



Alliance Française
DuPage County

2016 Cine-Column Movie Reviews Archive by Cynthia McLaughlin

Janvier 2016

No review for this month

Février 2016

Les Amants by Louis Malle

Louis Malle gives us Jeanne Moreau who plays an unhappy spoiled housewife and mother also named Jeanne in this 1958 film noir. Jeanne's husband Henri is a Dijon newspaper owner who takes his wife for granted and turns a blind eye to her infidelities.

Jeanne frequently travels to Paris in her sporty Peugeot to hook up with hipster childhood friend Maggy. During one of these visits, Maggy introduces her to star polo player, Raoul who falls hard for Jeanne. Although Raoul is handsome, much sought after by other women, and only has eyes for Jeanne, she is still not happy. Jeanne's world changes when home for a brief period of time, Henri insists that she invite Maggy and Raoul to dinner. They accept and travel to Dijon, but the twist to the plot comes when Jeanne's car breaks down and she accepts a ride to Dijon from Bernard, an archeologist. Jeanne arrives late to the dinner party with Bernard in tow. Events during and after the dinner party are somewhat of a surprise. At the end of the film, Jeanne is still not sure if she is happy but she has no regrets. Ms. Moreau's role reminded me of her role as Catherine in Jules and Jim where one is never sure if she is happy or just using those around her until something or someone better comes along. I decided that the point of the film isn't just about the obvious drama but it is more about challenging boundaries and embracing uncertainty.

This film questioned the definition of obscenity in the U.S. Viewers never actually see anything that is more than what we would call "racy" but one scene has enough implications to leave nothing to the imagination. When released here in 1959, theatre owners in Chicago, Cleveland and Portland were arrested for showing obscene material. One of those cases went to the Supreme Court where the charge was upheld and later reversed.

Mars 2016

Chinese Puzzle (Casse-tête chinois)

This is a humorous but lopsided 2013 French romantic comedy written and directed by Cedric Klapisch. It is the latest chapter of the Spanish Apartment trilogy which also includes *L'Auberge Espagnole*, 2002 and *Les Poupées Russes*, 2005. Having seen the first two films, I was anxious to continue on the path and find out how the characters had developed.

A somewhat scruffy Romain Duris plays Xavier who comes to New York to be by his children who he had with a Brit he lived with who moved to New York to be with an American. Confusing? Just wait! He has a baby with two lesbians and marries a Chinese woman so he can be an American. Characters introduced in the prior films include Wendy, the mother-of-his-children (Kelly Reilly) and two unusually disposed ex-girlfriends Isabelle (Cecile De France) and Martine (Audrey Tautou) who converge to help tell a complicated but familiar story.

I found the contrasts and exaggerations amusing and intriguing. I felt the film was as much about subtly comparing American and French culture and giving New York City a personality as it was about the complex

relationships between the characters. For example, there are a multitude of personifications of the large American and small French man. American misunderstanding of French culture peppers the film and the New York City depicted is much more of a “rotten apple” than the romantic metropolis seen through Carrie Bradshaw in *Sex and the City*.

The ending is pleasing. Xavier who seems like a train wreck at times manages to navigate gridlocked traffic, high rents and the American legal system to be with his children and eventually find love and happiness.

Avril 2016

No review for this month

Mai 2016

Le Chef (by Daniel Cohen)

Warning: Don't watch if you are hungry! This light-hearted romantic comedy will fold you in and embrace you in a bear hug. From the title, I expected to see a chef and his team in action and to learn about the rhythms and order of a French kitchen. The film provides those delicious insights and it also delivers fun and revives our faith in love and friendship.

Le Chef is a 2012 French comedy directed by Daniel Cohen and starring Jean Reno and Michael Youn. Youn plays Jacky Bonnot, a young Frenchman living with his pregnant girlfriend played by Raphaëlle Agogue. Jacky has a spotty employment record as a brilliant but impatient and non-conformist chef and seeks out a stable job as a painter to support his girlfriend and become serious about his upcoming role as a father. He coaches the chefs at the building he is painting and helps them to improve their menus. This reaches the ears of famous chef Alexander Lagarde who is in danger of losing a Michelin star at his restaurant if he doesn't reinvent his menu. Lagarde offers Jacky an unpaid internship and Jacky accepts but holds this as a secret from his girlfriend. As the story progresses, Lagarde and Jacky engage in some hilarious detective work to find out what a competing restaurant has to offer. After discovering his employment status, his girlfriend is less than receptive to a subsequent bumbling marriage proposal and things don't look very hopeful for Jacky or the restaurant. Don't get too worried because Jacky's innovation and culinary talent save the restaurant and the film has a happy romantic ending. A content feeling and an awareness of the grueling politics restaurants face with the star system stayed with me long after the film ended.

