AMBIVALENT AMERICANISM:
U.S. LITERARY MODERNISM IN FRANCE AND ALGERIA AFTER 1940

Lauren Du Graf

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Approved by:
Inger S. B. Brodey
Hassan Melehy
William R. Ferris
Anne-Gaëlle Saliot
Rick Warner
ABSTRACT

LAUREN DU GRAF: Ambivalent Americanism:
U.S. Literary Modernism in France and Algeria after 1940
(Under the direction of Inger S. B. Brodey)

This dissertation reveals how French and Algerian writers and filmmakers, from the onset of World War II to the present, have mined American literary modernist texts for the language with which to confront a range of societal and political injustices – including racism, sexism, colonialism, and war – witnessed at home. Writers and filmmakers from the Hexagon to the Maghreb have repurposed American modernist writing, from the fiction of William Faulkner to the novels of Chester Himes, to address French and Algerian social and political concerns from the Nazi occupation to the 1990s Algerian civil war. This decades-long phenomenon, I argue, gained traction during the politicization of American literary modernism during and after the dark years of Nazi occupation and Vichy collaboration, when works by U.S. writers acquired cult status as banned objects in both France and Algeria. From underground resistance magazines produced under Nazi occupation to to post-Algerian independence cinema, I show how the work of American modernist writers has been discursively mobilized at critical moments of renegotiating French and Algerian cultural identity. The durability of U.S. literary modernism in the French-speaking literary and cinematic productions also reflects what I call an ambivalent Americanism; while the French-language engagement with the texts of U.S. modernist writers has reflected an admiration for American cultural
production as well as an empathy for mutually felt historical and political crises, this interest is double-edged, often embedding a posture of critique and at times condescension towards the dark side of American modernity as rendered in its literary expressions of violence, anti-black racism, mass incarceration, capitalism, and poverty.
To my Grandmother,

Marcelina Lim Du (August 9, 1913 – February 27, 2014)
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In the Fall of 2008, I left my hometown of Seattle for Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Like Simone de Beauvoir, I had little sense of the American South beyond movies, books and music – from Carson McCullers’ *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* to William Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County, the sounds of Louis Armstrong’s Hot Fives and Sevens to the Goodie Mob, from *Steel Magnolias* to *Forrest Gump*. The six years I spent in North Carolina – and especially my relationships with Southerners – would help disabuse me of my stereotypes of the South and challenge my Pacific Northwestern chauvinism. As I near the end of this project and my time at UNC, I can see how my experiences as a Southern Seattlite have been a key ingredient in this project’s evolution.

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INTRODUCTION

Now all the world knows that nothing consoles a sick person so much as to know that he has brothers in misfortune...

Restless France of the postwar period turned to restless America as the young romantics of 1830 turned to Germany, the fatherland of Werther, and to England, the country of Byron.

And now that social problems are the order of the day, it is again in America that France finds the greatest number of young writers who are occupied with the same problems.

-Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, 1937

A 2009 Télérama survey asked 100 French authors to name their favorite literary work; William Faulkner was the second most cited author, just behind Marcel Proust and one slot ahead of Gustave Flaubert. Faulkner appeared on the top-ten lists of 24 authors, ranging from Marie Darrieussecq (who named Absalom, Absalom) to Philippe Djian and Annie Ernaux (who both listed The Sound and the Fury). On a tour of American universities in 2007, the Algerian writer Rachid Boudjedra gave lectures on the importance of Faulkner to Maghrebian literature. The Franco-Swiss filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, who first began to allude to the Mississippi author in his criticism and films


2 http://www.telerama.fr/livre/les-10-livres-preferes-de-100-ecrivains,40420.php

during the 1950s, continues to reference the Southern author in his most recent feature-
length efforts, including *Film Socialisme* (2010), which spliced a quote from Faulkner’s *Light in August* and seamlessly incorporated it into dialogue, without acknowledging the source.4 The ghosts of Mississippi modernism appear, too, in the recent releases of French filmmaker Bertrand Tavernier; *Dans la brume électrique (In the Electric Mist, 2008)*, set in Iberia Parish, Louisiana, adapted from *In the Electric Mist with Confederate Dead* by the Southern writer James Lee Burke, known throughout France as the “Faulkner du roman noir.”5 And the 2012 DVD re-release of Tavernier’s *Mississippi Blues* (1983) has given new life to the French filmmaker’s cinematic exploration of Faulkner’s Mississippi milieu.6 The engagement with American modernist literature can also be glimpsed in the debut feature-length effort of the Algerian filmmaker Tariq Teguia’s *Roma wa la n’ouma (Rome Rather than You, 2006)*, which invoked *Cast the First Stone* (1952), a semi-autobiographical prison novel by the African-American writer Chester Himes, long out of print in the United States.

How do we account for the enduring and energetic engagement of the works of American modernists like Faulkner and Himes by French and Algerian writers and filmmakers? In this dissertation, I suggest that the durability of U.S. literary modernism is due, in part, to its usefulness as an *ambivalent Americanism* – a strain of transcultural

4 Du Graf, 533–556.


6 Although I do not investigate the connection in this dissertation, it is interesting to note that Tavernier’s father, Réné, was the director of the important Lyon-based resistance journal *Confluences*, which comes up in Chapter 1 as the journal in which Alexandre Astruc and Gaetan Picon publish their reviews of *L’Arbalète*’s special American issues.
engagement that straddles the difference between Americanization (or Americanism) and anti-Americanism,\(^7\) two dominant strands of transnational discourse that have characterized the relationship between the United States and the world, particularly since World War II. American modernism served a double function both as an admired – and highly emulated – emblem of American straightforwardness and aesthetic innovation, as well as a window into the severity of American dysfunction. Thus, while the French and Algerian engagement with the texts of U.S. modernist writers reflects an empathy for mutually felt historical and political crises and a sympathy for the struggles of the oppressed, it is also rooted in an appreciation for American failure and the dark side of American modernity as rendered in its literary expressions of violence, anti-black racism, mass incarceration, capitalism, and poverty. On the one hand, the fascination with American modernism both reflects a deep engagement with American authors, their innovative techniques, vernacularity, and blunt address of societal injustice; on the other hand, it is a form of transnationalism that is intertwined with critique and, at times, tinged with condescension, allowing French and Algerian interlocutors to maintain a critical distance from dominant, less-desirable aspects of American culture. *Ambivalent Americanism*, then, describes a pattern of transnational engagement that is built on visible vulnerabilities, qualities which inspire both obsession and repulsion, identification and distance, empathy and dissociation.

To support this idea, this dissertation brings to light how a range of writers and filmmakers, from the onset of World War II to the present, have mined American literary

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\(^7\) Philippe Roger’s *The American Enemy* (*L’Ennemi américain*, 2002) offers a lengthy and engaging history of the French discourse of anti-Americanism that reaches back into the 1700s.
modernist texts for the language with which to confront a range of societal and political injustices – including racism, sexism, colonialism, and war – witnessed at home in France and Algeria. The fascination – and at times fetishization – of the dark side of American modernity, I contend, is grounded in a shared set of historical traumas and societal troubles, as reflected in the quote from the celebrated translator Maurice-Edgar Coindreau that serves as the epigraph for this introduction. The French felt a kinship with Americans as “brothers in misfortune” — traumatized by wars, witness and accomplice to similar societal and political schisms, and guilt-ridden by similarly pervasive forms of systematic oppression and racial injustice. For example, the post-Civil War trauma, loss of global economic influence, and military defeat of the Deep South resonated in France during les années noires of World War II and beyond. As historian Henry Rousso argued, France's post-war memories – particularly grappling with the legacy of occupation and Nazi collaboration – contributed to Le Syndrome de Vichy, an obsessional neurosis in the French popular imagination. Later, France’s obsession with narratives depicting American racism would parallel the official repression of its own racist histories. The parallel circumstances were obvious to William Faulkner, who, when asked by Dawson of the Tex and Jinx radio show in 1956 what questions he was most commonly asked abroad, replied: “Commonest was: people talk about freedom, and how can you reconcile freedom with the condition of the negro in your own

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8 This quote comes from Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, famed translator of American literary modernism, whose work I will discuss in Chapter 1. See “France and the Contemporary American Novel,” 275.

9 Although it is perhaps by coincidence, the title of Eric Conan and Henry Rousso’s 1994 text Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas, evokes Faulkner’s famous quote from Faulkner’s Requiem for a nun, “The past is never dead. It's not even past.”
country? The answers were quite obvious. In France, for instance, it was easy, because they have Algeria on their hands.”

Decades later in post-independence Algeria, African-American modernism would be deployed to illuminate structures of white supremacy and the unfairness of the criminal justice system, laying bare the hypocrisy of the United States’ claims to being the land of the free.

This study begins at the onset of the Second World War, a point of departure that is both a provocation and a concession. Such a starting point is a concession because the phenomenon that this dissertation endeavors to trace certainly began much earlier than a 1940; novels such as the wildly popular *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) had already laid the groundwork for France’s interest in American literary accounts of racism, violence and class struggle. Nevertheless, this dissertation begins with the underground circulation of American modernist literature during the period of Nazi occupation which, as I argue, would definitively impact how American literature was interpreted and popularized after the war. While the moment of liberation is often described as the epochal turning point in the rise in the popularity of American literature in France (as translator Maurice-Edgar Coindreau put it, “the American tidal wave which, after the Liberation, was to break upon intellectual France”

11), as I show in my first chapter, the special American issues of the *samizdat* occupation-era journals *Fontaine* and *l’Arbalète* played an integral role in ushering in a new era in American modernism, as works from decades past are translated into French for the first time, and new works by writers including William Faulkner and

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10 Notes of conversation between Faulkner and Dawson of the Tex and Jinx Program, Friday, February 24, 1956. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

11 *William Faulkner: Critical Assessments* 582.
Gertrude Stein are debuted in French before they appear in English. This discourse, I demonstrate, continues in the formative period of film criticism that Dudley Andrew has termed the Bazin Era (1945-1958), when American literary modernism functioned as a rhetorical trope for denoting the formally challenging, vernacular, morally ambiguous work to which the cinema of the subversively rebranded nouvelle avant-garde should aspire. This work of film critics (some of whom, including Alexandre Astruc were themselves contributors to occupation journals including Confluences and Fontaine) surfaces in both my second and third chapters, revealing how this discourse on American literature can be productively interwoven into the postwar films of Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean Renoir, as well as the first films of the Nouvelle Vague, including La Pointe Courte and À Bout de Souffle.

This dissertation approaches modernism not as a stable truth but rather as a shifting signifier, constantly under revision. Such an approach is not only in line with scholars working within the so-called New Modernist Studies to pluralize older, hierarchical models of modernism, but a very reflection of the transnationalism and transhistoricity of the specific discourse under investigation in this work. While this dissertation approaches American literary modernism as diverse and somewhat

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12 A February 2015 conference at Yale University convened by Dudley Andrew, for example, titled “The Bazin Era: French Postwar Journals and the Politics of Popular Culture” endeavored to illuminate the discursive landscape of post-WWII publications, particularly as they reveal interconnections between film criticism and other intellectual discourses of the postwar era, including feminism, jazz, the avant-garde, and American fiction.

irreducible enterprise,\textsuperscript{14} we can nevertheless assign it somewhat unified attributes by focusing on how it is refracted through the work of its French and Algerian interpreters. In French and Algerian eyes, American modernism is broadly interpreted through two categories:\textsuperscript{15}

1) Formal, aesthetic, and stylistic innovations: narratively disjunctive and discontinuous, temporally experimental, and often multi-perspectival, reflecting a fragmented postwar subjectivity. Pushes against the limits of language, and incorporates vernacular style, slang, music, and narrative strategies drawn from the cinema (montage).

2) Social insight and commentary: a reflection of a grittier way of life, a window into poverty and class struggles, as well as the gothic, violent, and socially complex world of the American South. Demonstrates American regionalism and multiculturalism. An engine for social critique, and a vehicle for exploring injustice, particularly the exploitation of the working class and anti-black racism. Exposes the unfairness of the American criminal justice system.

The American modernist works discussed in this dissertation are, on the whole, produced after World War I. Such a starting point is not an assertion that this is when American literary modernism begins, but rather is a reflection of the transnational interest

\textsuperscript{14} Indeed, as Linda Wagner-Martin has succinctly written, “American modernism could seldom be divided by genre, however: modernist writers wrote what they chose.” \textit{The Routledge Introduction to American Modernism} (2006), 3.

\textsuperscript{15} These categories, of course, are imperfect; other aspects of American modernism, including its moral ambiguity as well as violent, action-driven plots are related to these two categories, but don’t exactly fit within them.
in American literature that I am tracing; as I show, writers and editors sought to understand France’s experience of World War II through the lens of American literature produced in the wake of World War I. On the other hand, this dissertation is open in its consideration of works published after conventional modernist endpoints.\^{16} For example, although *Cast the First Stone* was published in 1952, this dissertation treats the prison narrative of Chester Himes, an author popularized through his work for the Gallimard imprint *Série Noire*, as an extension of the historical and discursive trajectory of French and Algerian engagement of American modernist literature.\^{17}

To reveal the long afterlife of American literary modernism in France and Algeria, this project engages with a diverse range of media, including not only traditional textual materials such as fiction and philosophical writings, but also cinema and print culture, as integral sites for examining the discursive engagement of American modernism after the onset of the second World War. As I argue, the war did not spell the end of American modernism in France; in fact, it became more multimedial and viral than ever before, particularly as it was disseminated by means of a rapidly evolving media landscape, the increased portability of image and text, as well as advances in transatlantic travel. Accordingly, this dissertation undertakes a blend of aesthetic and historical analysis that is necessary for the diverse nature of objects under investigation.

Because of the transnational, transhistorical, and multimedial nature of this work,

\^{16} Consider, for example, *Modernism: Keywords* (2014) in which the “long” modernist period is defined as ending in 1950. See also *Modernism: an anthology of sources and documents*; the latest sources in this anthology were written in 1940.

\^{17} In addition, Himes reportedly struggled for years to get the book published, making the publication date a particularly unreliable index for the era of the literary work.
extensive historical research proved necessary; some of the discourses detailed in this dissertation have elusive or non-existent histories. I relied on extensive historical research uncovered in online databases and archives, including the University of Virginia Special Collections Library, Emory University’s Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Musée de l’imprimerie de Lyon. In addition, I conducted two interviews with Agnès Varda in her home and editing room on Rue Daguerre in Paris.

In Chapter 1, I trace the interest of French intellectuals in American modernism through two resistance journals -- *Fontaine* and *l’Arbalète* -- which circulated the work of American modernist authors in spite of the Nazi occupation, which both effectively banned American literature, while making it even more desirable to young intellectuals who sympathized with the resistance. I highlight the work of cultural *passeurs* -- including Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, Jean Wahl, and Marcel Duhamel, as well as the institutions -- including the École Libre des Hautes Études and Pontigny-en-Amérique -- which supported them. These publications offer fascinating temporal implications of the Nazi ban on American literature, which had the paradoxical effect of both decelerating and accelerating French-language interest in American modernist texts. This chapter builds upon the important work of scholars such as George Bornstein, Robert Scholes, and Ann Ardis, who have explored little magazines as crucial sites for the transnational circulation of modernism, demonstrating how a rapidly developing print-media ecology contributed to modernism’s rise.

In Chapter 2, I examine how two films, *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse*, participated in French discourses on the American South – particularly the
region’s social problems. In addition to historical context and formal analysis, I examine these films’ critical reception both in the United States and France. After the onset of the Second World War, French intellectual discourse surrounding American anti-black racism, particularly within the U.S. South, intensified. At the time of these films’ productions, French critics had a keen sense of the contribution of their perspectives on American racism and exploitation of workers and farmers, a perspective which they perceived American writers and filmmakers could not voice themselves due to political repression. Like Chapter 2, this chapter draws on insights from periodical studies to examine the discourse that emerges surrounding these two films, which attempted to bring the postwar French literary and philosophical discourse to the big screen.

Continuing in the vein of the previous chapter, Chapter 3 considers how American modernist writers furnished a poetic strategy and functioned as a rhetorical trope on the pages of film periodicals in the period leading up to the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague. Drawing on these publications, I argue that Faulkner was at the heart of postwar French cinephilia, offering a model for the sort of literature that the cinema could potentially embody. After illuminating the centrality of Faulkner to postwar French film discourse, I then examine how Agnès Varda’s first film La Pointe Courte (1954) engaged the narrative poetics of Faulkner’s The Wild Palms (1939). I contend that La Pointe Courte was the first film of the Nouvelle Vague to successfully translate the discontinuous, multi-perspectival modernism of William Faulkner for the big screen. I then discuss how Godard has consistently cited Faulkner throughout his six decades of filmmaking and criticism. By revealing and recuperating the marginalized history of Varda’s Faulknerian adaptation, I aim to revise how we understand the film movement’s
origins, which, as Geneviève Sellier has argued, has all too often been told from the perspective of the masculine singular.

In Chapter 4, I explore how *Rome Rather than You* (2006), the first feature-length film by the Algerian filmmaker Tariq Teguia, voices a range of competing perspectives on life beyond Algerian borders through a handful of cultural and literary allusions to a range of European and American authors and cultural figures, including Chester Himes, D.H. Lawrence, Eldridge Cleaver, and Franz Kafka. While scholars have broadly interpreted these allusions as contributing to the film’s thematic investigation of mobility, I explore how the film invokes Chester Himes, Eldridge Cleaver, and Archie Shepp in a mode of indirect social critique. Each of these figures were at one point in their career expatriates who mobilized their voices to shed light on anti-black racism in the United States and the injustices of its prison system. While the film acknowledges the hardships of daily life in Algeria, by invoking a matrix of African-American expression that has condemned systemic injustice in the United States, the film creates a dialectical opposition between the allure of emigration and the naïveté inherent to the idealization of life in the so-called developed world.

