned a film to be shot live for television, which would then receive immediate cinematic release....

In *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe* (*Picnic on the Grass*, 1959), as its title suggests, Renoir paid his most direct homage to the world of the impressionist painters in which he grew up. Filmed in and around the Provencal estate of Les Collettes, where August Renoir spent the last years of his life, it offers a long lyrical hymn to nature, luxuriating in the warm southern summer landscape....It was eight years [from *Cordelier*, 1959] before Renoir was able to make another film—eight years during which the man generally acknowledged as France’s most distinguished filmmaker could find no one to back his projects....Meanwhile Renoir busied himself with writing....Renoir’s last years were spent mainly in California. He was paid all the expected honors and tributes; in April 1975 he received a special Academy Award for his “grace, responsibility, and enviable competence” as a filmmaker. An autobiography of sorts, *Ma vie et mes films*, appeared in 1974, and he wrote three more novels....

Today few would dispute Renoir’s status as one of the greatest of all filmmakers, and most would accept that the films he made between 1932 and 1939 (from *Boudu*, that is, to *La Règle du jeu*) include half-a-dozen of the supreme masterpieces of the cinema.



From Jean Renoir.
André Bazin. (edited
& introduction by
François Truffaut). Da
Capo Press NY 1992

From the Introduction
by Truffaut

No one should expect me to introduce this book with caution, detachment, or equanimity, André Bazin and Jean Renoir have meant too much to me for me to be able to speak of them dispassionately. Thus it is quite natural that I should feel that *Jean Renoir* by André Bazin is the *best* book on the cinema, written by the *best* critic, about the *best* director....

Bazin

One of the most paradoxically appealing aspects of Jean Renoir’s work is that everything he does is so casual. He is the only filmmaker in the world who can afford to treat the cinema with such apparent offhandedness. It took Renoir to muster the audacity to film *Gorki* on the banks of the Marne or to handle the casting as he did on *The Rules of the Game*, in which almost all the actors, except the servants, are so marvelously out of their usual characters. If one had to describe the art of Renoir in a word, one could define it as the art of discrepancy.

One of the best scenes in *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, the suicide attempt from the Pont des Arts, was made in total defiance of the logic of the scene. The crowd of unpaid extras gathered on the bridge and the river banks was not there to witness a tragedy. They came to watch a movie being made, and they were in good humor. Far from asking them to feign

the emotion which versimilitude would demand, Renoir seems to have encouraged them in their light-hearted curiosity. The film does not for a moment convince us that the crowd is interested in Boudu. Some of the spectators turn around to get a better look at the cameraman, much as in the earliest newsreels when people had not yet grown accustomed to the camera. And, as if he felt the falseness of the acting were not sufficiently apparent, Renoir had some rapid shots taken from behind the crowd which leave no doubt of its lack of emotion.

This incongruity is reinforced by the fact that Renoir is one of the masters of photographic realism, the heir of the tradition of the naturalistic novel and its contemporary, Impressionist painting. A fraction of these “mistakes” would condemn any other director.

But they are an integral part of the style of Jean Renoir, often the best part of it. For Renoir, what is important is not the dramatic value of a scene. Drama, action—in the theatrical or novelistic sense of the terms—are for him only pretext for the essential, and the essential is everywhere in what is visible, everywhere in the very substance of the cinema. Of course,

drama is necessary—that is what we go to the movies to see—but the story can get along easily by itself. It is sufficient to sketch just enough of it so that the audience has the satisfaction of understanding. That done, the real film remains to be made: character, objects, light, all must be arranged in the story like colors in a drawing, without being directly subordinated to it. At times the very interest of the finished product may be in the fact that the colors do not fit neatly within the contours of the drawing. The effects Renoir created out of the overlapping seem all the more subtle because he knows how to stay within the lines beautifully when he wants to.

Alexander Sesonke, “The Rules of the Game: Everyone Has Their Reasons” (Criterion notes)

By February 1939, it no longer seemed evident that the surrender of Czechoslovakia to Adolf Hitler at Munich had “saved the peace.” A sense of doom was beginning to hang over Europe. In this atmosphere, Jean Renoir, anticipating war and deeply troubled by the mood he felt around him, thought he might best interpret that state of mind by creating a story in the spirit of French comic theater, from Marivaux to Musset, a tradition in which the force that sets every character in motion is love and the characters have no other occupation to interfere with this pursuit.

The result was *The Rules of the Game*, a dazzling accomplishment, original in form and style, a comic tragedy, absurd and profound, graced by two of the most brilliant scenes ever created. It is also, in the words of Dudley Andrew, “the most complex social

criticism ever enacted on the screen.” A total box-office failure in 1939, *The Rules of the Game* now ranks as one of the greatest masterpieces of world cinema.