Juin 2016

No review for this month. Cynthia's reviews resume in July 2016. *Merci!*

Juillet 2016

I Do - How to Get Married and Stay Single (2006, Directed by Éric Lartigau)

Middle-aged confirmed Parisian bachelor and womanizer Luis Costa (Alain Chabat) is a “nose” at a perfume company. He has no interest in settling down. His job is going well and he has an abundant choice of ladies. His mother and five sisters who are over-involved in his life have different ideas and set Luis up on a series of doomed dates in an attempt to marry him off. Luis soon tires of dining out with strangers he has nothing in common with and arranges for his colleague's sister, Emmanuelle (Charlotte Gainsbourg), to pose as his fiancée to get them off his back.

Emmanuelle proves to be a challenge demanding his bonus in advance payment for the scheme. The plan is that she won't show up at the church on their wedding day and Luis will be done with his obligation to her and at last, his family will leave him alone. This becomes complicated when his mother becomes seriously ill at the church after Emmanuelle is a no show and asks incessantly for her during her hospital stay. He drags her in unwillingly for a second round but she may need him as much as he needs her.

This colorful take on a classic romantic comedy is entertainment at its best. The film is about the dynamics of large and close-knit families and how people can and do change when presented with the unexpected. Fans of fashion will find Gainsbourg's nonchalant attitude and wardrobe as interesting as the plot.

Août 2016

C'est l'heure des vacances. No film review this month

Septembre 2016

Spanish Apartment (L'Auberge Espagnole, 2002)

Several months ago, I reviewed *The Chinese Puzzle* (2013), the third and final part of Cedric Klapsisch's Spanish Apartment trilogy. The first film in the series, *The Spanish Apartment* brings us back to the chaotic routine and adventures of student life. A young Romain Duris is Xavier, a Parisian and economics student who goes to Barcelona for a year as part of the famed ERASMUS program, a European Union student exchange program. Xavier has his eye on a job in the Ministry and needs to complete this leg of his education to snag the job. The story is told in the first person and is mostly narrated in French.

Xavier leaves his long-term girlfriend Martine (Audrey Tautou) in Paris and heads to Barcelona after a dramatic goodbye at the airport. He meets a doctor and his wife on his flight to Barcelona and after a brief stay with them, settles in an apartment with students from England, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, Italy and Germany. The roommates develop a unique system as they grapple with cultural and linguistic challenges. Typical situations such as heated discussions over fridge space or cleaning responsibilities play out in a humorous manner that everyone who has lived with roommates can appreciate. I thought my fridge was unorganized before I saw theirs! Martine visits Xavier and is disappointed when she realizes things are not the same as when he left Paris. Meanwhile, Xavier cultivates a romantic relationship with the French doctor's wife, seducing her using tips he learns from his Belgian lesbian roommate, Isabelle.

At the end of the year, Xavier returns to Paris to the coveted job at the Ministry but doesn't last long as he becomes disenchanted with the bureaucracy. He quickly moves to a project that is more in tune with his heart – writing about his experiences in the Spanish apartment. Xavier and Martine meet in a café at the end of the film but reconciliation is not in the script. This film is about how experiences move and change us and about letting go and moving on. Since this is part of a trilogy, we shouldn't feel sad and should look forward to more about Xavier and Martine in parts two and three.

Octobre 2016

No film review for this month

Novembre 2016

A Man and a Woman (1966)

Pour yourself a glass of wine and settle in to watch the most romantic film ever produced. First released in 1966, this film is 50 years old and was reintroduced at the Chicago International Film Festival. Full of rainy nights, walks on Deauville boardwalks and beaches and set to a winsome theme song, this Claude Lelouch film is guaranteed to capture your heart.

Anne (Anouk Aimee) is a Parisian widow and single mother who meets widower Jean-Louis (Jean-Louis Trintignant) at their children's boarding school in Deauville. Jean-Louis is a race car driver and Anne is a film script supervisor. Their friendship develops over weekend visits with their children and becomes charged with romance. However, they are caught in the past, guarded and unwilling to reveal details about themselves to the other person too quickly. Lelouch gives us a vantage point to their developing feelings by allowing us to "hear" their thoughts as we observe their outward coyness. We eventually learn of the tragic circumstances that have left each of them spouseless.

The part of this film I most adore is when Jean-Louis drives in the Grand Prix race then drives his practice car non-stop back to Paris after receiving a telegram from Anne. Not finding her at home, he continues to Deauville and finds her with the children. Their romance reaches a peak but is still uncertain.

At the end of the film, their relationship remains a bit ambiguous but we are hopeful that they have decided to let go of the past and not to deprive themselves of what could be a great and lasting love.

As a final note, the photography in this film is breathtaking and does a superb job of conveying moods with transitions between black and white, full color and sepia tones.

Décembre 2016

No film review this month. *Joyeuses Fêtes!*