Thus, the chapters in this dissertation move chronologically through radical shifts, taking us through a full circle of how American literary modernism has been deployed and repurposed in France and Algeria – first, as a signifier of freedom, later, as a marker of innovation, and lastly, as proof of its American injustice as exemplified by the inhumanity of the carceral system. While the contemporary engagement with American literary modernism signals the enduring relevance of works by authors who have illuminated the dark side of American modernity, this engagement should not be
mistaken as admiration for the United States itself.
CHAPTER 1

FONTAINE AND L’ARBALÈTE:

AMERICAN LITERARY MODERNISM

IN THE MAGAZINES DURING THE DARK YEARS

It meant so many things, America! To begin with, everything inaccessible…

-Simone de Beauvoir\textsuperscript{18}

The Occupation exploded the prewar geography of French literary life. Paris, hitherto the sun of the French intellectual solar system, was now full of Germans. Writers and intellectuals were scattered in all directions. Dispersal is one of the keynotes of this period.

-Robert O. Paxton\textsuperscript{19}

In this chapter, I reveal how two clandestine journals, the Algiers-based \textit{Fontaine}\textsuperscript{20} and the Lyon-based \textit{L’Arbalète},\textsuperscript{21} circulated American modernist literature to French-speaking readers in France and Algeria under Nazi occupation. Both \textit{Fontaine} and \textit{L’Arbalète} each published special issues on American literature during les années noires of the occupation and Vichy collaboration that functioned as vital engines for

\textsuperscript{18} Force of Circumstance 17.

\textsuperscript{19} Collaboration and Resistance 15.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Fontaine}, which was originally titled \textit{Mithra}, was founded by Charles Autrand, and rebranded as \textit{Fontaine} by Max-Pol Fouchet in 1939. The journal was published monthly in Algiers beginning in 1941. Fouchet relocated to Paris in 1944, where the journal was published until 1947.

\textsuperscript{21} Founded by Marc Barbezat, \textit{L’Arbalète} published 13 issues between May 1940 up to Summer 1948. The American issue was the ninth issue of the journal.
facilitating discourse on American modernist literature at a time when it was prohibited. These special issues faced exceptional challenges on the path to production, and were edited, published and disseminated at great personal risk. As Marc Barbezat, editor of *L’Arbalète*, recalled in an interview: “Vous savez, quand on vit la guerre, on ne se rend pas compte de ce qu’on fait. C’est après qu’on réalise qu’il y avait une certaine audace à cela.”

Despite the monumental and risky labor of gathering and translating texts into French, paper shortages, and a publication process that stretched across sometimes three continents, these *samizdat* journals succeeded in bringing American literature before French-language readers at a precarious and pivotal moment, as France’s cultural identity was on the brink of redefinition. In turn, these publications would come to have a profound – if largely unrecognized – impact on the course of American literary history as well as the future of French-language literature, cinema and criticism.

While available throughout the French-speaking world prior to the onset of World War II, American literature – particularly modernist works written after World War I – assumed an even greater significance in 1941. That year, the United States entered World War II, and the “Liste Otto” (a long list of banned books, named for Otto Abetz, Hitler’s ambassador to Vichy France) was expanded to include American literature. In addition, Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company bookstore and lending library, which had been a reliable pipeline for the latest in American literature since it opened in 1919, was forced to close its doors. Although Beach was able to hide the contents of her bookstore in a vacant apartment above

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22 “You know, when you live the war, you don’t realize what you’re doing. Its after that we realized that there was a certain audacity to it.” (“Le numéro américain de *L’Arbalète*: entretien avec Marc Barbezat,” 88)
the bookstore before Nazi officers came to confiscate her stock, she was sent to the Vittel internment camp for six months.\footnote{The Letters of Sylvia Beach, XXIII.} Beach, a Baltimore native, would later recall in her memoirs, “When the United States came into the war, my nationality, added to my Jewish affiliations, finished Shakespeare and Company in Nazi eyes.”\footnote{Shakespeare & Company, 215.} Although Beach returned to Paris after being interned at Vittel, she would never reopen her store.

While Vichy bans made American literature harder to obtain, the ban also had the unintended effect of boosting its cult value, intertwining the circulation and reading of works by American writers with the causes of freedom and the resistance. Jean-Paul Sartre would describe in the Atlantic Monthly how a black market for American modernist literature emerged on Saint-Germain-des-Prés during the occupation. “The headquarters was the Café de Flore, where poor students resold at a profit books which they found in the bookstalls along the Seine,” recalled Sartre in 1946. “The reading of novels by Faulkner and Hemingway became for some a symbol of resistance.”\footnote{“American Novelists in French Eyes”} Three years earlier, the intellectual connection between the resistance and American literature had been tested out the pages of the special American issue of the Algiers-based Fontaine, where writers living in exile, like Jean Wahl, Denis de Rougemont, and André Gide, as well as Franco-American writer Julien Green, wrote prefaces to the issue, which included texts by American authors including William Faulkner, Ernest
Hemingway, Hart Crane, and Langston Hughes.

Despite severe constraints, the American issues of Fontaine and Arbalète made history by publishing the first French-language translations of a number of American writers’ work. In L’Arbalète, for instance, we encounter the first French translations of the work of Zora Neale Hurston and James Agee, as well as the first translations by Marcel Duhamel of texts that would become the first works in his celebrated Série Noire, a prolific and influential Gallimard imprint of hard-boiled American or American-inspired crime novels. Other more established modernist writers whose work had already been translated into French, including Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, and William Faulkner, would in some instances debut material on the pages of these resistance magazines – publications that would in some cases predate the English-language publication of the same work by years and, in the case of Stein’s “American language and literature” essay, decades. Indeed, some material appears not to have been published in English at all. To take an example almost at random, in Fontaine’s publication of T.S. Eliot’s “Music and Poetry” lecture, Eliot added two paragraphs at the start of the essay, situating the lecture’s poetic criticism in a time of war; to this date, these paragraphs do not appear to have been translated into English. Thus, Fontaine and L’Arbalète are exceptionally rich and largely unmined resources for scholars of modernism, particularly those wishing to understand American modernist authors’ investments in World War II and France’s intellectual resistance.  

26 Indeed, Edward Burns has cited Stein’s inclusion in Fontaine and L’Arbalète as evidence against claims that she was a collaborator. See “Gertrude Stein: A complex itinerary, 1940–1944,” Jacket2, https://jacket2.org/article/gertrude-stein-complex-itinerary-1940%E2%80%931944
Over the past ten years, scholars have produced groundbreaking work that charts the terrain of literary magazines clandestinely published during the occupation, assessing the role played by French writers, editors and printers in the resistance, as collaborators, or somewhere on the spectrum in between. The rise of scholarly interest in occupation-era magazines among French cultural historians has paralleled an explosion of interest in periodical studies by scholars of modernism, who have similarly examined how a rapidly evolving print media ecology shaped the development of modernist discourse, both in the United States and abroad. Although modernist scholars have undertaken studies of transatlantic print culture, these studies have overwhelmingly focused on English-language, and primarily Anglo-American, exchange. The history of these immensely influential transnational periodicals produced during the occupation remains largely unknown within modernist studies.

The wartime dispersal of intellectuals and artists made underground magazines a

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27 Recent scholarly volumes on the subject include the two-volume Panorama des revues littéraires sous l'occupation published by Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine (IMEC), the 2009 New York Public Library exhibit, “Between Collaboration and Resistance: French Literary Life during the Occupation” with an accompanying illustrated volume by Oliver Corpet, Claire Paulhan, and Robert O. Paxton; and the 2014 English translation of Gisèle Sapiro’s La Guerre des écrivains (1999), French Writers’ War, 1940-1953.

pivotal vehicle for bringing people from far-flung locales into a community on the page. As such, these magazines offer an example of transnational modernist connectivity that exceeds the usual paradigm of face-to-face collaboration, as exemplified by the frequent mythologization of salons and spatially-bounded expatriate enclaves. That a spatially bounded social scene is integral to artistic and literary poesis is an assumption that undergirds some of our most basic ideas about cultural production. Both in scholarly and popular discourse, literary movements and genres are so frequently presented as inextricable from the geographically rooted communities which produced them. From the Bloomsbury Group, to the Harlem Renaissance to the Black Mountain School of Poets, abundant and well-known examples testify to our habitual and often unquestioning conflation of social scene, geographic space, literary movement, and even genre. By contrast, these magazines demonstrate how transnational modernist communities extended to the page, proliferated, translated and conveyed by means of a resolutely portable and reproducible print landscape.

29 Among the most well-known and beloved examples of this phenomenon are the generation of American writers who came to be known as the Lost Generation, a term first used by Gertrude Stein and made famous as an epigraph to Ernest Hemingway’s The Sun Also Rises. The term, which Stein first used to describe the generation of men returning home from World War I, came to be associated with a coterie of American expatriate writers living on Paris’ Left Bank during the jazz age of the 1920s and 30s. Their names – Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, among others – have in turn become synonymous with American literary modernism, a fact that literary scholars such as Marc Dolan and Michael Soto have lamented. “Theorists of American modernism routinely take for granted this ubiquitous and powerful discursive object, often at the expense of those authors who lie outside the Lost Generation rubric,” wrote Michael Soto (19). Indeed, the “discursive object” of Americans in Paris has framed our understanding of American modernism, the structure of its transatlanticism, as well as our expectations of what a modernist community looks like.
Background: American Literature in France, 1850-1940

France’s wartime interest in American literature was not without historic precedent. In the mid-19th century, Harriet Beecher Stowe’s antislavery novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* swept French readers away. The novel was a resounding success in France; the *New York Post* reported that by early January 1853, at least fourteen new translations had been printed in France and “three melodramas, two vaudevilles, and one opera” had been prepared for French audiences. French readers had devoured Stowe’s depiction of slavery’s impact on black and white families. By the end of the first World War, French readers had been exposed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain, and Edgar Allen Poe, whose work legendarily served as inspiration for Baudelaire, who in turn translated and wrote critical essays about the American poet. After the first World War, Jack London emerged as a major writer in France; twenty of his books were translated into French between 1918 and 1929. In 1930, Sinclair Lewis’ *Babbitt* made a splash in the Hexagon, selling 80,000 copies in a few months. French readers also knew of Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos

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30 The book appeared after 1848’s failed democratic revolutions, offering “European readers a strangely familiar drama between the forces of freedom and subjugation, between good and evil, and a narrative far more entertaining – and exotic – than a political text like the recent *Communist Manifesto* (1848). After touring Europe, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in a preface to the Illustrated French edition of the book: “The author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is deeply touched by the outpouring of enthusiasm with which the beautiful country of France is responding to the cry for brotherhood and freedom from the American slave. It is to France’s credit that she has abolished slavery throughout her colonies; it is her glory that not a single drop of the slaves blood stains her coat of honour.” See Stowe, 587.

31 See Culler, “Baudelaire and Poe.”
An audience for American modernist literature in the French-speaking world would become even more established through the translations of Maurice-Edgar Coindreau. After first encountering American writers – including John Dos Passos – in Spain while preparing for his Spanish agrégation, Coindreau accepted a post as a professor of French at Princeton in 1923. The French-born Coindreau, who continued to spent almost every summer in Paris was on “très bons termes” with Nouvelle Revue Française (NRF) director Jean Paulhan, who would publish translations and articles on American literature whenever Coindreau provided them. Coindreau also developed close ties with NRF’s publisher, Gallimard, where he published his first translation, Manhattan Transfer by Dos Passos, in 1928. Coindreau’s translations would figure prominently in the Gallimard series Du monde entier, which sought to publish new translations of the best “romans étrangers” prefaced with essays written by established French authors, or in some cases, written by the translator himself. Intellectuals on the French left eagerly read Coindreau’s translations, and he became known as a tastemaker in American literature in France and beyond. In turn, the opinion of French intellectuals sent

32 See Transatlantic Migration, 15-18.

33 The exceptions came during the war, when Coindreau was unable to leave America. See Coindreau, Maurice Edgar. The time of William Faulkner: a French view of modern American fiction, essays. University of South Carolina Press, 1971, ix.

34 Casanova uses the idea of consecration to discuss the process whereby “sanctioning authorities of world literary space” assign value to writers, thereby securing their fame and the prestige of their literature. Casanova uses Faulkner as a central case study of this process, citing Coindreau as an example of how the fame of Faulkner had the effect of reverse consecration, the process whereby “once a writer has been canonized and his
ripples back to the United States, inflecting the reception of American writers within their own country.

Coindreau’s best-known translations were those of Faulkner, an author whose work he encountered “par pur hazard”: one of his students at Princeton had lent Coindreau his copies of *Sartoris*, *The Sound and the Fury*, and *As I Lay Dying*. In 1931, Coindreau published his first article on Faulkner, a favorable survey of all the novels Faulkner had published up to that point. At the time, “peu de gens avaient entendu prononcer son nom,” Coindreau later recalled. At Coindreau’s suggestion, the *NRF* published a translation of Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* in 1933—the first of the Southern author’s novels to be translated into French. The translation was accompanied by a preface by Andre Malraux, providing another major boost to the author’s reputation. In 1936, Sartre published his first article in the *NRF*: an article on William Faulkner’s *Sartoris*. As Sartre’s reputation grew, he would continue to write about Faulkner, both in occasional essays and in some of his longer philosophical works, including *Being and Nothingness*.

 works have become classics, the process is reversed, and it is then the writer who consecrates the translator” (301).


36 “[F]ew people had heard his name pronounced.” Ibid., 10.

37 In his preface, Malraux would refer to Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* as a “novel with a detective-story atmosphere but without detectives,” For more on the translation of *Sanctuary* into French, see *A new history of French literature*, 908-913.

38 In *Being and Nothingness*, for example, Sartre praises Faulkner’s depiction of Joe Christmas in *Light in August* as the ultimate depiction of “the power of the victim’s look at his torturers.” See (*Being and Nothingness*), 526.
As France was on the brink of entering World War II, the French appetite for American literature continued to grow, especially for violent, hardboiled fiction. Sabine Berritz’s 1936 translation of James M. Cain’s violent, morally ambiguous *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934), would prove to be particularly fruitful source for European writers and filmmakers; the novel would receive its first French cinematic adaptation in 1939.39 As Alice Kaplan argues, *The Postman Always Rings Twice* would go onto inspire Albert Camus as he wrote *L’Étranger*, helping Camus crack into a flat first-person narrative style that he would draw on for his own novel; indeed, as Kaplan suggests, *L’Étranger*’s murder of a nameless Arab may have even been inspired by *The Postman Always Rings Twice*’s murder of a nameless Greek.40

Although works by African-American writers had been known in France prior to World War II – Michel Fabre’s *French Critical Reception of African-American Literature* catalogs 243 mentions of African-American literature by French critics prior to the onset of the war – the publication of these works was limited, “dependent upon a handful of deeply-concerned enthusiasts” who included Frank L. Schoell, René Maran, Georges-Albert Astre and Paulette Nardal.41 Nevertheless, as France was on the brink of war, all that was about to change. Although the work of Richard Wright had scarcely

39 The novel would go onto inspire other cinematic adaptations, including *Ossessione*, which Luchino Visconti reportedly made after Jean Renoir gave him a copy of the French translation of Cain’s novel.

40 Alice Kaplan makes this argument in her forthcoming book *Looking for “The Stranger”: Albert Camus and the Life of a Literary Classic* (2016), which shows how Camus readership of Cain’s novel a decisive turning point in the composition of his seminal work, *L’Étranger*.

41 *French Critical Reception of African-American Literature*, xi.
been translated into French,\textsuperscript{42} Simone de Beauvoir recalled that it was already available in English at Sylvia Beach’s Shakespeare and Company as early as 1940. It was then that, at the suggestion of Sylvia Beach, Beauvoir first encountered Wright’s \textit{Native Son}, which had just been published in the United States. In an interview with Michel Fabre, Beauvoir recalled: “Sylvia Beach had told me: “you like violent books. Well, here is a violent one, it will hit you hard.” And I said: ‘Yes, I’ll read it.’” I read it and I was very, very much impressed.\textsuperscript{44} Indeed, as France was about to enter \textit{Les Années Noires} of the Nazi occupation, the dark violence of American literature – from Wright’s Bigger Thomas to Faulkner’s Temple Drake – seemed to fit the times. As Sartre would write after the war, “All around us clouds were gathering. There was war in Spain; the concentration camps were multiplying in Germany, in Austria, in Czechoslovakia. War was menacing everywhere. Nevertheless analysis – analysis à la Proust, à la James – remained our only literary method, our favorite procedure. But could it take into account the brutal death of a Jew in Auschwitz, the bombardment of Madrid by the planes of Franco?”\textsuperscript{45,46}

\textsuperscript{42} Michel Fabre’s \textit{French Critical Reception of African-American Literature} shows that “Big Boy Leaves Home” had appeared in French translation in 1938 in the journal \textit{Littérature internationale} (66).

\textsuperscript{43} Fabre, “Impressions of Richard Wright: An Interview with Simone de Beauvoir,” 3.

\textsuperscript{44} Wright’s work and friendship would have a significant impact on Beauvoir, who would cite the Mississippi-born author in \textit{The Second Sex} as well as \textit{America Day by Day}, which was dedicated to Wright and his wife Ellen, who would go on to be his literary agent.

\textsuperscript{45} Sartre, “American Novelists in French Eyes.”

\textsuperscript{46} Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, in 1939, the Henry Church-edited review of \textit{Mesures} also put forth an issue entirely focused on North American literature, prefaced by Jean Paulhan and including texts by 24 writers, including Washington Irving,
Jean Wahl and Fontaine

The rise of in American literary modernism in France and Algeria is owed in large part to the significant number of French intellectuals who took refuge in the United States after the onset of the Second World War. French exiles and refugees living in the United States played a central role in gathering American literary texts, both arranging for works to be translated and translating works themselves. Perhaps no single person embodied the significance of political refugees in the transnational promotion of American literature as the French scholar and poet Jean Wahl. Like Coindreau, Wahl was a notable passeur between American and French intellectual cultures before the war. Wahl’s first book, a study that introduced the French to the American pragmatist philosophies of Josiah Royce and William James, appeared in 1922. Wahl was also an early influential interpreter of Bergson, Hegel, Kierkegaard and Heidegger, credited with helping to bring their philosophical works to French audiences. His interpretations of these philosophers would famously inspire Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jean Hyppolite, Gilles Deleuze, and Emmanuel Levinas.47

Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Vachel Lindsay, Hart Crane, John Peale Bishop, Langston Hughes, Archibald MacLeish, John Dos Passos, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. See Claire Paulhan, “Henry Church and Mesures” in Artists, Intellectuals, and World War II: The Pontigny Encounters at Mount Holyoke, 89-100.