Throughout the 1930s, Renoir had worked at the margins of the French movie industry, exploring aspects of contemporary French society while developing a style in opposition to the one that emanated from



Hollywood and dominated the film world. Renoir arranged his actors in deep space; long takes in deep focus allowed them to move freely in this space and gave them time to seek and achieve convincing characterizations. Then, in the late thirties, intent on creating rhythm and balance within complex narrative structures, he began constructing his films around matched opposing pairs, a form that helped bring coherence and resonance to his intricate story lines.

As he mastered this style, Renoir’s social commitments deepened. He became, in the midthirties, the film director of the left, his protagonists often working-class rather than bourgeois. Still, for all his command, his films were seldom commercial hits. But then two big successes,

Grand Illusion (1937) and *La bête humaine* (1938), encouraged him to act out a dream—to form his own production company, wherein he could work when and as he pleased. *The Rules of the Game*, the most expensive and ambitious French production of 1939, was the first film made under the auspices of that organization.

As he wrote the script, Renoir referred to the film as “an exact description of the bourgeoisie of our time.” He was so confident in his vision that he later claimed to have started shooting with only one-third of the script complete: “In reality, I had this subject so much inside me, so profoundly within me, that I had written only the entrances and movements, to avoid mistakes about them. The sense of the characters and the action and, above all, the symbolic side of the film was something I had thought about for a long time. I had desired to do something like this for a long time, to show a rich, complex society where—to use a historic phrase—we are dancing on a volcano.”

For his dancers, he finally chose not big stars but talented supporting players, old friends like Marcel Dalio, Gaston Modot, and Julien Carette, with an unknown Austrian princess, Nora Grégor, as his leading lady, Christine. He filled out the cast with such amateurs as the photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson, and himself played a major role, as Octave, the meddling court jester to the idle rich. Consequently, it is impossible to identify the central character in *The Rules of the Game*. “There is none,” Renoir said. “The conception I had from the beginning was of a film representing a society, a group. I wanted to depict a class.”

The class, of course, is the haute bourgeoisie, the upper middle class, whose blindness and intransigence had helped create the hopeless situation of Europe in 1939. To reveal the folly and the tragedy of that group and of his time, Renoir derived his action from two French classics, Alfred de Musset’s

Les caprices de Marianne and Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais’ *Le mariage de Figaro*, then shaped the cast into matched opposing pairs. For characters, he began with four from *Les caprices de Marianne*: jealous husband, faithful wife, despairing lover, and intervening friend. Doubling this group then yielded

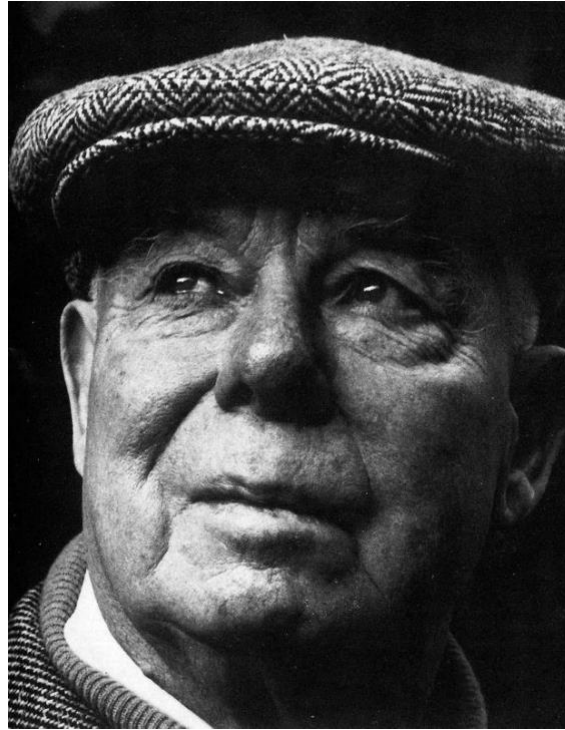
the central opposing pairs in *The Rules of the Game*: matched sets of husbands, wives, lovers, mistresses, and friends—one set among the masters, the other among the servants, thus evoking one of Renoir’s perennial themes, the relations among classes.

Luxurious town houses define the social setting of the film, and two remarks reveal its moral climate: “Love as it exists in society is merely the mingling of two whims and the contact of two skins” and “The awful thing about life is this: everyone has their reasons.”