47 Wahl’s landmark study of Bergson, Philosophes pluralistes d’Angleterre et d’Amérique (1920) influenced Deleuze greatly, and, along with Kojève, Wahl’s Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel (1929) played a critical role in the French interpretation of Hegel, helping to introduce the French to Hegel’s then-unknown early theological works as well as the Phenomenology of Spirit. See Kierkegaard and Existentialism, 236; Kremer-Marietti, Angèle. “Jean Wahl the
In December 1940, Wahl was barred from his teaching post at the Sorbonne, where he had held a chair in philosophy since 1936, on account of Vichy anti-Jewish legislation. After being forced out of the Sorbonne, he continued to hold his seminar on Martin Heidegger at the Hôtel des Beaux-Arts, but on July 1941, he was arrested by the Gestapo, thrown in a secret cell, and then sent to the Prison de La Santé, where he was interrogated under torture, and not allowed a pencil – a punishment that would prove particularly difficult for Wahl to endure.\textsuperscript{48} After 36 days in prison, Wahl was transferred to a concentration camp in Drancy, where he found a way to keep up his professorial habitus in the concentration camp. As a nearly 12-page profile on Wahl in the May 12, 1945 \textit{New Yorker} reported, “Wahl’s freedom in Drancy consisted of talking with his fellow-prisoners, giving a lecture on Bergson that was attended by three hundred men, and writing poetry” (35). Wahl narrowly made it out of Drancy alive; after an outbreak of cholera in the camp, he had help from a sympathetic doctor, who respected Wahl’s scholarly vocation and had heard from a head nurse that Wahl had an appointment to teach at a University in the United States. After leaving the camp, Wahl was smuggled into the unoccupied zone in the back of a butcher’s van.

Before he was arrested by the Gestapo, Wahl had sought help from the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars,\textsuperscript{49} writing on February 4, 

\textsuperscript{48} Jean Wahl et Gabriel Marcel, 90; Weil and Bespaloff, \textit{War and the Iliad}, xvii. 

\textsuperscript{49} The Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars was a division of the then-Carnegie and Rockefeller-funded Institution of International Education, which helped to find institutional homes for a number of refugee scholars who had been persecuted by the Nazis, including Marin Buber and Paul Tillich.
1941, “You will appreciate, Monsieur, the feeling of gratitude with which I would resume contact, thanks to America, thanks to you (should my plan be achieved) with students, with teaching.” While records from the Emergency Committee held in the New York Public Library suggest that Wahl did not receive a grant from their organization, Wahl had been invited to join the recently established École Libre des Hautes Études, a Rockefeller-funded offshoot of the New School that provided an institutional home for French professors living in exile. With this invitation, Wahl was one of the last Europeans to obtain a visa for the United States. Wahl would also find work in the philosophy department at Mount Holyoke, where an article in the student newspaper recounted Wahl’s ordeal to its readers with the powerful headline, “Packaged as Meat, Frenchman Jean Wahl Flees Nazi Captors in Dramatic Escape.”

![Figure 1.1: Jean Wahl in the Mount Holyoke News, September 26, 1942](image)

50 *Collaboration and Resistance*, 323.
“The release of a French philosophy professor from a concentration camp, and his desperate escape over the frontier into unoccupied France disguised as a package of meat sounds like first-rate source material for a play or a novel,” read the article. “But this is only part of the dramatic story of Jean Wahl (pronounced Vahl), erudite professor formerly at the Sorbonne, now teaching in our philosophy department. Although quiet and unassuming, M. Wahl is already known on campus as the small dark man with the French accent. He arrived here from Europe on July 29, exactly one year after the day that he was arrested by the Gestapo in Paris.”

Despite struggling with the language, the pain of exile, and the trauma of his experience, Wahl wasted little time in getting to work in the United States. At Mount Holyoke, Wahl helped to organize the Éntretiens de Pontigny, an American version of the ten-day symposium held annually in Pontigny, France. The symposium ran for the duration of Wahl’s three years at Mount Holyoke College, gathering exiled French intellectuals and artists alongside their American colleagues. In its short tenure of three years, it served as a crucial site of Franco-American humanistic exchange, facilitating a number of important encounters, including Wallace Stevens’s first meeting with Marianne Moore. Both poets were listed as consultants in Poetry magazine’s advertisement of the symposium. Topics discussed at the symposium included:

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51 Even before its temporary migration to the United States, the Décades de Pontigny provided an example of Franco-American cross-pollination, as it was modeled after the American Chautauqua. See Benfey 3.

52 For further discussion of the implications of this meeting, see Schulze 157.

53 In a letter dated August 27, 1943 to Hildegarde Watson (wife of The Dial magazine cofounder James Sibley Watson, Jr.), the poet Marianne Moore wrote of the impression Wahl made at the Decades: “Jean Wahl…is an elfin and most touching exile, escaped
"Literature and the Idea of Crisis," "Problems of American music," "Liberty and Authority," "The Responsibility of Literature in the World Crisis," and "The Place of the Spiritual in a World of Property." Indeed, as Christopher Benfey has noted, the dominant concern at the Pontigny sessions was “the proper relation of creativity and political crisis.”

The summer after the first Pontigny-en-Amérique, the Algiers-based Fontaine published a special issue dedicated to “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis,” which Wahl was from prison; and just now at Holyoke...Nothing more unintrusive, yet tense and industrious could be imagined than this brave young man…” (Selected Letters 434)

54 Benfey 11.
instrumental in bringing about. The Algiers-based *Fontaine* had been edited by Max-Pol Fouchet, Albert Camus’ classmate at the Lycée d’Alger and a student of French philosopher Jean Grenier, since April 1939. Fouchet’s outspoken editorials defending the cause of freedom had drawn the attention of Vichy authorities, who threatened Fouchet with internment in a Vichy concentration camp.\(^55\) Owing to its geographic location, *Fontaine* had played an important role during the occupation in providing a venue for writers in exile to publish their work; as Gisele Sapiro wrote, “*Fontaine* became one of the pivotal sites of the symbolic reunification of the fragmented literary field.”\(^56\)

Territories in the free zone – including the South of France and Algeria – emerged as central sites for intellectual production.\(^57\)

The American edition of the journal didn’t appear until June-July 1943. While by November 1942, Algiers was more or less liberated, work had nonetheless begun on the issue in the uncertain summer of 1942, when the fate of North Africa was still hanging in the balance. As Fouchet wrote in his introduction to the special issue, “No one at the time knew that America and England, united in a joint effort, would succeed, an astonishing operation by which history will continue to be dazzled, the crossing and landing on the shores of North Africa….”\(^58\)

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\(^55\) Bokanowsky 125.

\(^56\) *The French Writers’ War*, 330.

\(^57\) At various points during the Occupation, Andre Gide, Jacques and Anne Heurgon, Jean Amrouche, Phillipe Soupault, Antoine de Saint-Exupery, Bernard Lecache, Jacques Lassaigne, Armand Guilbert, Luie Faure, and Robert Aron all took up residence in Algeria. See *Collaboration and Resistance*, 288.

\(^58\) Qtd. in Corpet and Paulhan 335.
Wahl did the lion’s share of work in assembling *Fontaine’s* American issue, which, according to Benfey, he had initiated before he arrived in the United States.\(^{59}\)

Wahl’s prominent role was acknowledged by Fouchet in his opening *avertissement*:

“C’est à Jean Wahl que l’on doit u’un tel project devînt use réalité….Il a su lui donner form et vie, grouper les écrivains les plus représentatifs et susciter le concours de traducer fervent et scrupulous.”\(^{60}\)

In addition, notices in *Poetry* Magazine suggest that the writers Edouard Roditi (then employed by the Office of War Information) and Frederic Prokosch helped to edit the issue.\(^{61}\)

The list of contributors and translators of “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis” overlapped with attendees of *Pontigny-en-Amérique*, including Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, and Rachel Bespaloff, suggesting that the symposium may have intersected with the issues’s production.

“Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis” included newer American texts, such as excerpts from Henry Miller’s recently published travelogue *The Colossus of Maroussi*, alongside more established high literary modernist voices such as T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Conrad Aiken. The volume’s heavy emphasis on poetry was perhaps a reflection of the personal significance of the literary form to Wahl, who was both a scholar of poetry, as well as a prolific poet in his own right; while interned at Drancy, he penned 100

\(^{59}\) Benfey, 7.

\(^{60}\) “It is to Jean Wahl that credit is due for the fact that this project has become a reality. He managed to endow it with form and life, assembling the most representative writers and mobilizing the collaboration of fervent and scrupulous translators.”

poems. Wahl translated most of the poems included in the issue himself. In addition, the poetic content of the Fontaine special issue reflected the rising tide of the critical mode of the New Criticism in the American academy, a discourse to which some of the issue’s contributors, including Southern Agrarian John Crowe Ransom, helped to contribute. The issue also featured poetry by Robert Frost, Hart Crane, William Carlos Williams, Carl Sandburg, James Agee, Allen Tate, Robinson Jeffers, Marianne Moore, Lola Ridge, Sara Teasdale, Kenneth Patchen, Mark Van Doren, Adelaide Crapsey, Hermann Hagedorn, H. Phelps Putnam, Archibald Macleish, and Louise Bogan. In addition, the issue featured six poems by Langston Hughes – more than any other poet.

In a letter announcing the publication of the special issue in the “News Notes” section of Poetry Magazine, Roditi expressed reservations about the eclecticism of the volume and the homogeneity of Wahl’s translations. Wrote Roditi, “In this broad but erratic selection, it is to be regretted that so little distinction is made between poems written some years ago and those of recent vintage: the foreign reader thus has little opportunity to understand the progression of contemporary American poetry. Besides, too many of the poems are

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62 The New Yorker, 35.

63 The Harlem Renaissance poet had already received a significant amount of attention in French language journals and publications; Michel Fabre’s painstaking French Critical Reception of African-American Literature shows the first mention of Hughes’ work to date to 1928, when Hughes received the critical attention of writers including Eugène Jolas, André Maurois, and Régis Michaud as early as 1928. Hughes’ work had also been eagerly promoted on the pages of La Revue du monde noir by Paulette Nardal. The first book-length study of Hughes’ work in French, René Piquion’s Un Chant Nouveau, was published in Port-au-Prince in 1941. For a more complete record of Langston Hughes’ French reception see Michel Fabre’s The French Critical Reception of African-American Literature: From the Beginnings to 1970: An Annotated Bibliography (1995).
translated in the same style, by Jean Wahl, who thus gives them an appearance of monotony. "64 Despite the issue’s shortcomings, the American issue of Fontaine was a monumental achievement. The issue had faced countless obstacles on its way to publication, including Wahl’s narrow escape from the Holocaust, risky and delayed communication across three continents, securing prefaces from well-known writers, the added task of translation, as well as paper shortages. This issue also deserves the distinction of being one of the first, if not the first French-language collection of American literature explicitly to link the cause of reading of American modernism to France’s intellectual resistance. 65

“Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis” contained ample prefatory material by well-known French writers including André Gide, Denis de Rougemont (who, like Wahl, was living in the United States and working at the École Libre des Hautes Études), and Wahl himself that corroborated the intellectual seriousness of the endeavor, while suggesting connections between American democracy and its literature.

64 “News Notes” 353.

65 As Claire Paulhan has pointed out, the Henry Church-edited special American issue of Mesures had collected the work of American modernist writers in a special issue with a preface by Jean Paulhan. Nevertheless, this issue was published in 1939, and therefore did not make the important link between the resistance and the reading of American literature that I am trying to unpack in this chapter.
In the issue’s opening *avertissement*, Fouchet contended that the American literary tradition offered much to French readers who too readily reduced America to “la terre de [John] Ford et de Hollywood,” linking the imperative of reading of American literature to France’s quest for freedom and need to heal itself. Fouchet argued America’s democratic spirit and liberated way of life advanced its literature, proving “l’excellence du climat démocratique pour la vie de l’esprit et, par comparaison avec les pays totalitaires dont l’intellectualité se trouvait contrainte à l’exil ou à la servitude, que seuls les régimes de liberté permettent de s’épanouir et de foisonner aux facultés créatrices de l’homme.”

Another introductory essay by Gide, who had recently arrived in Algiers after the liberation of Tunis, suggested that American literature would please venturesome

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66 “[T]he excellence of the democratic climate for the life of the spirit and, compared to totalitarian countries where intellectualia was forced into exile or servitude, that only regimes of freedom permit the creative faculties of man to flourish and abound.”

67 Bokanowsky 126.
readers like himself, who preferred to encounter difference, as opposed to just a version of themselves reflected on the page. “Il n’est pas de littérature contemporaine qui requiert plus ma curiosité que celle de la jeune Amerique,” wrote Gide.  

The issue’s literary content began with a translation of an unpublished lecture by T.S. Eliot, whose poems and essays had previously been translated into French in publications including Commerce, Mesures, Les Cahiers du Sud, and Échanges. The lecture, titled “The Music of Poetry,” had been delivered the previous year at the University of Glasgow. In the lecture, Eliot makes the claim the poetry has to be rooted in the common language of the time, and that poetry “must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear.” For publication in Fontaine, it appears that Eliot added two introductory paragraphs added to explain why he chose to discuss a purely literary subject at a time of war and great cultural uncertainty. This text was followed by an excerpt of the second chapter of Ernest Hemingway’s For Whom the Bell Tolls. In addition, the issue featured texts that portrayed immigrant life in the United States. William Saroyan's short story “The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse,” for example, centers around a young Armenian-American boy named Aram Garoghlanian, whose capricious cousin Mourad steals a beautiful white horse from an Assyrian neighbor. In this simple, parable-like account of young boys learning a lesson about theft, the reader is brought into the landscape of the country roads and vineyards of the

68 “There isn’t a contemporary literature that demands my curiosity more than that of young America.”

69 Écrivains 214.

San Joaquin Valley and the poor Near Eastern immigrant families who live there. The issue also contained the short story “The Murder” by John Steinbeck. As in “The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse,” “The Murder” chronicles the lives of immigrants living in California through the perspective of Jim Moore, a native of the central Californian valley of Cañon del Castillo who marries Jelka Šepić, a beautiful daughter of Yugoslav immigrants. At an emotional and cultural distance from his quiet, serious wife (“she spoke the language of his race out of a mind that was foreign to his race”), Jim seeks the comforts of “the noisy girls of the Three Star.” Yet after returning home unexpectedly early one evening, he discovers that the philandering has been mutual; Jelka is in bed with her cousin. The story takes yet another gothic turn when, as the two cousins are lying side-by-side in bed, Jim shoots Jelka’s cousin in the head. The death, ironically, brings new emotional intimacy to his relationship with Jelka; the story ends as Jim resolves to build a new house, leaving the past behind. Such stories, which depicted immigrant life in both everyday and grotesque detail, revealed the American West to be a frontier of multiculturalism.

In addition to Eliot’s unpublished lecture, Fontaine published a number of texts that hadn’t yet appeared before English-language readers, including Coindreau’s translation of Faulkner’s noteworthy short story, *Afternoon of a Cow*, which he had written under the name Ernest V. Trueblood, a *nom de plume* that served a poetic

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71 Steinbeck had been one of the most popular American writers in Europe during World War II, largely on account of *The Moon is Down*, a novel depicting a small town that suddenly becomes subject to occupation by a foreign army, had been clandestinely circulated among readers sympathetic to the resistance and appeared in two French language translations beginning in 1943. The 1943 translation of *The Moon is Down* was published by the Lausanne-based house Éditions Jean Marguerat, followed by a new translation by the resistance publishing house Éditions de Minuit which appeared a year later (Coers 105-112).
function within the story, furthering its humorous experiment with perspective which allows Faulkner himself to become a character within the narrative; the narrator claims to “have been writing Mr. Faulkner’s novels and short stories for years.” In the story, which wouldn’t be published in English for another four years, Trueblood trails the Southern author as he seeks to bring animals to safety as a fire rages on his property. The shift in perspective allows for Faulkner to make fun of himself; Trueblood refers to Faulkner as “a man of what might be called almost violently sedentary habit by nature” with a “natural lethargic humor,” who drinks “with that static violence which was his familiar character…” The absurd humor of this story reaches its apex as Faulkner, along with one of his cows, falls into a ditch.

Despite Roditi’s reservations about the volume that he himself helped to edit, he praised the special issue for the incredible feat of its publication. Wrote Roditi, “Considering how rapidly the issue was translated and edited, and the difficulties and delays of censored wartime correspondence, Fontaine however deserves warm congratulations for having achieved something almost impossible, even if imperfectly and sketchily. It is to be hoped that this will be but an auspicious beginning in revived Franco-American literary relations.” As with the other important works published in France during the Occupation, the reprinting of Fontaine’s American issue after the liberation in 1945 further affirmed its significance.

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72 The story first appeared in English in the 1947 issue of the New Haven-based journal Furioso.

73 “News Notes” 352.
Figure 1.4: Second edition of Fontaine's “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis,” 1945.

Table of Contents, Fontaine's “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis”

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Figure 1.5: Table of Contents, Fontaine's “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis”
One year after Fontaine published “Écrivains et Poètes des États-Unis” in Algiers, the Lyon-based journal *L’Arbalète*, edited and handprinted by Marc Barbezat, published its own American-centered issue in August of 1944. The pugnaciously titled *L’Arbalète* – meaning “crossbow” in English – ran for 13 issues from 1940 to 1948. Prior to the publication of the American issue, *L’Arbalète* had made a name for itself by publishing the work of Louis Aragon, Antonin Artaud, Albert Camus, Paul Eduard, Jean Genet, Sartre, and others. *L’Arbalète*’s “Numéro américain” featured texts by familiar names like Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner, and others who were barely, if at all, known to French readers, including Zora Neale Hurston, whose name was mistakenly printed as “Norah Zeal Hurston.” The cover of the American issue featured *L’Arbalète*’s usual crossbow logo, although for this issue it was transposed over the spines of American literary works, from novels familiar to French audiences, including *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *Gone With the Wind* (1936) to more recent novels that would have been tantalizingly unfamiliar to French readers in the midst of occupation, including Betty Smith’s *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) and Upton Sinclair’s *Dragon’s Teeth* (1942).

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74 Barbezat was perhaps best known as the editor and discoverer of Jean Genet. Wrote Edmund White, “The powerful Gallimard editor Jean Paulhan (who had published Sartre and Beauvoir) discovered Genet through *L’Arbalète*, as did other people at Gallimard, eventually Genet’s publisher. As Marc Barbezat later wrote, ‘Genet was more than famous. All Paris was fighting over him.’” See Barbezat, “Comment je suis devenu l’éditeur de Jean Genet.”
It seems hard to imagine how Barbezat could not have been inspired by the American issue of *Fontaine*: Wahl was his former professor,\(^{75}\) and before Wahl fled France for the United States, he had taken refuge with Barbezat in Lyon.\(^{76}\) Further, each of *L’Arbalète*’s first six issues,\(^{77}\) published between May 1940 and Autumn of 1942, had contained contributions from Wahl. While there was some continuity between the two special American issues of *Fontaine* and *L’Arbalète* – William Faulkner, William

\(^{75}\) Wahl had been Barbezat’s oral examiner six years earlier (*Panorama des revues littéraires* 56).

\(^{76}\) *Collaboration and Resistance* 323.

\(^{77}\) Numbers three and four were published as a double issue.
Saroyan, Erskine Caldwell, Gertrude Stein and Henry Miller appeared in both – their content contrasted significantly, offering vastly different conceptions of modern American literature. While Fontaine’s special American issue had prominently featured high modernist writers like T.S. Eliot, L’Arbalète by contrast, abandoned poetry to focus exclusively on prose. L’Arbalète’s take on American modernist literature was less academic and more vernacular, collecting a more diverse array of voices within the U.S. socio-political landscape, and tackling American injustice head on. While Fontaine had published formally challenging works like Wallace Stevens’ imaginative and abstract “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” and “The Dry Salvages” from T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets, L’Arbalète’s special issue was filled with slang, blues and jazz. Even the Faulkner selections between the two issues reflected the difference – while Fontaine had included the formally experimental and humorous “Afternoon of a Cow,” L’Arbalète featured “Wash,” a violent and tragic story told from the perspective of a nearly 60-year-old living man on Colonel Sutpen’s plantation, so poor the slaves call him “white trash.” The story opens as Wash’s 15-year-old granddaughter has just given birth to Sutpen’s baby, yet Sutpen appears more interested in the birth of a new horse. ("Well, Milly," Sutpen said, "too bad you're not a mare. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable.") Enraged by Sutpen’s treatment of his granddaughter, Wash ultimately kills Sutpen with a scythe. And while the special issue of Fontaine had featured the lyrical

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78 L’Arbalète’s special issue included “Mona,” an excerpt from Tropic of Cancer. Although Tropic of Cancer had been published by Obelisk Press in France in 1934, it wouldn’t be published in the United States until 1961.

79 This short story was later integrated into part of the seventh chapter of Absalom, Absalom.
Harlem Renaissance poetry of Langston Hughes, *L’Arbalète’s* inclusion of Richard Wright’s “Big Boy Leaves Home” along with a preface by Paul Robeson, brought the violent horrors of American racism front and center.

Like Fouchet’s *Fontaine*, Barbezat gave much of the credit for the issue to the cultural *passeurs* who helped furnish and select the American texts and provide their translations: Sylvia Beach, proprietress of the recently shuttered Shakespeare and Company and Marcel Duhamel, who the following year would establish the Gallimard *Série Noire*, which he would direct until his death in 1977. Barbezat credited Beach with not only furnishing the texts, but also helping to select them.Indeed, the vernacular orientation of *L’Arbalète’s* special issue may reflect Beach’s background as a bookseller, which put her in closer proximity to current trends and the tastes of readers. Further, the violent and dark selections in the *L’Arbalète’s* special issue further confirm Beauvoir’s anecdote about Beach’s promotion of “violent books” that “hit you hard.” Duhamel served as a go-between, trafficking the texts between Beach in addition to his work as a translator; of the issue’s 19 stories, 11 were translated by Duhamel. Prior to the American issue of *L’Arbalète*, Duhamel had worked as mainly an actor in theater and in

80 “Quand j’ai avancé l’idée d’un numéro sur la littérature américaine actuelle, Sylvia Beach s’est tout de suite proposé de me fournir un choix de textes. Le numéro s’est fait en grande partie comme cela, en bavardant avec elle, dans la librairie d’Adrienne Monnier….Sans [Beach], rien n’aurait été possible. C’est grâce à elle que j’ai été l’un des tout premiers à publier en France des auteurs comme Horace Mac Coy [sic] …William Saroyan, Richard Wright.” [“When I proposed the idea of an issue on current American literature, Sylvia Beach right away offered to furnish me with a choice of texts. The issue was produced in large part like that, chatting with her, in Adrienne Monnier’s bookshop….without Beach, nothing would have been possible. It is thanks to her that I was one of the first to publish authors like Horace Mac Coy [sic]….William Saroyan, Richard Wright.”] (Dichy 86)
film (including in Jean Renoir’s *Crime of Monsieur Lange*), and as a translator dubbing American movies for Tobis-Klangfilm.81,82

Compared with Fontaine’s extensive prefatory material, L’Arbalète’s special American issue contained none, striking a decidedly less didactic tone. Instead, the issue’s first essay, Gertrude Stein’s “American Language and Literature,” served as a de facto introduction of sorts; as Barbezat wrote, Stein’s essay “faisait le point sur la nouvelle generation d’écrivains.”83 In the essay, which would not be published in English for another four decades,84 Stein argued for the distinctive qualities of American language and literature. Stein wrote:

“[i]t did not take long for the Americans to know that they did not have the same things to say the same things to feel the same things to know and the same things to live as the English had who had made the language which was all the language the Americans had to tell their story. And what could they do. They had to do

81 *Remapping Habitus in Translation Studies*, 34.

82 As Barbezat told Dichy in an interview: J’ai présenté Marcel Duhamel à Sylvia Beach et il a propose et traduit un certain nombre de textes de la revue – en particulier, évidemment, les romans noirs américains auxquels il a commencé à s’intéresser en faisant ce numero, comme ceux de D.H. Clarke ou Peter Cheney (qu’il avait par erreur, comme la plupart des Français à l’époque, pris pour un américain alors qu’il était Anglais!). Il m’a servi de relais à Paris pour la reunion et la traduction des textes.” [I introduced Marcel Duhamel to Sylvia Beach and he offered and translated a certain number of texts in the issue – in particular, evidently, the American noir novels which he began to take interest in while making this edition, like those of D.H. Clarke or Peter Cheney (whom he had by error, like most French people at the time, taken for an American although he was English!). He served as a relay in Paris for the gathering and translation of texts.” (Dichy 86)

83 “reported the progress of the new generation of writers.” (ibid.)

something because everybody does have to tell all of their story in their own way and from the beginning the Americans knew that they had a story to tell and it had nothing at all to do with the story the English who had made their language had to tell.” (229)

While in a certain regard, Stein’s “American Language and Literature” continued in the vein of the arguments put forth in the prefaces of *Fontaine*, Stein’s essay, by contrast, was informed by her perspective as an American, and written in the uncanny informality of her comma-less voice, a plain, direct style that affirmed the message of her essay. Further, Stein connected shifts in the American literary sensibility to its wartime zeitgeist: “I have often thought that a war is very useful in making people conscious of the changes that have taken place in the point of view of a nation and most of the nation is not conscious of it until a war comes along and publicizes it, makes everybody and anybody conscious of it.” Stein’s essay ends with a reflection on the literary changes brought about by the momentum of World War I. “Then came the world war and that produced a further liberation,” wrote Stein. “We were now the arbiters we had that strength and so was born a new generation of writers who did not have to think about the American language it was theirs and they had it and that was all there was to it, singing it or rag time Sherwood Anderson or Hemingway or Faulkner they all had it and now what are they going to do with it that is the question” (231). Such a statement must have read as a provocation to French readers, on the brink of their own war-induced massive cultural shift.

The essay led into an excerpt of Dorothy Baker’s *Young Man with a Horn* (1938), a story inspired by the life of Bix Beiderbecke, a white jazz trumpeter in a black milieu.
Music and race would again surface in “Big Boy Leaves Home,” Richard Wright’s tragic novella set in Deep South of Mississippi, which begins with young boys singing the “dozens”, the playfully insulting African-American vernacular rhymes that anticipated rap by several decades. *Fontaine’s* special issue had invoked lynching through the inclusion of Langston Hughes’ elegiac “Song for a Dark Girl,” with lines like, “Way Down South in Dixie / (Break the heart of me) / They hung my black young lover / To a cross roads tree.” *L’Arbalète*’s contents were, by contrast, blunter and more graphic in their indictment of the brutality of Southern racism. Wright’s story, for instance, portrays young blacks growing up in Jim Crow-era Mississippi as victims of merciless violence perpetrated by racist whites. “Big Boy Leaves Home” begins with the joyful innocence of four young black boys cutting class on a sunny day to play in a swimming hole that is on a white neighbor’s property. Their fun is cut short when a white woman screams in shock at seeing these boys swimming, an encounter that triggers deadly chain of events, including the self-defense killing of a white soldier and the murder of three of the boys, one of whom is tarred, feathered, and burned alive by a lynch mob as the fourth boy watches. “Big Boy Leaves Home” was the only story in the volume to receive an individual preface, written by Paul Robeson, then an international celebrity. In his preface, Robeson introduced Wright as a “great artist, certainly one of the most significant American authors of his time.”\(^85\) Wrote Robeson, “We have been long waiting for a book which would give a true and clear picture of the colored man in

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\(^{85}\) Robeson’s foreword to *Uncle Tom’s Children* had first appeared in 1939 when, according to Hazel Rowley, Robeson had been asked to write the preface by left-wing publisher Victor Gollancz for the British edition of *Uncle Tom’s Children* (*Richard Wright: The Life and Times* 158).
America, especially in the deep south, where more than two-thirds of this oppressed minority of the United States live… Would that everyone who has read *Gone With the Wind* would read *Uncle Tom’s Children*!!86,87 *L’Arbalète* would also break new ground for African-American literature in France by featuring an excerpt from Zora Neale Hurston’s semi-autobiographical novel *Jonah’s Gourd Vine*, which depicts the life of a Southern black family adjusting to freedom after the end of slavery. Although Hurston had been mentioned in a review of Nancy Cunard’s *Negro* anthology by the French West Indian poet Emmanuel Flavia-Léopold in 1935, her work itself had not yet appeared in French.88

![Excerpt from List of Contributors, L’Arbalète no. 9 (1944)](image)

Figure 1.7: Excerpt from List of Contributors, *L’Arbalète* no. 9 (1944)

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86 Reprinted in *Paul Robeson Speaks* 132-3.

87 Wright had written the lyrics for the song “King Joe” in honor of Joe Louis, which Robeson would perform with the Count Basie orchestra in 1941 (*The Richard Wright Encyclopedia* 218)

88 See *French Critical Reception of African-American Literature* 65.
While *L’Arbalète*’s special issue reflected a more current and diverse cross-section of American literature, the breadth and ambition of the endeavor resulted in some inaccuracies and confusion, including the accidental inclusion of an excerpt written by a British novelist: *Poison Ivy (La Môme vert-de-gris)*, by British novelist Peter Cheyney, whom Duhamel had believed to be an American author. *Poison Ivy* depicted Lemmy Caution, an American FBI agent investigating gold-smuggling in Casablanca. Although Duhamel had realized that Cheyney was British before *L’Arbalète* went to press, he decided to include it in the volume anyway. The story appeared in *L’Arbalète* along with a note written by Duhamel that both acknowledged his mistake and explained, that while it may not be authentically American, Duhamel still liked the slang, violence, and rhythm of Cheyney’s text. This accidental inclusion of this faux American narrative would prove fortuitous and historic: Duhamel selected *La Môme vert-de-gris* to be the first book in Gallimard’s *Série Noire*, which began in 1945. Indeed, the first four works published in the *Série Noire* were written by Peter Cheyney, James Hadley Chase, and Horace McCoy – authors whom Duhamel had first translated in the special American issue of *L’Arbalète*. Duhamel would continue to publish Lemmy Caution thrillers, inspiring filmic adaptations directed by Bernard Borderie and starring Eddie Constantine. In 1965, Jean-Luc Godard would pay homage to these films in *Alphaville: une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution*, which starred Eddie Constantine in his familiar role, but in a radically defamiliarized, futuristic sci-fi setting. Duhamel’s inclusion of *La Môme vert-de-gris* would also set the precedent for the *faux américain* fiction – the American-esque works written by non-American authors James Hadley Chase, Terry Stewart, John Amila, and Carter Brown –

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89 Spelled “Cheney” in *L’Arbalète*.
that he would continue to promote in his *Série Noire* alongside works written by American authors.

The publication of *L’Arbalète*’s special issue was an event among intellectuals; “Les gens en parlaient,” as Barbezat would recall in an interview years later. In the *Atlantic Monthly*, Sartre would report back to American readers that French intellectuals “eagerly read” the issue,\(^{90}\) and years later, Beauvoir would mark the appearance of the journal in her memoirs.\(^{91}\) In the months following the special issue’s publication, it

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\(^{91}\) Wrote Beauvoir, “*L’Arbalète* published a collection of texts, mostly translated by Marcel Duhamel, by American authors both unknown — Henry Miller, Horace McCoy, Nathanael West, Damon Runyon, Dorothy Baker — and known — Hemingway, Richard Wright, Thomas Wolfe, Thornton Wilder, Erskine Caldwell, and, of course, Saroyan; it was impossible to open any periodical without coming across his name” (*Force of Circumstance* 12).
would be discussed on the pages of the René Tavernier-edited Confluences and Emmanuel Mounier’s Esprit. One of the most enthusiastic readers of the L’Arbalète’s American issue was a 21-year-old Alexandre Astruc, who, wrote a spirited review of the issue for Confluences in March 1945. At times, Astruc’s review was unsympathetic; for example, Astruc found the inclusion of a text by Hemingway’s one-act play “Today is Friday” too predictable, “une sorte de défaite devante une certaine idée du style Hemingway.”

Nevertheless, Astruc’s review of L’Arbalète’s American issue was mostly encomiastic. Astruc’s review conveyed the dizzying sensorial experience of moving through the issue, skipping between scenes of stories as if composing a montage:

“La découverte d’un monde. Plus on avance dans ce cahier et plus l’on se sent submergé. Un brouillard de Marathon de la danse sanglant, de jazz cafardeux, de pluie rougeâtre noyant les soirs de Broadway, finit par se lever dans une symphonie où viennent se mêler les hurlements des nègres lynches et le crépitement des armes automatiques. C’est trop d’un coup, on ne s’y reconnaît plus…”

To Astruc, Duhamel’s defense of including Cheyney’s story would convey the

92 “A defeat in the face of a certain idea of Hemingway’s style.”

93 In addition to Astruc’s article about the special issue of L’Arbalète, Gaetan Picon would also write another article in Confluences in April 1945 that developed an argument about the differences between American and French literature. See Picon 314-21.

94 “The discovery of a world. The more we progress in this notebook, the more overwhelmed we feel. The fog of the bloody dance of Marathon, dismal jazz, and reddish rain drowning Broadway nights, ends up dissipating into a symphony mixing the screams of lynched Negroes and the sputtering of automatic weapons. It’s too much at once, we lose ourselves therein...” Confluences, nouvelle série, no. 2, March 1945. In Astruc, Du stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo: Écrits (1942-1984) 113.
impression that being “American” was as much a question of style as it was of national identity. Wrote Astruc, “Un Anglais, pensez donc, mais que écrit comme un Américain, alors c’est un Américain, parce que l’Américain, c’est d’abord un style.”

Such a statement would prefigure Astruc’s own involvement, elaborated in the next chapter, with the cinematic adaptation of Sartre’s La Putain Respectueuse – a noir-esque film that tackled racial and sexual politics in the American South, although in the French language with mostly French actors.

Claude-Edmonde Magny would also discuss the special American issues of L’Arbalète and Fontaine in March 1945 issue of Esprit, the fourth issue to appear after the journal was banned during the occupation. Magny brought up L’Arbalète and Fontaine as she described the scene that had emerged at the Café de Flore for American literature, as well as the hankering for new American literature in translation, newer than “D.H. Lawrence, Shelley, Steinbeck et Saroyan, (ces deux derniers dont on abuse vraiment chez nous depuis trois ans….).”

Magny’s request for new literature would be answered by Duhamel’s Série Noire, a series that he had in fact originally offered to Barbezat. When asked by Dichy about the influence of L’Arbalète, Barbezat had this to say:

“Comment savoir, au juste, quel role joue une revue? Elle a certainement aide à faire connaître de nouveaux auteurs, la nouvelle littérature américaine…Mais en

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95 “An Englishman who writes like an American is an American, because American is first off a style” Du stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo 112.

96 Magny was a nom-de-plume for Edmonde Vinel, who in 1948, wrote l’âge du roman américain, a study of the contemporary American novel and its relation to the cinematic medium.
vérité, les effets sont le plus souvent indirects. Par exemple, c’est grâce à ce numéro que Marcel Duhamel a eu l’idée de sa fameuse “Série noire”. Il m’avait proposé la collection, mais je n’avais ni les moyens financiers, ni l’organisation suffisante pour une belle diffusion. Il est alors allé voir Gallimard. On connaît la suite…”

While Barbezat had missed out on the opportunity to publish Duhamel’s *Série Noire*, he would instead make his name as the editor and discoverer of Jean Genet, an author whose own interest in American crime and racism would manifest years later in his activism on behalf of the Black Panther Party, including an introduction to George Jackson’s *Soledad Brother* (1970).

**Conclusion**

The special American issues of *Fontaine* and *L’Arbalète* published near the end of the dark years of Nazi occupation (in 1943 and 1944, respectively) were pivotal sites for intellectual discourse surrounding American literary modernism that would explode after the end of the war. The French craze for American literature has been largely understood as a postwar phenomenon, with the American liberation of Paris as an important turning point.