Everyone has their reasons, but in *The Rules of the Game*, the reason is always the same: I love her/him. The differences lie in the acts each character believes this reason justifies. These range from suicide to murder.

Once his central opposing pairs are formed, Renoir isolates his characters in the swampy beauty of the Sologne, France’s hunting country, where their game of love becomes a danse macabre through the halls and glittering salons of the Château de la Colinière, with the dancers changing partners as they go—a surreal scene that swings from joy to despair, from burlesque to tragedy, as the bourgeois world spins out of control. Richard Roud calls it “an astonishing combination of lengthy shots to create an effect of vertiginous simultaneity.”

The centerpiece of Renoir’s intricate structure, the pivot on which the action turns, the symbolic core of his critique of French society, is the hunt, the scene that most clearly reveals the volcano that seethes beneath the dancers. In a film whose shots often run for a minute or more, here fifty-one shots appear in less than four minutes, in a mounting rhythm of



cutting and movement that culminates in an awesome barrage of gunfire as, in twenty-two shots—fifty-three seconds—twelve animals die. Surely one of the most powerful scenes in all of cinema.

Though the world of the film seems at times one of sheer chaos, *The Rules of the Game*, seen

whole, is lucid and as precisely constructed as the marquis' mechanical instruments.

Unfortunately, few Parisians in 1939 ever saw it whole. Later in his life, Renoir could laugh as he pronounced *The Rules of the Game* “a magnificent flop, perfect, complete,” for by then his “frivolous drama” was hailed as a masterwork. But in

1939, he was not amused. At the premiere, the Paris audience howled and whistled and threw things at the screen. In a week, ten minutes had been cut from the film, but audiences still hooted. In a few more weeks, the exclusive opening run had ended; this most ambitious production of the year had quickly become a commercial disaster. Renoir was so discouraged he thought he must either give up cinema or leave France. He did move to Hollywood a year later to avoid working under the Nazi occupation, abandoning the film to its fate.

Booed, banned, nearly destroyed, *The Rules of the Game* was reconstructed in 1959, with the approval of Renoir, to a length of 106 minutes. Thus viewers of this disc are afforded a privilege available to almost no one when the film was new: that of seeing *The Rules of the Game* as Jean Renoir intended it.

The Rules of the Game: Tributes

The Rules of the Game is one of the best-loved films of all time. The following is a selection of tributes to it from writers and directors, originally included in the 2004 Criterion DVD edition.

PAUL SCHRADER, Writer-Director

The Rules of the Game stands above all other films because, quite simply, it has it all. If one movie can stand for all others, represent all that film can be, that film is *The Rules of the Game*.

It excels in every area. The camera work is innovative but also part of the narrative. The exposition—the

bane of all writers—is exquisite. Eight characters, each unique, are set in motion; each interacts in a different way with the others. The dialogue is sharp, understated, constantly interweaving tensions and themes. The details, the decor, the costuming—everything is to a point. Blissfully entertaining, it nonetheless touches



each side of each relationship. It creates a world: upper and lower classes, men and women, wise and foolish, petty and sublime. Every shape has a shadow. This is craftsmanship of the highest order.

But most of all, *The Rules of the Game* is profoundly humanistic. Renoir details the complex threads of experience, then, with the aplomb of a show-man, steps back from the threads to reveal the tapestry . . . a reality built on rules that will soon be irrelevant. At the end of an era (the eve of World War II), Renoir took a dying genre (the bedroom farce) and used it to define the world.

AMY TAUBIN, Film Critic

Why is *The Rules of the Game* the greatest film ever made? There are other films as formally complicated and graceful, as packed with ideas and emotions, as detailed and inclusive in their depiction of a social order and a historical moment. But I can think of no other film that is as unfail-ingly generous—to its audience, its characters, its actors, its milieu, and its medium. A social satire that is devoid of cynicism and its companion, sentimentality, and that evokes compassion rather than contempt is a rare thing. A cautionary tale that is as prophetic of today's

tomorrows as of those many yesterdays ago is rarer still.

LUC SANTE, Writer

The paradoxes do nothing but multiply when it comes to *The Rules of the Game*. It is (like, say, *Moby-Dick*) a supreme classic that was initially a failure—such a failure that it was cut down by 25 percent, in bits and pieces, over the first few years after its release. It is a filigree of classical inspiration (the comedy of Marivaux, and Renoir tells us he listened incessantly to the music of Rameau and Couperin while working on it) that achieves a kaleidoscopic modernist complexity. It is a dense clockwork mechanism, and yet Renoir said, “Of all the movies I’ve made, probably none was so thoroughly improvised. We made up the script and decided on locations as we went along.” It is a lucid portrait of the time in which it was made, although you’d be hard-pressed to find more than a handful of direct allusions. It is both a buoyant tragedy and a farce that ends in tears. It is simultaneously Shakespearean and Chekhovian. It is 106 minutes long, and yet it seems inexhaustible. Every viewing is repaid with new strands of the story, new turns of dialogue, new corridors of meaning—as if they had not been there all along but had grown in the interval between the last time you saw it and this time. It was made in 1939, but it continues to take shape as you watch.