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97 “How do you know, exactly, the role played by a magazine? It certainly helped to make new authors known, the new American literature…but in truth, the effects are most often indirect. For example, it’s thanks to this issue that Marcel Duhamel had the idea for his famous “Série noire”. He offered me the collection, but I didn’t have the financial means nor the sufficient organization for distribution. Then he went to Gallimard. The rest is history…” Dichy 88.

98 Wrote Edmund White, “The powerful Gallimard editor Jean Paulhan (who had published Sartre and Beauvoir) discovered Genet through *L’Arbalète*, as did other people at Gallimard, eventually Genet’s publisher” (288).
point in establishing French appetites for American literature – an appetite connected to public opinion about America’s rising military and political power. While such arguments accurately portray the momentousness of liberation and the cultural transformation brought about by the postwar moment, such a narrative minimizes the vital work of institutions and individuals who often undertook significant personal risk to bring American literature before French-language readers during the war. Deviating from this narrative, this chapter has attempted to highlight a complex network of passeurs de culture – including translators, editors, and political refugees, as well as institutions that supported the exchange of American literature during the years of Nazi occupation and Vichy collaboration. In the United States, Algeria, and France, American literature exchanged hands through informal alliances between friends and former classmates, magazine editors, as well as well-funded institutions including magazines, universities, and organizations, who were all unified by the desire to circulate American literature in spite of – and because of – the pressures of Nazi occupation. Tracing the history of these wartime publications helps remind us how humanists have mobilized in the face of a global refugee crisis, a history that is especially urgent for us to remember today. The history of these magazines and the organizations that supported them helps to uncover the long-lasting impact of cultural institutions – including universities and other state-sponsored and non-profit organizations – that played instrumental roles in transforming

99 For example, as James Naremore has argued, the popularity of Noir has much to do with a “strong resurgence of Americanism” in the decade following liberation. More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts 15.

100 In Not Like Us, Richard Pells traces rising position of American culture throughout the world after 1945, using the end of World War II as the pivotal moment of departure (39).
political crises into opportunities, offering intellectual hospitality and cooperation, and in turn, expanding the bandwidth of cross-cultural exchange for years to come.

The special American issues of *Fontaine* and *L’Arbalète* would set the stage for more visible post-liberation American issues of the journals *Esprit* and *Les Temps Modernes*, which each released their own American issues in 1946. Furthermore, the discourse on American literature in these resistance journals would inflect film criticism as it was emerging on the pages of journals like *L’Ecran Français*, where Astruc, who had himself contributed to occupation-era resistance journals, would go on to extend the wartime discourse on American literature into the concept of the *caméra-stylo*; indeed, Astruc would continue to invoke the names of writers, like Faulkner, whose work he praised on the pages of *L’Arbalète*. It was Astruc’s *L’Ecran Français* colleague Nino Frank who, drawing on Duhamel’s recently established Gallimard *Série Noire*, would be credited as the first writer to use the term Film Noir. James Naremore has argued that “[t]he end of World War II in Paris gave rise to what might be called a noir sensibility.” (11) Nevertheless, as I’ve tried to show, the emergence of the noir sensibility had as much to do with the occupation as it did with the end of the war. This distinction is important, because it helps to frame the origins of the noir as deeply enmeshed in the illicit circulation of literature. By tracing the roots of noir to the precarious production of underground journals during the occupation, one may see how the texts that would help to define the genre were themselves mired in a noble

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101 Indeed, the very name of *Les Temps Modernes*, taken from the Charlie Chaplin film, reflected the centrality of American modernism to France’s postwar intellectual climate.

102 *Esprit*’s special American number was in November 1946, and *Les Temps Modernes*’ special double issue appeared in 1946.
criminality, collected, translated, published, and circulated in defiance of legislation established by Nazi and Vichy authorities. When we consider how Duhamel’s role as a translator for L’Arbalète involved the trafficking of illegal contraband, smuggling American literature between the then-hidden book cache of Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach in occupied Paris to Barbezat in the unoccupied zone in Lyon, we uncover a new layer of meaning in the Série Noire’s investments in violence, danger, and moral ambiguity. Publishing American literature during the occupation meant that translators, editors and publishers had to undertake secretive and risky work – the sort of illicit heroism that one might expect from a noir protagonist.
CHAPTER 2

THE AMERICAN SOUTH ON FRENCH SCREENS:

THE SOUTHERNER AND LA PUTAIN RESPECTUEUSE

“I love Faulkner because I too am a Southerner.
I love the dust and the heat.”

-Albert Camus

In Chapter 1, I explored how during les années noires, the dark years of German occupation and Vichy collaboration, American Literature served as a weapon in the French intellectual resistance, one which promised to lift French culture out of its tired traditions. In this chapter, I investigate French depictions of the American South in two pivotal, yet under-examined films of the postwar decade – The Southerner (L’Homme du Sud, dir. Jean Renoir, 1945) and La Putain Respectueuse (The Respectful Prostitute, dir. Charles Brabant and Marcel Pagliero, 1952), adapted from Jean-Paul Sartre’s play of the same name. The Southerner and La Putain Respectueuse, I argue, represent a postwar shift in French intellectual and artistic attitudes towards the United States; while these films sentimentalize the United States and the South in particular as sites of hard and authentic living, they also negatively portray the region as a case study of societal ills,

\[103\] Writing Was Everything, 84.
including racism, economic injustice, and poverty. Indeed, both films were subject to American boycotts or bans, accused of promoting Anti-American sentiment. In this chapter, I contend that *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* display an ambivalent Americanism, an alternate model of Franco-American engagement that can be situated between the “myth of Americanization,” as articulated by Richard Pells and the tradition of anti-Americanism discussed by Phillipe Roger. By depicting the South as the epitome of the evils of capitalism and racism in the United States, these films engaged a transnational gaze both as a mode of critique, and as a form of projection; the critical and artistic turn to the American South coincided with France’s reckoning with its own anti-semitism, Nazi collaboration, and colonialism.

*The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse*’s investments in the South’s social and economic inequalities functioned as an oblique self-portrait, gesturing to the concerns of postwar France as it emerged from les années noires of the Occupation. These filmic representations of the American South are ultimately tinged with France’s own postwar trauma, which as French historians have argued, had yet to be fully processed. France’s postwar concern with American poverty,

104 Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, these two films hold intriguing possibilities for future study that might help scholars better understanding the relationship between modernism and censorship and obscenity laws, particularly in light of recent scholarship that considers the risk of censorship to be a deliberate modernist strategy. For example, Rachel Potter recently has connected a “confrontational dynamic” to modernism her 2013 monograph *Obscene Modernism: Literary Censorship and Experiment 1900-1940*. See also Adam Parkes’ *Modernism and the Theater of Censorship*, in which Parkes argues that modernist authors exploit the “social space in which texts and authors became subject to public censure and legal action” (xi).

105 Richard Pells has characterized the myth of Americanization of Europe as a narrative which foregrounds the dominance of American popular culture and global popularity of Hollywood cinema, particularly as it manifested after the start of the second world war.
racism, and economic equality, while ostensibly appealing to a universal humanitarian impulse in alignment with the ideology of the French Communist Party, should also be understood within a broader matrix of French narratives produced in the wake of World War II trauma. In *The Vichy Syndrome*, Henry Rousso noted a tendency in postwar France to construct myths that appeased its conscience and self-esteem in the aftermath of Vichy. The official repression of the historical narratives delayed France’s ability to come to terms with its Nazi collaboration, and later, the Algerian war. As France underwent a cultural reappraisal after the devastation of Nazi occupation, few places were as visible for examining French national identity in flux as was the French cinema, both reflecting and steering the French collective imaginary as it sought to reinvent itself by venturing beyond its own borders.

My analysis joins an ongoing discussion among Southern Studies scholars, including Tara McPherson and James Cobb, who have examined how Southern identity has been constructed, in part, within the European cultural imaginary. Nevertheless, despite a revitalized interest in transnational constructions of Southern identity, remarkably little work has been done to examine how French writers and filmmakers, spurred by WWII defeat, turned to the American South with renewed

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106 For more on this topic, see also Benjamin Stora, *La Gangrène Et L'oubli: La Mémoire De La Guerre D'algérie*, La Découverte, Paris, 1991.


vigor. As I will show, these films’ treatment of Southerners reflects an essentialist tendency in post-war France’s emergent anti-racist and anti-colonialist discourse: using the American South, its blacks, and its poor Southern tenant farmers as generic signifiers of class struggle and racism.

I will also examine how Renoir’s *The Southerner* and Brabant and Pagliero’s *La Putain Respectueuse* intersect with key debates in the emergence of postwar film theory, particularly over the capacity of cinematic language to express ideas and engage in social problems on par with literature, both politically and philosophically. During the period of French reception of these two films, French film culture was on the brink of redefinition, testing out emergent theories about auteurism, montage, the relationship of film to literature and philosophy. Such concerns achieved widespread interest in the 1948 essay, “Du Stylo à la caméra et de la caméra au stylo,” written by Sartre-disciple Alexandre Astruc who, a few years later, would contribute to the film adaptation of *La Putain Respectueuse*. In the essay, Astruc proclaimed that a *nouvelle avant-garde* was on the verge of being born, and that film would soon be able to communicate ideas as effectively as literature and philosophy. As I suggest, *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* represented attempts to accomplish just that; by depicting and engaging the

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109 A notable exception to this scholarly tendency is the Richard Gray-edited volume *Transatlantic Exchanges: the American South in Europe – Europe in the American South* (2007), which includes Jacques Pothier’s excellent essay on the long tradition of creative misunderstandings that have characterized Franco-American literary exchanges.

110 *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* were released in 1945 and 1952, respectively. However, due to distribution, these films appeared in France within three years of one another – with *The Southerner* appearing at the famed Biarritz festival in 1949 and *La Putain Respectueuse* first appearing in 1952.
politics of the American South, these films brought an integral aspect of mid- and post-war French literary and philosophical discourse to the big screen.

While these films were innovative in their transnationalism and ambitious in their social critique, they nonetheless failed to render the American South realistically; instead, they used the South to critique broader structural forms of oppression – namely capitalism, racism and sexism. In so doing, these films presented flat, essentialized versions of Southern tenant farmers, African-Americans and women, reducing them to victims of systemic forms of oppression. These films’ use of neorealist stylistic techniques, while intended to convey the South authentically, instead provided a neutral, standard canvas against which the cultural discontinuities – or as Brent Hayes Edwards might say, the décalage – between the United States and a French version of the United States became plainly evident.111

In spite of these films’ shortcomings, their controversy nonetheless fostered significant discourse about what a cinema of ideas should be like. The South would continue to be of symbolic significance in the postwar path towards a new French cinema, one which would eventually find fuller expression in the turn away from realism and continuity towards the radical cutting and disjunctive poetics of certain directors affiliated with the French New Wave, who, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, took as their template the modernist strategies of the Southern writer par excellence, William Faulkner.

111 Edwards characterizes décalage as “a resistance to crossing over” from one culture to another; See The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism 13.
Both *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* featured contributions from Southern authors – Faulkner and Richard Wright, respectively. Although Faulkner and Wright’s contributions to *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* went uncredited, nevertheless both authors served as crucial liaisons between France and the American South. In his autobiography, Renoir credits the success of the film to “the counsel of Faulkner” and “the influence of that man of genius.”¹¹² Faulkner, too, regarded his contributions to *The Southerner* as the finest work he did onscreen, although his role as a scriptwriter went uncredited; Renoir’s film was a United Artists production, and at the time, the Mississippi writer was under contract with another studio, Warner Brothers.¹¹³ Richard Wright wrote the Foreword to the English translation of the text which appeared in the magazine *Twice a Year*, and wrote a dossier of recommendations for the screenplay of *La Putain Respectueuse* that were heeded in the film adaptation. Thus, a study of *La Putain Respectueuse* expands our scholarly understanding of Wright’s cinematic engagements, adding a useful intertext for Wright’s own film version of *Native Son* (1951), a film, like *La Putain Respectueuse*, was filmed outside of the United States.¹¹⁴ Indeed, the largely-unknown contributions of Faulkner and Wright alone warrant a renewed appraisal of these films, adding important historical context to the growing understanding of American literature’s central role in France’s postwar film discourse. While American literature was of central importance to French film criticism of the

¹¹² *My Life and My Films* 234-35.

¹¹³ Phillips 51.

¹¹⁴ Unable to find financing for the film in the United States, Wright’s film adaptation of *Native Son* was filmed in Argentina.
1940s and the 1950s – epitomized by the publication of Claude-Edmonde Magny’s *L’Âge du Roman Américain* (1948) – the topic has yet to receive sufficient critical attention.

**The Franco-Southern Contact Zone**

Examples of the richly generative cultural contact zone\(^{115}\) between France and the American South stretch back at least to the 19\(^{th}\) century. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the earliest instances of this occurred when France and Francophone novelists and playwrights eagerly remade Harriet Beecher Stowe’s abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.\(^{116}\) A multitude of 19\(^{th}\)-century French writers, including Victor Hugo, Stéphane Mallarmé, Jules Verne, and most famously, Charles Baudelaire, offered their own reinterpretations of the work of longtime Southern resident Edgar Allan Poe, who, as Jacques Pothier reminds us, was the archetypal *poète maudit*.\(^{117},^{118}\) Although France’s fascination with the American South had long been established, it intensified after the onset of World War II, as French readers began to recognize their own wartime trauma in the narratives of the post-Civil War South. An important example of this was the

\(^{115}\) Here, I refer to the term “contact zone” as it has been defined by literary scholar Mary Louise Pratt. See "Arts of the contact zone." *Profession* (1991): 33-40.

\(^{116}\) Consider, for example, Charles Testut’s French-language adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, recently brought to light by Heidi Kim in "Excerpts from Old Solomon; or, A Slave Family in the Nineteenth Century." *PMLA* 125.3 (2010): 798-815.

\(^{117}\) For a recent treatment of Poe’s relationship to France, see Andrea Goulet’s article “France,” in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* (2013) 41-52.

\(^{118}\) Although Poe was born in Boston and lived and worked in a number of Northern cities, he was raised a Virginian, attended the University of Virginia, and lived for a number of years in the liminally Southern city of Baltimore. For more on Poe as a Southern writer, see J. Lasley Dameron’s entry on Poe in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson and William R. Ferris 892-3.
runaway success of the Atlanta author Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, which fetched the tulipomaniacal black market price of up to 2500 francs (the list price was 55 francs) in France during the occupation. The French scholar Jean Simon had (in the words of Thelma Smith and Ward Minor) “suggested that the French who read it during the somber days of enemy occupation recognized in the calamities of Georgia at war an astonishing prefiguration of the miseries of their own country.”

The popularity of Southern literature in France extended well beyond *Gone With the Wind*; as discussed in Chapter 1, the work of Southern authors like William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright were hotly traded commodities during the war, circulated in the American literature issues of underground *samizdat* journals including *Fontaine* and *L’Arbalète*. The March 1945 issue of the Emmanuel Mounier-directed journal *Esprit* included a report on American literature of 1944 written by John Brown, which affirmed the message that the troubles of the South made its literature and art so powerful: “La tension sociale du Sud est un thème puissant pour l’artiste et justement quelques-uns des romanciers américains les plus doués, les plus originaux viennent de cette région, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Thomas Wolfe.”

While the occupation fed France’s desire for Southern fiction, after the war, French newspapers and journals discussed the hard realities of the South – its poverty, its

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119 *Transatlantic Migration* 23.

120 Ibid.

121 “The social tension in the South is a powerful theme for the artist and fittingly, some of the most gifted, most original American novelists come from this region, William Faulkner Erskine Caldwell, Thomas Wolfe.” “Les Lettres Américaines en 1944” 600.
defeat, and its anti-black racism – even more energetically. As Sartre biographer Annie Cohen-Solal has suggested, Sartre’s denunciation of American racism became so vigorous that it constituted a “declaration of war.” From its very first issue in October 1945, the Sartre-edited Les Temps Modernes focused its readers’ attention on American racism in the segregated South through the inclusion of Richard Wright’s short story “Fire and Cloud.” In 1946, a special issue of the journal was devoted to the United States, which featured contributions by Richard Wright as well as sociological essays such as Horace Cayton and St. Clair Drake’s Black Metropolis and Gunnar Myrdal’s “An American Dilemma.” The 1947 emergence of the pan-African journal Présence Africaine would further promote this discourse; its first issues included texts on American

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122 As Simone de Beauvoir told Michel Fabre in an interview, although she knew the United States through its literature before the war, such knowledge the United States had “represented for me something extremely mythical.” “The fact is that I became extremely preoccupied with racial problems in the United States after the war only.” The World of Richard Wright 253.

123 In contrast to Sartre, Camus is keen to point out the contradictions in broad-sweeping theories about American life. For example, in Journaux de Voyage, Camus sardonically reports on yet another theory he has heard about Americans: “L.M. me fait sa théorie personnelle sur les Americans. C’est la quinzième que j’entends.” Elsewhere in his travel diary, Camus points out exceptions to the “question nègre.” For example, soon after his arrival, Camus writes, “Question nègre. Nous avons envoyé un Martiniquais en mission ici. On l’a logé à Harlem. Vis-à-vis de ses collègues français, il aperçoit pour la première fois qu’il n’est pas de la même race.” Camus touches a flaw in the very formulation of the “question nègre” — that “nègre” is an essentialism that does not correspond to an ontological reality. Further, observing an “American moyen” give up his seat for “une vieille dame nègre,” Camus points out how whites are not uniformly racist towards blacks, complicating the often binary logic of racism. Camus writes: "Observation contraire: dans le bus, un Américain moyen se lève devant moi pour céder sa place a une vieille dame negre.” See Journaux de voyage 27-8.

124 Sartre’s attitudes on American racism have been treated at length by Julien Murphy in the essay "Sartre on American Racism." See Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays 222.
anti-black racism by Wright and Cayton alongside texts by French and African authors championing Négritude and decolonization.

While Sartre and other intellectuals on the French left closely scrutinized anti-Black racism in the U.S. South, such scrutiny was also accompanied by a degree of sympathy and fascination for a region whose misfortune seemed recognizable. As Sartre remarked in a January 24, 1945 dispatch for *Le Figaro*, the U.S. South and France shared a great deal in common, as both knew the shame of invasion and defeat. “Les États du Sud, qui gardaient un atroce souvenir d'une défaite et d'une occupation, se sentaient plus près de notre honte et de nos malheurs,” wrote Sartre. “Ils nous ont compris mieux que les Américains du Nord, qui n'ont jamais vu leur sol envahi.”

125 It was France’s World War II defeat and occupation, Sartre suggested, that made the French better equipped to understand the South than the Yankees. When discussing the American South, French writers would adopt a paradoxical rhetoric, highlighting two contrasting reasons for France’s special insight into the trauma and injustice of the South. On the one hand, French writers argued that France’s shared historical experiences with the South made it uniquely disposed to understand the region’s trauma. On the other hand, writers reinforced the distance between France and the South, arguing that their foreignness was what made them best equipped to perceive and report the objective truth of the South.

125 “The Southern states, which keep a terrible memory of a defeat and of occupation, feel closer to our shame and our misfortune. They understand us better than Americans from the North, who never saw their soil invaded.” “La France vue d’Amérique,” *Le Figaro*, January 24, 1945.
The Southerner

In 1941, Jean Renoir reluctantly fled France and arrived in Hollywood, a town he found to be lamentably shallow and anti-intellectual. Renoir expressed his cynicism about Hollywood in an April 15, 1941 letter to his brother, the film producer Claude Renoir. “La vraie vie intellectuelle est certainement à New York,” he wrote. “Ici dans le monde du cinéma, c’est une vie de fonctionnaires dans une espèce d’immense Juan-les-Pins.”  

With twenty-six silent and sound films under his belt, the veteran filmmaker was welcomed in America’s film capital. But Renoir, who wished to make films about the real America, found Hollywood to be ill-suited to his creative sensibilities. “En France j’ai toujours voulu faire des films parlant de la France,” wrote Renoir. “Ici mon rêve est de faire des films parlant de l’Amérique” (Lettres d’Amérique 160).

Far from the vapidity of Tinseltown, the American South enchanted Renoir. Of Atlanta, he wrote: “Pour la premiere fois, je me trouvais dans une ville américaine du Sud, une grande ville, puisque je crois que ça approche de six cent mille habitants, et, malgré les fatigues du voyage, j’étais tout a fait enchanté.” Renoir found even the Jacksonville airport delightful: “Charmant petit aéroport. L’atmosphere du Sud est charmante, c’est gentil et c’est amiable.” In the South, Renoir winced at being seen as

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126 “The real intellectual life is certainly at New York...Here in the world of cinema, it’s a life of office workers in a huge sort of Juan-les-Pins.” In Lettres d’Amérique. Presses de la Renaissance 1984.

127 “For the first time, I found myself in an American city of the South, a big city, since I think it’s near 600,000 inhabitants, and, despite the fatigue from traveling, I was quite enchanted.” Ibid. 50.

128 “Charming little airport. The atmosphere of the south is charming, it’s nice, it’s friendly.” Ibid. 51.
a Hollywood-type. Renoir wrote home of his encounters with locals in Waycross, GA, who “nous regardent d’un oeil malin de paysans.”\(^{129}\) Writes Renoir, “nous sommes les gens de Hollywood, les clowns, les types ridicules…Des qu’on lui parlait de Hollywood, il gloussait et se pliait en deux de rigolade…Décidément, nous habitons un pays qui n’est pas considéré très sérieusement par le reste des États-Unis!”\(^{130,131}\)

Renoir’s fascination with the South surfaced in two of the five feature films he made in Hollywood between 1941 and 1947 – *Swamp Water* (1941) and *The Southerner* (1945). Having been creatively stymied by working with a major studio in *Swamp Water*, the low-budget independence of *The Southerner* gave him greater creative control and the ability to thrive.\(^{132}\) Renoir would later tell Jacques Rivette and Francois Truffaut in an interview, “*The Southerner* is the only film I’ve been able to make up till now that corresponds a little to my ideal”; “I believe that it is also my only American work deserving of the hour and a half lost in watching it.”\(^{133}\) Renoir wrote to Claude Renoir Senior, “C’est un film qui, pour Hollywood, n’a pas couté très cher, et qui n’a pas de grand vedette. J’en ai écrit le scénario moi-même, et j’ai travaillé plus agréablement et

\(^{129}\) “They look at us with the clever eye of people from the country.” Ibid. 51.

\(^{130}\) “We are the people from Hollywood, the clowns, the ridiculous types. As soon as Hollywood is mentioned, he chuckles and bowls over from laughter. Evidently, we live in a part of the country that’s not taken very seriously by the rest of it.” Ibid. 51

\(^{131}\) Renoir would go on to consider writing a book (*Voyage a Géorgie*, it would have been called) about his travels to Georgia (Sesonske 51).

\(^{132}\) After struggling to work within the major studio system in the making of *Swamp Water*, Renoir was later able to pursue a comparatively independent route with *The Southerner*, finding a kindred spirit in producer David Loew, who permitted Renoir to have more creative control and improvise on-set (Bacher 229-256).

\(^{133}\) Qtd. in Davis 93.
At the heart of *The Southerner* are themes that were common in American literature and film during the Great Depression – the hope and persistence of farmers in the face of abject poverty, starvation, and despair. *The Southerner*’s treatment of poor American farmers came on the heels of other successful, agrarian, poverty-themed American novels whose success reached across the Atlantic to France, including Erskine Caldwell’s tale of destitute Georgia sharecroppers *Tobacco Road* (1932), and Steinbeck’s tale of poor migrant farmworkers, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). As numerous critics at the time noted, *The Southerner* also followed two critically acclaimed filmic adaptations of these novels: John Ford’s *Tobacco Road* (1941) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940). Based on George Sessions Perry’s 1941 novel *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, *The Southerner* portrayed a poor cotton picker, Sam Tucker (Zachary Scott) and his family as they struggle to make ends meet as sharecroppers in rural Texas, victims of an economic system that privileges landowners and renders its laborers seemingly dispensable. In one of the opening sequences, Sam’s uncle, Peter, lies sprawled out on a field, dying of presumed exhaustion after a life of hard, under-remunerated labor as a

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134 It is a film that, by Hollywood standards, wasn’t very expensive, and didn’t have a huge movie star. I wrote the script myself, and I worked more agreeably and freely than I ever have in my life.”

135 Both novels were translated by the important postwar French literary figure Marcel Duhamel, who founded and edited the Gallimard *Série Noire*. Sartre would help to promote and chronicle the popularity of both Caldwell and Steinbeck in France, as well. See, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre’s 1946 article in the *Atlantic Monthly,* ”American Novelists in French Eyes.”

136 Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* was published just two years before George Sessions Perry’s novel *Hold Autumn in Your Hand* was written. Indeed, they were both winners of the National Book Award, with Perry’s novel taking the prize for “Bookseller’s Discovery” two years after Steinbeck’s book won the Fiction prize.
Emboldened by his uncle’s dying exhortation to “work for yourself” and “grow your own crops,” Sam sets out to grow cotton on his own, albeit as a tenant-farmer, convincing an owner of a long-abandoned plot of land to rent it to him without a deposit. The labor is difficult, and the family suffers. The Tuckers’ anxiety peaks when, on account of the family’s poor diet, their daughter comes down with spring sickness. Sam’s friend Tim, repeatedly offers to help him find work in a factory, but Sam refuses. Through hard work, Sam and his family are able to eke out a living, although the Tuckers’ labors ultimately prove to be Sisyphean; Sam’s hard-earned progress is undone by a neighbor who, embittered by years of suffering, decides to ruin the Tuckers’ vegetable garden in a fit of envy. Later, a thunderstorm causes the river to flood, wiping out their crop and causing their cow to float away. The rain comes to a stop, Sam and Tim are able to rescue the cow, and Sam makes peace with his jealous neighbor by letting him take credit for catching a gigantic fish. *The Southerner* ends on this upbeat note, which highlights the indomitable spirit of the Tuckers and the triumph of human courage in the face of adversity. Nevertheless, dissonant overtones hover over the film’s happy ending; the family’s entire livelihood, the cotton crop, has been devastated, and the human toll of tenant farming has been exposed over the course of the film. The system remains rigged, and while there may be temporary reprieves, it will be nearly impossible for families like the Tuckers to move beyond the cycle of living hand to mouth.

In *The Southerner*, Renoir (assisted by newcomer Robert Aldrich) used deep focus camerawork to capture multiple planes of action, as well as depth staging to produce the profondeur de champ for which the French filmmaker, championed by critics like André Bazin, became known. Renoir’s deep-focus camerawork is on display, for
instance, in a scene in the Tucker’s farmhouse when the daughter is sick in bed with pellagra. The daughter lays underneath the covers and the blocking situates her close to the camera, foregrounding her imperiled condition within the frame. In the rear of the frame, Sam and Granny Tucker (Beulah Bondi) play tug of war in the background over Granny’s favorite blanket, which Sam hopes to wrest away from her and use to make a coat for his sick daughter. In so doing, Renoir makes use of intra-image composition, rather than cutting, to draw out the contrast between the competing concerns of Tucker family members, who must each make sacrifices in the face of the family’s hardship.

Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, and 2.4: Profondeur de champ composition, including deep-focus camerawork and depth staging in *The Southerner*

The film’s camera movements and editing are largely unobtrusive – the camera is mostly static, and the film consists of abundant long takes with minimal cutting. These formal
strategies contributed to the film’s essentially transparent and realistic decoupage, a film style that both suited the aesthetic sensibility of post-1940 moment\textsuperscript{137} foregrounded the stark, elemental simplicity of *The Southerner’s* storyline.\textsuperscript{138}

As in other Renoir films, *The Southerner* unfolds largely outdoors, taking advantage of the mise-en-scène of the countryside, replete with natural light, the beauty of open fields, the river, and the rustic decrepitude of the Tucker’s rickety old farmhouse. Like *Boudu sauvé des eaux* (1932) and *La Regle du Jeu* (1939), *The Southerner* makes use of the outdoors as a neutral backdrop upon which the theater of competing class relations plainly unfold, unencumbered by wealth-signifying interiors. But unlike the edenic bucolism of films like *Partie de Campagne* (1936), the pastoral landscapes of *The Southerner* are, as in *Toni* (1935), a site of manual labor; the fields are for plowing and planting and the river, a familiar visual motif in Renoir’s films, is for fishing. However difficult life on the farm may be, *The Southerner* ultimately portrays farm work as an idealistically noble alternative to industrial labor. In this way, the landscapes of *The Southerner* recall a predicament raised by John Barrell’s critiques of the paintings of

\textsuperscript{137}For a more in-depth discussion of the use of *profondeur de champ* and cinematic realism as a historically significant film style as practiced in the work of Jean Renoir, Orson Welles, William Wyler, and the Italian NeorealisTs, see “Against the Seventh Art,” in David Bordwell’s *On The History of Film Style*, p. 46-82.

\textsuperscript{138}Indeed, *The Southerner’s* realistic, minimal montage style appears well suited to André Bazin’s description of the innovations in cinematic language between 1940 and 1950 in his essay “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema”: “…the real revolution took place more on the level of subject matter than of style. Is not neorealism primarily a kind of humanism and only secondarily a style of film-making? Then as to the style itself, is it not essentially a form of self-effacement before reality?” (*What is Cinema* I, 29)
the English Romantic painter John Constable: the film’s naturalism, predicated on a spectators’ enjoyment of man’s idyllic harmony with nature, comes into conflict with our awareness of the hardly idyllic social and economic relations that underwrite the scenario. *The Southerner*’s landscapes are quaint, and also the site of economic exploitation.

*The Southerner*’s first review appeared in the French press; Sartre wrote about it in the resistance newspaper *Combat*, having attended a screening of the film while traveling through the United States in the Spring of 1945. Sartre wrote admiringly of the film: “…[J]e voie en présentation privée un film d’un metteur en scène français, l’admirable Hold Autumn in your hands, que Renoir a tiré d’un roman paysan sur les petits fermiers du Texas et qui n’a pas encore été projeté à New York…En devenant adulte, le cinéma américain a perdu sa grace, son charme enfantin, son bonheur d’expression. Il y a gagné d’autres qualités: par exemple, on commence, dans les studios de Hollywood, à prendre le gout de l’exactitude historique.” A few months later in

139 For a classic Marxist analysis of labor in John Constable’s landscape paintings, see: John Barrell’s *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840*. Cambridge UP, 1980.

140 As discussed in Chapter 1, Sartre had been dispatched by *Le Figaro* and *Combat* (edited by Albert Camus) to represent the journals on an U.S. Office of War Information-sponsored tour for French journalists of the United States.

141 *The Southerner* was originally titled *Hold Autumn in Your Hands*.

142 “I attended the private screening of a movie by a French director, the admirable *The Southerner*, which Renoir has adapted from a novel about small Texas farmers and which has not yet been released in New York…Growing up, American cinema has lost its grace, its childish charm, its joy in expression. But it has gained other qualities, including a taste for historical accuracy.” Sartre, Jean-Paul, “Hollywood 1945: Un Film Sur Wilson a apporté des voix à Roosevelt.” *Combat*, April 5, 1945 (translation qtd. in Cohen-Solal, Annie. *Sartre: A life*. transl. Anna Cancogni, New York, Pantheon Books, 1987, 241).
Combat}, Sartre would draw on the example of the Southwestern farmer for his composite portrait of the American worker who, as Sartre suggested, shared similarities with French colonial subjects in North Africa. Wrote Sartre, “In spite of the obvious and profound differences, they have the same consciousness of having established themselves freely in their place of work, and the result has been the same devotion to energy and action and the same profound conservatism.”¹⁴³ Sartre’s characterization of Texas farmers in this article resembles the portrayal of Sam Tucker in *The Southerner*; indeed, it is plausible that Sartre’s viewing of the film a few months earlier influenced how Sartre grew to understand the Southwestern farmer, and by extension, the American worker.

In the United States, *The Southerner*’s portrayal of poverty and labor in the American South would receive mixed reviews, a fact that tended to reflect the country’s regional and political differences. Some viewers interpreted the film to be a referendum on the American South; as such, the film’s American reception was as much a discourse on the American South as it was a discourse on *The Southerner*. In the South, for example, some found Renoir’s portrayal of white poverty to be misleading and offensive. Although the film had been endorsed by five chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy in Atlanta, Lloyd T. Binford, the “dour, dogmatic” chairman of the Memphis, Tennessee Board of Censors, banned the film because he felt it portrayed Southerners as “illiterate mendicants,” "common, lowdown, ignorant white trash."¹⁴⁴,¹⁴⁵


¹⁴⁴ See “United Artist First to Buck Memphis Censors.”

¹⁴⁵ Renoir was shocked by Binford’s ban, telling a reporter from the *Los Angeles Times* that he himself “comes himself…of peasant stock….I copied some of my own relatives in
The film was banned in several Southern states, and boycotted by the Ku Klux Klan. In cities like Baltimore, Washington, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, Binford’s ban became a *cause célèbre*, galvanizing critics to defend the film’s portrayal of the South as advancing an innovative brand of realism, one that had not yet been seen on American screens. Indeed, some critics attributed this realism to Renoir’s foreignness. For example, a critic for *Time Magazine* wrote, “very few American moving pictures have understood so poetically such matters as the beauty and meaning of lighting the first fire in a new home; of using all your strength and sense in hard work and watching the tangible result; of cooking and eating the meat you have hunted and killed; or the anguish of watching all your hopes struck flat by one spasm of the sky.”146 The *New Republic*’s Manny Farber suggested that *The Southerner*’s depiction of American country life set him apart from other Hollywood directors: “…unlike almost any other Hollywood director, Renoir tries to make every shot count as much as possible, and the fine naturalistic work he has done here has turned out some of the only true scenes of American country life that I have seen since films like *Tol’able David.*”147 *The Sun*’s Nelson B. Bell praised the “savage and relentless realism” that Renoir “brought from the Continent to the American screen.”148 Renoir received an Academy Award nomination for Best Director, and the National Board of Review named him Best Director of 1945, citing *The Southerner* as the third best film of the year.

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146 “Higher Criticism in Memphis.”

147 Qtd. in Wegner 62.

148 Bell 1.
While some American critics were impressed by the French director’s realism, others were dismayed by the film’s lack of African Americans. Writers for African-American newspapers, including the Atlanta Daily World and the Baltimore Afro-American, criticized the film’s omission of African-American sharecroppers. Renoir, when pressed by Daily World reporter David Platt, said he intentionally omitted African-Americans from his film as he did not want to make a film about racial prejudice. In response, Platt replied that the film would have been “much deeper” if the film had “shown the oppression of the colored [sic] in the South, and how it stems from the ruthless tenant farm system, enemy to white and colored sharecropper alike.” Such critiques revealed a significant flaw in Renoir’s realism; even with deep-focus camera work and depth staging, one could hardly call the film’s portrayal of the South realistic if it did not accurately represent the region’s racial demographics.

While the clippings from the French press suggest that The Southerner met with a much narrower geographic reception in France than in the United States (mostly, if not

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150 Hugo Butler’s screenplay, which Renoir liberally adapted, did include black actors, if only peripherally. George Sessions Perry’s Hold Autumn in Your Hand, the novel upon which The Southerner was based, also includes African-Americans, although their presence is largely atmospheric; they remain unnamed and they function in the narrative primarily as a way to measure the Tuckers’ poverty. For example, the novel describes the decrepitude of Sam Tucker’s house by using the houses of other black folks in the area as a benchmark: “Here it was definitely the worst house in the vicinity, not excluding the poor but neat houses of several Negroes who by some extraordinary circumstance owned their own small farms in a settlement a mile or two up the river.” (35). Later in the novel, since Sam doesn’t have a license to sell fish, he goes to "nigger town" to sell them; there "...black faces, with eyes full of big-fish wonder, were converging on him." (68).
entirely, screened at film festivals and in Paris), the French critical discourse over the film was just as lively as it was in the States, if not more so.