ROBIN WOOD, Film Historian

We value films for their coherence, yet of the greatest transcend such a criterion. Few agree as to what exactly *The Rules of the Game* is about. Even Renoir seemed ambivalent, even self-contradictory, claiming once that “the film attacks the very structure of our society,” but on another occasion that “people said I was attacking society, but that is not true . . . I would

have loved to live in that society.” Hence, every critic takes a different approach. I am especially fascinated



by the film’s radical sexual politics and want to offer “promiscuity” as one of Renoir’s major positives.

It operates on all levels. There is the promiscuity of his attitude toward theory (every theory may be valid, according to its application), and the promiscuity of his camera style, moving continuously from character to character, entering and transitorily sharing each point of

view. The opening quotation from *The Marriage of Figaro* applies the principle to love: As it has wings, why should it not fly?

The film definitively establishes his variant on the “eternal triangle,” extending it to a fourth component; the pattern recurs obsessively through *The Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Golden Coach*, and *Elena and Her Men*, and is reversed in *The River* (one man, three women). The triangle raises the problem of simple choice (often husband or lover); the three-to-one dissolves this: Why have to choose at all? Why not all three? This raises fundamental questions: Why must sex be the criterion of fidelity? Why not merely an option? Why should not Christine (who, pace Renoir, is clearly the film’s central character, not André Jurieux) be free to relate as she pleases, whether or not the relationship is sexual?

The ending of the film is tragic, but the nature of that tragedy has been widely misunderstood: not the death of André (who is not a tragic figure) but the final entrapment of Christine, led back into the château as a prisoner, not of her husband but of the “rules of the game.”

NOAH BAUMBACH, Writer-Director

I love the gradual seduction of Lisette (Paulette Goddard) by Marceau (Julien Carette). First, he ogles her while stuffing food in his mouth at the servants' dinner table. Later he recites, "She loves me, she loves me not," using the leather shoes he's shining rather than flower petals. He plays a tune on a musical doll, looking at her with a strange amorous glow in his eyes. It's part Groucho Marx, part lunatic. Then he attacks her and chases her through the room. Amazingly, Marceau's tactics work on Lisette. He's just as charming to her as he is to us. And I root for him and Lisette, just as I feel sorry for Schumacher (Gaston Modot), Lisette's cuckolded husband. Later, after the two men have been fired, Marceau comes upon Schumacher on the grounds of the château. Schumacher cries, having lost his wife. Marceau has squandered his dream of becoming a servant. It's both sad and comforting watching these men bond after having been trying to kill each other moments earlier. As they watch Octave and Lisette (actually Christine), Marceau says to Schumacher, "Haven't you got your pistol? Let him have it." Schumacher replies, "I fired all my bullets at you."

KENT JONES, Film Critic

The Rules of the Game is certainly a masterpiece, but it's a far more sprawling, unkempt film than it's often cracked up to be—excitingly so. Renoir apparently took off in many different directions during the chaotic shoot, and it shows: this film is the work of a man thinking on his feet, plunging into new territory without knowing precisely where he's going to end up. It is completely decentered, morally and otherwise, floating like a balloon over all the hullabaloo at the château. The supremely talented, supremely flexible Renoir rides his own movie like a wave, thus foreshadowing (and inspiring) the cinema of Godard, Rivette, and Cassavetes and the great experimental impulses that came alive in the sixties

and seventies. Those famous lines he gave Octave, his own character, about everyone having his or her own reasons, have often been taken for a sweeping judgment of mankind. But in this film that seems to

contain every emotion—joy, vanity, neurotic confusion, narcissistic self-obsession, passion, depression, smugness, envy, jealousy, pride, elation—it's probably best understood as a gesture, one among many. Renoir once said that one should float through life like a cork over a stream. In *The Rules of the Game*, every character, from Octave on down, is madly trying to scoop up some water with their hands, only to see it drain through their fingers.



KENNETH BOWSER, Director

As we watch the characters who inhabit Jean Renoir's *The Rules of the Game*, a kind of sweet melancholy overtakes us. How else to respond to people so

wrongheadedly convinced that they can control life? Renoir's artistry lies in his clear-eyed, unsentimental, but nevertheless empathic view of people struggling to bring order to the chaos that is life. That the film was made in 1938-'39, even as his neighbors were insisting on bringing a degree of order to existence that was essentially antihuman, only emphasizes the quiet humanity at the heart of this great artist, who recognized that nothing human was alien to him.

WIM WENDERS, Director This film is no small miracle, in my book. Made right before the outbreak of the Second World War, it is full of anticipation of the horrors about to happen. Yet it is rather looking back, showing an old and morose society vanishing in front of our eyes, not just in France but all over the world. Violence is erupting ferociously and randomly, even if the film itself is full of warmth and tenderness. An incredible lightness of being is carrying us through it and helping us overcome all the bitterness it evokes as well. You just wonder how a camera could have possibly been so weightless, long before the invention of the Steadicam. But what makes *The Rules of the Game* so ephemeral and translucent is really Jean Renoir's view of things. Rarely has there been a film so void of any prejudice whatsoever. Nothing appears fixed or set. There are truly no rules to the game he's unraveling in front of us. We're rather invited to throw all preconceived notions overboard, on any of the film's matters: friendship, trust, love, the relationships between men and women. I promise you: you will travel lighter after the film! (You also have to know that Jean Renoir appears as an actor. He's the guy in the bear outfit! Watching him alone is a sheer pleasure. This film is addictive—be warned!)

J. HOBERMAN, Film Critic

The Rules of the Game was the great culminating talkie of the 1930s, before World War II changed everything. This magnificent ensemble piece—a movie that Woody Allen, Robert Altman, and Mike Leigh, to name three, are always trying to remake—is as fresh, funny, and poignant as it ever was, and even more mysterious. How did Renoir do it? *The Rules of the Game* has much overlapping dialogue and very few reverse-angle shots. The camera is endearingly shaky, as if jostled by the mad chases and frantic intrigue; the deep space allows ample room to mix up

spouses and lovers, masters and servants, living creatures and automatic dolls, theater and life, truth and lies. The leads are fabulously miscast. What to call a sex comedy of manners that turns slapstick and culminates in murder? Is it a tragic farce, a form of melodramatic social satire, a new kind of documentary? Not surprisingly, *The Rules of the Game* was the greatest failure of Renoir's career. Midway through its Paris premiere, the audience started hooting. (Was it the hunting scene?) Then they rioted. The movie was banned only days before war broke out and wasn't seen again in its entirety for twenty years. The comment made by Renoir's character, Octave, "The awful thing about life is this:

everyone has their reasons" is often attributed to Renoir himself—but without the qualifying *awful*.

PETER COWIE, Film Historian

While he remains an individualist, Renoir always returns to the essential need for companionship between men and women. His heroes and heroines, from the enraged gamekeeper to the sophisticated Geneviève, harbor the same

emotions at heart.

Renoir asserts their sad predicament in one of the best sequences in French cinema. The game shoot is filmed on a perfect spring day, with low, luminous clouds prevailing as the beaters march through a young wood on their time-honored mission. The camera zips behind each luckless hare and then hovers dispassionately while the animal squirms and suddenly dies—just as André falls at the end of the film, a victim of society rather than circumstance. Humanity, warmth, generosity: these are the qualities that infuse *The Rules of the Game* and that transcend Renoir's occasional flippancy and lack of discipline. Is he not indeed the father of the New Wave?

ROBERT ALTMAN, Director

The Rules of the Game taught me the rules of the game.



THE FALL 2022 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XLV:

August 30 William Wellman *Wings* 1927
Sept 6 Jean Renoir *Rules of the Game* 1939
Sept 13 Michael Curtiz *Casablanca* 1942
Sept 20 Nicholas Ray, *In a Lonely Place* 1950
Sept 27 Luis Buñuel *Viridiana* 1961
Oct 4 Orson Welles *Chimes at Midnight* 1966
Oct 11 Mel Brooks *Young Frankenstein* 1974
Oct 18 Arthur Penn *Night Moves* 1975
Oct 25 Sydney Pollack *Tootsie* 1982
Nov 1 Akira Kurosawa *Ran* 1985
Nov 8 Martin Scorsese *Goodfellas* 1990
Nov 15 Hiyo Miyazaki *The Wind Rises* 2013
Nov 22 Ava Duvernay *Selma* 2014
Nov 29 Pedro Almodóvar *Parallel Mothers* 2021
Dec 6 Ang Lee *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* 2000

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Jean Renoir and Auguste Renoir's painting of Gabrielle and Jean