In France, the film received high-profile coverage and a much longer period of critical scrutiny, incited by Renoir’s fame and curiosity over his American oeuvre, the American controversy surrounding the film, and delays in film distribution. European audiences first glimpsed the film at the 1946 Venice Film Festival, the first meeting of the festival since it was suspended three years earlier for the Second World War. The American controversy had followed the film to Venice, where a group of American editors boycotted the film. Despite, or perhaps because of the controversy, *The Southerner* beat out films like Marcel Carné’s *Children of Paradise* and Roberto Rossellini’s *Paisan* to earn the Golden Lion. It seems hardly coincidental that *The Southerner*, the only

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151 For example, of the eight articles in the folder “Revue de presse film – *The Southerner*” at the Cinémathèque Française, all were from Paris-based publications, including *Combat*, *Le Figaro littéraire*, *France-soir*, *Le Franc-tireur*, *Les Lettres françaises*, and *Radio cinéma* television.

152 Sadoul 1.
American film at the festival, took the top prize in 1946, the first year that American films were allowed at the festival since 1939.153

Although the film continued to be of great interest, *The Southerner*’s reputation would diminish in the eyes of French film critics in the years following the film’s victory at Venice, reflecting shifts in politics and taste, as well as perhaps a diminished enthusiasm for American exports. The film wouldn’t be screened in Europe again until the historic 1949 Festival du film Maudit at Biarritz, where it again was a subject of controversy.154,155 An image from the film featured prominently in *Le Parisien libéré*, which published Bazin’s dispatch from the festival. In it, Bazin diplomatically averred, “Certes, on y sent Renoir, metteur en scène typiquement français, très mal à l’aise en face de cette matière naturellement étrangère à son génie. Mais trois ou quatre moments du film sont pourtant d’une beauté éblouissante et non indignes de l’auteur de *la Règle du jeu.*”156 The evenness of Bazin’s appraisal belied the film’s raucous reception at the

153 The festival was held just three months after the signing of the Blum-Byrnes agreements, agreements, which lifted the ban on American films in French markets.

154 This landmark independent festival, orchestrated by president Jean Cocteau, included members Robert Bresson, Roger Leenhardt, René Clément, Alexandre Astruc, Pierre Kast, Raymond Queneau, and others. The festival was a watershed moment in the history of French cinema, intended to showcase films that were *maudit*, or “cursed” – masterpieces that were misunderstood by critics or box-office failures. The term *maudit* was a nod to the *poètes maudits*, such as Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Mallarmé. See Cocteau; Hillier 3.

155 As Dudley Andrew has noted, the Biarritz festival was the first meeting of the avant-garde left and the so-called Young Turks who would become affiliated with the Nouvelle Vague. See Andrew 45.

156 “To be sure, there we perceive Renoir, the typical French director, very ill at ease when faced with this material naturally foreign to his genius. But three or four moments of the film are stunningly beautiful and not unworthy of the director of the Rules of the
Festival du film Maudit where, according to Dudley Andrew, audiences jeered the film: “…As Bazin later admitted, there was more that was positive in that jeering than in the accolades of most well-received movies,” writes Andrew. “For The Southerner made this cultured audience reconceive its notion of itself. This was not the Renoir they expected and had grown to lean on for support. This was a Renoir experimenting with a new idiom (Faulknerian language)...and with a new style” (Andrew 146). Indeed, from the eccentric Granny Tucker to the decaying farmhouse framed by dead trees, to the bleak poverty of Texas farmers, the film evoked the grotesque world of the Southern Gothic, a universe away from even the lowest slums of Renoir’s Les Bas-Fonds (1936). While French audiences had readily accepted Southern literature, Renoir’s American experimentation had proven to be a challenge to French tastes.

Press clippings suggest The Southerner was not seen again until it was screened at

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the Paris Cinema d’Essai in June 1950.\textsuperscript{157} Again, critics eagerly engaged Renoir’s now five-year-old film, though the reviews were mixed; by then, it seems, much of the luster of Renoir’s Southern experiment had worn off. Like a number of American reviews, some French critics ascribed the vividness and boldness of the director’s portrayal of Southern suffering to Renoir’s Frenchness. Robert Chazal, for example, echoed Sartre and others, writing in \textit{France-Soir}, “c’est un bon film parce que ce Français égaré chez les Yankees a tout de suite mieux compris l’Amérique que les Américains.”\textsuperscript{158}

This opinion was forcefully countered by Georges Sadoul, perhaps the harshest critic of Renoir’s American films.\textsuperscript{159} Of Renoir’s time in America, Sadoul dramatically lamented, “Quel gâchis ! quelle perte pour le cinéma français, et quelle perte pour son art.”\textsuperscript{160} Sadoul questioned Renoir’s ability to depict the real United States (“il ne connais pas à fond le sud des États-Unis”),\textsuperscript{161} although Renoir had by now lived in the United States for 10 years, Sadoul nonetheless dismissed Renoir as a “touriste français aux États-Unis.”\textsuperscript{162} Sadoul admired the film’s portrayal of famine and scarcity, which evoked the

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{157} In \textit{France-Soir}, Robert Chazal explained the delay in the French screening of the \textit{The Southerner} as “la stupidité des moeurs financières du cinéma, côté exploitation.” See Chazal.
    \item \textsuperscript{158} “It is a good film because that stray Frenchman lost among the Yankees immediately understood America better than the Americans.”
    \item \textsuperscript{159} Laurent Marie has contextualized Sadoul’s dismissal of of Renoir’s American films as related to the filmmaker’s increasing distance from the French communist party, with which Renoir was aligned from the years 1936-1939. See "Renoir and the French Communist Party" in \textit{A Companion to Jean Renoir}, 328-346.
    \item \textsuperscript{160} “What a waste! What a loss for French cinema, and what a loss for his art!”
    \item \textsuperscript{161} “He doesn’t know the heart of the American South” (Sadoul, 1).
    \item \textsuperscript{162} “French tourist in the United States” (ibid.).
\end{itemize}
suffering of France during the occupation (“cette maladie de dénutrition qu’il fallut l’occupation pour revoir en France,” wrote Sadoul.)\textsuperscript{163} Nevertheless, while the film’s stark portrayal of Southern poverty echoed the proto-neorealism of earlier Renoir films such as \textit{Toni} (1935),\textsuperscript{164} Sadoul derided \textit{The Southerner}’s harmlessness, declaring that the film showed how Renoir had regressed as an artist: “Quelles que soient les réussites épars de \textit{L’Homme du Sud}, quelle recul depuis \textit{Toni} ! ce film qu’il a voulu, par certains côtés, refaire \textit{Monsieur Lange} ou \textit{La Belle Équipe}. Ah ! que Jean Renoir reveille vote manger du brie et boire du vin rouge avant les grises perspectives des rues parisiennes.”\textsuperscript{165}

Like the critics for the African-American press five years earlier, Sadoul noted \textit{The Southerner}’s failure to include any African-Americans who, as he pointed out, constituted 80 percent of the population of Southern farmers. Sadoul ultimately chalked Renoir’s omission of blacks to the numerous bans and censures Renoir encountered in the United States. Nevertheless, Sadoul’s observations on the inadequate representation of African-American farmers in \textit{The Southerner} further corroborate the ubiquity of the French discourse on U.S. South race relations. The discourse had crescendoed rapidly in the five years since \textit{The Southerner}’s original 1945 release. While Renoir’s rationale of

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163 “([T]hat illness due to malnutrition that only appeared in France during the Occupation),” ibid.

164 Luchino Visconti began his career as a filmmaker as an assistant director for Renoir’s \textit{Toni}, would base his first film, \textit{Ossessione} (1943), on James M. Cain’s \textit{Postman Always Rings Twice}, a novel given to him by Renoir. \textit{Ossessione} is considered by some critics to be the first Italian Neorealist Film.

165 “Despite whatever sparse success \textit{The Southerner} might enjoy, what a downturn since \textit{Toni}!, the film that sought, in certain aspects, to remake \textit{Monsieur Lange} or \textit{La Belle époque}. Oh! That Renoir might return quickly to eat some brie and drink some red wine in front of the grey sight of Parisian streets!” (Sadoul 1).
not wanting to make a film about the racial prejudice might have worked in 1945, by
1950, even a French film critic could discern that a realistic portrayal of the American
South had to include its sizable black population.

**Le Problème Noire**

After the end of World War II, French writers increasingly regarded themselves
as an essential voice on American racism, capable of perceiving what Americans could
not see and expressing what they could not themselves. Among the most prominent
voices in this discourse was Sartre, who wrote about American racism in a series of
dispatches for *Le Figaro* and *Combat.*\(^{166}\) While in his April 1945 dispatch in *Combat*,
Sartre praised *The Southerner* without seeming to notice the film’s elision of blacks, by a
few months later in June and July, Sartre would write two articles for *Le Figaro* as an
expert on anti-black racism in the U.S. South. In the first piece, “Ce que j’ai appris du
problème noir,” Sartre wrote, “…I have encountered here a new nationalism; when I am
bothered by the fate of blacks, nearly all Americans change the conversation.”\(^{167}\) While
both articles used a Marxist perspective to critique the structure of anti-black racism in
the United States, the second article in particular described racism as primarily a
Southern problem, with the South’s agricultural economy a remaining vestige of
slavery.\(^{168}\) At nearly every turn, Sartre sought to connect anti-black racism to broader
structures of economic oppression; indeed, he described Southern blacks as “essentially a

\(^{166}\) Sartre’s American reportage was later collected in *Situations II.*

\(^{167}\) Sartre, “Ce que j’ai appris du problème noir”.

Le problème noir, Sartre suggested, could only be solved by an uprising of members of both the black and white proletariat. As the articles subhead loudly proclaimed: “Ni politique, ni culturel, [le problème noir] ne peut être résolu que par la fusion du proletariat noir et blanc dans la lutte pour la reconnaissance de ses droits.” Sartre’s foregrounding of social class and the need for cross-racial solidarity would reverberate onscreen in the cinematic adaptation of Sartre’s play *La Putain Respectueuse*, a film that portrays a white woman and a Southern black man joining together in solidarity to confront their mutually oppressed conditions.

**Richard Wright and La Putain Respectueuse**

The rise in French interest in anti-black racism in the American South coincided with Richard Wright’s 1946 move to France. Although Wright’s work had been essential to advancing the visibility of the plight of black Americans among the French Left, Wright nevertheless found that French discussions on “freeing the American Negro from American prejudice” had grown almost too pervasive, and verged on smugness. That Fall, Wright wrote to Dorothy Norman to describe the French interest in the plight of black Americans:

Dorothy, you ought to be here and see how the treatment of the Negro

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169 I am citing here from a translation, which appeared in the Lewis Gordon edited volume *Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy*. The original article, titled “Retour des États-Unis: Ce que j’ai appris du problème noir.”

170 “Neither political, nor cultural, the negro problem cannot be resolved except by the fusion of the black and white proletariat in the fight for the recognition of their rights.”

171 Norman, editor of the journal *Twice a Year*, hired Richard Wright as a co-editor in 1946, and introduced the African-American author to Beauvoir and Sartre.
in America strikes these people. Each day the headlines blaze it forth. And, of course, when a Frenchman sees an American Negro, he is self-centered enough to feel that he has come to stay, to escape. That kind of an impression bobs up all the time and there is no sense in trying to explain to people. It is, in a way, a terrible criticism of our country; it is bad for a country when one of its citizens has but to show his face and folks think at once: Oh, he got away from that awful place. How lucky he is. But this is just so much an indication of the awful job we must do at home. Our poison has spread far and wide; and we give folks a stick to beat us over the head with each day on the Negro problem.\footnote{Encounters 199.}

As Wright’s letter to Dorothy Norman illustrates, the French discourse on American racism was underwritten by a tacit sense of competition and even arrogance; the horrors of American racial injustice were a blessing to French egos. The staggering commercial success of the 1946 novel \textit{J'Irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes} (\textit{I Spit on Your Graves}) written by \textit{Les Temps Modernes} stalwart Boris Vian was a testament to the French fetish for narratives depicting American racism and violence in the South. Published under the pseudonym Vernon Sullivan, the newly established Éditions du Scorpion, modeled after Gallimard’s popular Marcel Duhamel-founded imprint \textit{Série noire}, marketed \textit{J'Irai Cracher} as an American novel written by an African-American, “Traduit de l’Américain par Boris Vian.” The novel unfolds in a fictional small Southern town called Buckton, and involves a light-skinned black man who, passing for white, sets on a spree of violence – including rape and murder of two white sisters – to avenge racial injustice, a
mix of situations that, as James Naremore aptly observes, recalls Faulkner’s *Sanctuary* and Wright’s *Native Son*.\(^{173}\)

![Figure 2.8: Book Cover, *J’irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes* (“Traduit de l’Americain”), 1946.](image)

While the novel passed itself off as belonging to a uniquely American brand of violence and fast living, *J’irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes* was packaged to appeal to a French self-perception of broad-mindedness on American affairs. Indeed, France’s fascination with Southern racism paralleled similar discourses about obscenity and censorship, in which France frequently cast itself as a permissive alternative to the puritanism of the United States. The Vian-authored preface suggests that the novel was too graphic to find a publisher in the United States.\(^{174}\) Comparing *J’irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes* to Henry Miller, Vian suggests that Sullivan’s obscenity is even more sophisticated and less reliant on an offensive vocabulary for shock value: “Sullivan songe

\(^{173}\) Naremore 12.

\(^{174}\) “[Il n’est pas surprenant que son oeuvre ait été refusé en Amérique: gageons qu’elle y serait interdite le lendemain de sa publication.” [“it is not surprising that his book should have been refused in America: we wager it would be banned the day following its publication”] *J’irai Cracher* 8.
Vian goes on to suggest that the novel bears the strong influence of James Cain and James Hadley Chase, though the novel reveals Sullivan to be “plus réellement sadique que ses devanciers illustres.”176 Indeed, Vian and Chase were among a significant number of faux américains – including Frank Harding (Léo Malet), Sally Mara (Raymond Queneau), and Terry Stewart (Serge Arcouët) – who wrote dur à cuir novels under false American-sounding names.177 Vian concludes the preface with an apology for the formulaic nature of the text, reasoning that it is not only a good recipe for selling books, but also a sign of the American lack of anxiety in exploiting “sans vergogne une formule qui a fait ses preuves.”178

As was the case with the French reception of The Southerner, Vian’s preface supported the oft-repeated idea that what could not be said in the United States could be said by the French. Indeed, the American literary tropes of obscenity, violence, racism, and hard-boiled detective pulp fiction had grown so reliably successful, that they had become a money-making gimmick. Vian later rationalized his authorship of the novel under an African-American nom de plume as a strategy designed to make easy money in France.179 As James Baldwin would later note, “The curious, and, on the whole, rather

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175“Sullivan thinks more of suggesting by a turn of expression and construction of a sentence than by the crude word” J’Irai Cracher 8.

176“[R]eally much more of a sadist than his illustrious predecessors.”

177See Cadin 2011.

178 J’Irai Cracher 9: “exploiting unblushingly a formula which has proved its value.”

179The success of this strategy, noted James Baldwin, enraged Vian.
obvious doctrine of *l’existentialisme* flourished, and the word *négritude*, though it was beginning to be muttered, had yet to be heard. *I Shall Spit on Your Graves*, and Vian himself, and a tense, even rather terrified wonder about Americans, were part of this ferment…”

In November 1946, the same month as Éditions du Scorpion published *J’irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes*, Sartre’s play *La Putain Respectueuse* premiered at the Théâtre Antoine in Paris. The storyline was loosely inspired by the Scottsboro Boys trial, in which nine black teenagers were sentenced to death, wrongly accused of gang rape by two young white women. The case captured international attention, largely through the efforts of the Communist Party and the International Labor Defense. The Communist Party had long been concerned with the cause of Southern blacks, considering their struggle for rights as part of an unfinished revolution of abolition which had only eliminated slavery in theory, but not yet in practice. The play’s critique of the American South won over audiences in London too, where it premiered in July 1947 with Rita Hayworth in the audience; Beauvoir wrote to Alger, “English people love and hate American people as twin brothers can do, so they were delighted with the satire; the mere fact of hearing American accents on the stage made them laugh to tears, they caught every point and it was a real triumph with Sartre being brought to the stage, very clumsy and shy and silent.”

The play also found success in the United States, where it enjoyed a 10-month run in New York, and in Moscow as well, where Sartre attended the 400th

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180 *The Devil Finds Work* 40.

181 *A Transatlantic Love Affair* 49.
performance by special invitation.182 The following year, Richard Wright promoted La Putain Respectueuse in Twice a Year, the journal he co-edited with Dorothy Norman, writing an introductory note, which appeared before a translation of the play.183

Although distinct from the blatant racial cross-dressing of Vian’s J’irai Cracher Sur Vos Tombes, the film adaptation of La Putain Respectueuse offered a similar French-language take on racial injustice in the American South. To help with the film adaptation, Sartre employed contributors who were both students of his existential philosophy and conversant in the cinema, Jacques-Laurent Bost and Alexandre Astruc. Bost, who had contributed to the first issue of Les Temps Modernes, was a close associate and former student of Sartre who had worked on dialogue for three earlier Sartre-affiliated film projects. Like Sartre, Bost had travelled to the United States as a correspondent for Combat. Astruc, who had also written for Combat, had written some of his earliest articles about Sartre, including an article about Sartre’s film Les jeux sont faits (1947).184,185

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182 The Play out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture 80-81.

183 “Introductory Note to The Respectful Prostitute,” 14.

184 See, for example, the following articles written by Astruc during his early years as a critic about Sartre: “Signification de Sartre,” Messages, 1943; “L’Être et le Néant, de Jean-Paul Sartre,” Poésie, no. 17, janvier-février 1944; “Les Mouches, par Jean-Paul Sartre,” Poésie, no. 15, juillet-septembre 1943; “Huis clos, de Jean-Paul Sartre,” Poésie, no. 20, juillet-octobre 1944; “Sartre, le théâtre, la liberté.” These articles can all be found in Du Stylo à La Caméra, which collects Astruc’s writing from 1942 to 1984. The preface to this volume, written by Philippe d’Hugues, points out that Astruc began writing on Sartre at age 18 or 19, which drew Sartre’s attention (7). In 1976, Astruc would go on to make a film about his mentor, Sartre lui-même.
Astruc was a friend of Vian, whom he had directed in his 1949 short film, *Ulysse ou les Mauvaises Rencontres*. In 1948, Astruc had authored “Naissance d'une nouvelle avant-garde: la caméra-stylo” for *l'Écran Français*, an essay that would help to sketch out the shifting relationship between cinema and text, advocating film’s potential as a medium capable of expressing ideas. Following in footsteps of Sartre and Bazin, Astruc’s essay on the *camera-stylo* helped to shift the discourse regarding the intersection between film and literature away from the strict, old-fashioned consideration of adaptation from one medium to another original medium ("the chimera of fidelity," as Robert Stam would later call it). Instead, Astruc traced the energy of a “new avant-garde,” one which aspired to compose films in a literary, philosophical, or otherwise intellectual way, using the cinematic medium on its own terms to construct a director’s own clear argument. This new avant-garde, as opposed to the old surrealist avant-garde of the 1920s, made use of the technical innovations in cinematic realism, as exemplified

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185 La Putain Respectueuse featured many of the same personnel who worked on Sartre’s first screenplay, *Les jeux sont faits*, a film that Sartre wrote as a *scenariste* at Pathé (where he worked from 1943 to 1946) and was made into a film by Delannoy in 1947.

186 While Sartre was in the United States, Beauvoir recalls spending time with Astruc and Vian, whom she called “one of the guiding spirits of the *zazou* movement,” referring to the jazz-obsessed, zoot-suit wearing, hard-partying subculture that emerged in France during the occupation. Of the *zazous*, Vian, and Astruc, Beauvoir wrote, “A handful of them not only like jazz but also Kafka, Sartre and American novels; during the war they rummaged through the bookstalls along the Seine and were triumphant if they dug out some forbidden work by Hemingway or Faulkner. To read and talk, they came to Saint-Germain-des-Prés. That’s how I met Vian at the bar of the Pont-Royal; a manuscript of his was being read by Gallimard, and Queneau thought highly of it; I had a drink with them and with Astruc…He gave a party in March; by the time I arrived, everyone had already had quite a bit to drink…Astruc was asleep barefoot on the divan; I too drank manfully while we listened to American records. (*Force of Circumstance, Vol. 1* 60-1)

187 Astruc (following Bazin) polemically co-opted and rebranded the term “avant-garde” to describe the transparent realism of directors including Renoir, in defiance of the montage-drive avant-garde tradition of the 1920s.
by directors like Renoir, Bresson, and Welles, to furnish the neutral canvas upon which a "caméra-stylo,” or a camera-pen, could “write ideas directly on film.” Astruc’s seminal essay offers a particularly rich critical intertext for La Putain Respectueuse, offering insight into how Astruc, (along with Sartre, Jacques-Laurent Bost, and Marcel Pagliero) envisioned and practiced the process of “writ[ing] ideas directly on film.” As such, La Putain Respectueuse should be understood as a cinematic experiment in bringing the philosophical discourse embedded in Sartre’s essays on “Le Problème Noir” to the big screen. Astruc had specific source material in mind when he suggested that the language of film could offer a vehicle of thought. “From today onwards, it will be possible for the cinema to produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux, to the essays of Sartre and Camus,” wrote Astruc (183). Astruc lamented that his vision could not yet be realized on account of the constraints of the medium. “The economic and material difficulties of the cinema create the strange paradox hereby one can talk about something which does not yet exist,” wrote Astruc. “For although we know what we want, we do not know whether, when, and how we will be able to do it” (184). In light of this context, we can see how La Putain

188 Bazin would also mention a similar group of authors in his essay “An Aesthetic of Reality.” Referring to Sartre’s analysis of Camus’ use of the passé compose in L’Étranger, Bazin wrote, “The objective nature of the modern novel, by reducing the strictly grammatical aspect of its stylistics to a minimum, has laid bare the secret essence of style.” Bazin went on to write, “Certain qualities of the language of Faulkner, Hemingway, or Malraux would certainly not come through in translation, but the essential quality of their styles would not suffer because their style is almost completely identical with their narrative technique—the ordering in time of fragments of reality…A Faulkner, a Malraux, a Dos Passos, each has his personal universe which is defined by the nature of the facts reported, but also by the law of gravity which holds them suspended above chaos” (What Is Cinema? Volume 2 31).
Respectueuse represents an important moment in the negotiation of Sartre and Astruc’s shared vision for a cinema of ideas on par with literature and philosophy.

The film’s directors included first-time director Charles Brabant and Marcel Pagliero, who acted in Les jeux sont faits, as well as Roberto Rossellini’s landmark Italian Neorealist film Rome Open City (1945). In addition, Pagliero had contributed as a writer to Rossellini’s Paisan (1946), a film which had, in one episode, intertwined the fate of a black American G.I. from the South to a young boy from war-torn Italy, portraying both as victims of an unfair system. Truffaut, in his famous article “Une certaine tendance du cinéma français” said of Pagliero, “[he] is called the Sartre of the cinema, probably because his films resemble the articles in “Temps Modernes.”

In addition, although the film does not credit the contributions of Richard Wright, the Mississippi-born author wrote extensive notes on the screenplay, offering advice on how the film could more accurately portray race relations in the South. While not all

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190. In the same article, Truffaut would single out Pagliero’s use of crude language as a tawdry form of realism. In Truffaut’s “Certain Tendency” article, for example, Truffaut criticizes Pagliero’s film Les Amants des bras-mort (1951), writing: “In one single reel of the film, towards the end, you can hear in less than ten minutes such words as: prostitute, whore, slut and bitchiness. Is this realism?” Truffaut’s pan of Pagliero’s filmmaking would certainly apply to La Putain Respectueuse, a film with profanity embedded not only in its dialogue but also in its very title. Pagliero’s reputation for violating decency codes appears to have persisted into the 1960s, when Pagliero would again be labeled by the Cahiers critics as a filmmaker known for “écrire des sujets de films qui se heurtent à la censure.” See Cahiers du Cinéma, Mai 1962.

191. “Reactions to the Script of La Putain Respectueuse,” undated, Michel Fabre papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.
of Wright’s suggestions were followed, a number of them appear to have been incorporated into the film, including the suggestion to have signs designating racial segregation prominently posted in public areas, and to humanize Sidney, the African-American protagonist, by giving him a family.

Figure 2.9: Excerpt from Richard Wright, “Reactions to the Script of La Putain Respectueuse” (Courtesy of Emory MARBL)

Figure 2.10: Still from La Putain Respectueuse (1952), showing “COLORED ONLY” sign in train car.

La Putain Respectueuse begins on a train, where we encounter the film’s female protagonist, Lizzie Mackay, en route from New York City to start a new life for herself in the South. She soon finds herself the target of unwanted advances from a white passenger who has had too much to drink, from whom she escapes by hiding out in a “Colored Only” car. Although she is warned that she isn’t allowed to be there, Lizzie refuses to move, as she is from the North, and presumably ignorant of the social codes that strictly separate whites and blacks in the South. The drunk passenger tracks Lizzie
down in the colored car, and in a fit of rage, strikes a black passenger dead who stands up to defend Lizzie. The white passenger is arrested; however, as we later learn, he is the nephew of a senator who is running for reelection. To avert a political scandal, the senator sets about framing Sidney, an innocent African-American bystander who happened to be in the same train car at the same time of the attack. Lizzie, who initially testified against the senator’s nephew, is pressured and bribed into signing a false statement that recants her initial one, instead falsely accusing Sidney of murder – a lie that she almost instantly regrets. The news of Lizzie’s revised statement is widely transmitted on television and in newspapers, prompting an angry mob to take to the streets to hunt the wrongly accused Sidney who, like Bigger Thomas in Wright’s *Native Son*, races around the city to escape the masses of bloodthirsty vigilantes. Realizing that she has been victimized by powerful and rich white men, Lizzie takes pity on Sidney, realizing blacks suffer from the same system of oppression that women do (“Poor bastard,” says Lizzie, “You’re like me”). In the film’s closing scene, she and Sidney run through the angry mob to submit themselves for arrest. They ride off together in a paddy wagon, holding hands in solidarity.

Although the film critiques the corruption and nepotism of moneyed elites, institutional racism and sexism in the U.S. South, it ultimately does so to the detriment of plot and characters, using them as a flat vehicle in the service of an overarching structural critique. For example, the film’s black protagonist, Sidney, functions as a meek and voiceless presence; indeed, as Julien Murphy notes, audiences of the original play reportedly “took issue with the role of the innocent black man about to be framed as a rapist whose lines are confined to pleading for his life” (225). While this may have been
a narrative strategy to underscore the powerlessness of blacks in the South, in effect, such a portrayal only minimizes the potential for understanding African-Americans beyond a flat stereotype of a submissive and oppressed class. Further, the film’s closing solidarity between the oppressed classes of women and black comes off as trite and contrived. Unlike Ruby Bates in the case of the Scottsboro Boys, whose false rape accusations ultimately resulted in eight innocent black men receiving death sentences, the film adaptation of La Putain Respectueuse offers Lizzie moral redemption through her eventual change of heart. Sartre initially added this happy ending for the Soviet production of the play, and retained it for the film version.\textsuperscript{192} The film’s concluding solidarity between Lizzie and Sidney is entirely incumbent on the silence and deferential gratitude of Sidney, and subsumes the film’s critique of anti-black racism within a broader narrative of class and gender oppression.\textsuperscript{193}

The film is plagued by problems that lay somewhere between failures in continuity editing and breakdowns in transcultural adaptation. Stylistically, La Putain Respectueuse has all the hallmarks of film noir, including the use of low-key lighting, the

\textsuperscript{192}About the changed ending of the Soviet performance, Sartre wrote, “I didn’t see the production, but I agreed to an optimistic ending, as in the film version, which was made in France. I knew too many young working-class people who had seen the play and had been disheartened because it ended sadly. And I realized that those who are really pushed to the limit, who hang on to life because they must, have need of hope” Qtd. in Murphy, 226.

\textsuperscript{193}Beauvoir would explore the similar conditions of oppression between women and blacks in the The Second Sex, a subject that Margaret Simons has treated at length in Beauvoir and The Second Sex: Feminism, race, and the origins of existentialism. While I can find no official credit given to Beauvoir for her contribution to La Putain Respectueuse, her letters to Sartre suggest that she was involved at least peripherally. For example, Beauvoir wrote to Sartre on April 30, 1947: “J’ai discuté 2 h. avec. Wright et Dorothy Nordman et Lionel Abel, qui traduit La Putain, sur cette traduction. Je vous expliquerai dimanche.” Further, the film intriguingly features a black butler named Nelson and a Judge named Algren – likely a nod to Nelson Algren.
omnipresence of venetian-blind shadows, a jazz club, police officers dressed in suits and fedoras, and a morally ambiguous femme fatale. Narratively, the plot does little to exceed or betray the Aristotelian causality and reversals that are typical to noir’s classical structure, nor does it attempt to carry off any of the complex flashbacks typical to the genre, either. Lacking the genre’s narrative intricacy, La Putain Respectueuse’s noir aesthetic appears mainly as a prop to reinforce the film’s American setting, a film style that many French audiences had come to identify with the United States.

Figures 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, and 2.14: Stills from La Putain Respectueuse (1952) illustrating the film’s noir style

While the plot fits more or less neatly within the bounds of classical narrative convention, the film’s continuity is nevertheless disrupted by transcultural slippages. For example, although the film’s dialogue unfolds in French, the sets and are signs and advertisements written in English, resulting in a bewilderingly bilingual diegetic world. While the film’s profuse use of signs aim to convince viewers of the film’s American setting, some English-language signs are misspelled; a sign in a garage, for instance, reads “Honck” instead of “Honk.”
The film’s depiction of the American South is unpersuasive; while the film supposedly takes place somewhere in the South, the film’s setting is nondescript and never named explicitly.

Stage Venice Walkout Over ‘Respectful Prostitute’

American delegates to the Venice Film Festival walked out in a huff upon the showing of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *The Respectful Prostitute*, which had a short run as a play on Broadway. The Americans called the movie a “deliberately anti-American film.” The film is the story of a Negro in the South, a white prostitute who befriends him, and a lynch mob. It reaches a climax with the marriage of the Negro and prostitute. American actor Walter Bryant plays the role of the hunted Negro, while Bill Coleman and other musicians appear in a few short scenes.

Like *The Southerner*, *La Putain Respectueuse* generated a storm of controversy at Venice. Writing for *Cahiers du Cinéma*, André Bazin noted that it was the film “qui a fait le plus de bruit à Venise. Seule, la moiteur du climat a sans doute empêché certaines
discussions de degénérer en bagarres."  American delegates walked out of a screening of La Putain Respectueuse at the Venice Film Festival, calling it a “deliberately anti-American film.” Bazin’s review in Cahiers du Cinéma noted that it wasn’t just Americans who were scandalized by the film; “beaucoup d’autres étrangers partageaient leur indignation.”

The Transparent Imperfection of Transnational Cinematic Realism

Although he noted that almost all of the contention surrounding La Putain Respectueuse derived from the film’s political and moral message, Bazin’s review did not discuss the film’s indictment of sexism and racism. Rather, Bazin took the film’s failure as an opportunity to sketch the theoretical terrain between the divergent media of the theater and the cinema, critiquing the La Putain Respectueuse on the basis of its adaptation, not for its anti-Americanism. Here I will dwell in some detail on Bazin’s review in order to unpack his claim about the vexed relationship between transnational cinema and cinematic realism. In his review, Bazin wrote:

C’est un lieu commun de rappeler la puissance de l’image cinématographique par rapport à l’écriture. Il faut pourtant bien la constater dans des cas comme celui-ci. En dépit d’une relative pudeur qui reste bien en deçà de ce que le texte autorisait les réalités admises dans la pièce comme un pur conflit théâtral, un jeu de forces

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194. “[T]he film that made the most noise in Venice. It’s most likely the humid climate alone that stopped certain discussions of it from degenerating into brawls.” See Bazin, André, “La Putain Respectueuse,” Cahiers du Cinéma, October 1952, 15-17.


196. “A lot of other foreigners shared their indignation.”
imaginaires, deviennent ici choquantes dès qu’elles affectent le spectateur dans ses passions morales ou politiques, alorès qu’au théâtre il s’intéressait surtout à leurs rapports, il est tout à coup requis ici par leur réalité même. Mais surtout l’existence du film fixe cette réalité dans une interprétation donnée une fois pour toutes et cette interprétation conçue en France pour un public français n’est assimilable pour un étranger, même non Américain, qu’au prix d’une grande ignorance ou d’un grand effort critique….Malheureusement telle est la puissance du réalisme cinématographique que tous les spectateurs étrangers n’ont pu faire cet effort critique sur leur propre perception.”

In this passage, Bazin first reminds the reader of the singularity of the “puissance de l’image cinématographique”; unlike the theater, whose force derives from text-based abstraction, the cinematic medium imposes a fixed interpretation on the spectator (“l’existence du film fixe cette réalité dans une interpretation donnée”). As such, the

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197 “It is commonplace to recall the strength of the cinematographic image with respect to the written word. It is nonetheless necessary to take note of it in cases such as this one. Despite the play’s relative modesty – well short of what the text permits – its themes become shocking as soon as they impinge upon the viewer’s moral or political interests, rather than remaining staged purely in terms of theatrical conflict and imaginary forces. Whereas at the playhouse the spectator was concerned primarily with the relationships between these themes, he is now suddenly requisitioned by the act of their portrayal. Moreover, the film’s very existence fixes the specific interpretation of these themes as if once and for all, and this interpretation, designed in France for a French audience, can only be embraced by the foreigner, even an American, at the cost of either great ignorance or great critical effort… Unfortunately, cinematic realism’s power is such that all foreign spectators are not able to critically intervene on their own perception” (Cahiers 16).

198 Elsewhere in the article, the abstraction inherent to theater is described as follows: “Une pièce, c’est d’abord un texte, c’est-à-dire une abstraction, un jeu d’idées. Elle ne vous atteint pas par les sens mais d’abord par l’intelligence.” Translation: “A play is first and foremost a text, which is to say, an abstraction or a formation of ideas. It touches not through the senses, but through the mind” (16).
capacity of the cinematic image is particularly unsympathetic to the falsified foreign setting of *La Putain Respectueuse*, which, “conçue en France pour un public français,” did not translate well outside of a French context. While the article was reproachful of how cinematic realism functioned in *La Putain Respectueuse*, it was far from a condemnation of cinematic realism in and of itself. Rather, the article argued that the “puissance du réalisme cinématographique” brought into relief the phoniness of the film’s transnationalism, imposing a “fausse et conventionnelle” interpretation of the United States on spectators; as the *Cahiers* critique argues, such a portrayal of American life, one which relied on French approximations of Hollywood conventions, would only be convincing to a French audience.

From Bazin’s review, we might extrapolate a more general critique on the fallibility of cinematic realism as a stylistic approach for transnational, politically engaged cinema. Such a critique provides important historical context for a turn in the development of cinematic modernism – in particular the work of directors affiliated with the *Nouvelle Vague*, who remained both transnational and political in their filmmaking, yet turned away from narrative continuity and cinematic realism as it was practiced in the 1940s. Instead, they embraced new stylistic approaches to realism (handheld cameras, improvisation, and a documentary aesthetic) as well as the radical cutting that had fallen out of favor in the 40s. Bazin’s critique also provides context for understanding why French depictions of American race relations tend to become less hinged to conventions of narrative continuity, preferring discontinuous representational strategies to engage racial politics. Consider, for example Godard’s address of American race relations vis-à-vis the fragmented use of African-American texts, including LeRoi Jones’ *Blues People*
(1963) and Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968) in *One Plus One (Sympathy for the Devil, 1968)*. If the hope of a realistic, narratively continuous transnational film about race or politics is a doomed enterprise from the outset, then a turn towards a film style that embraces, for example, radical cutting becomes a vital representational strategy in order to enjoin, without artificially smoothing over, cultural difference.  

Finally, France’s cinematic take on the American South in *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* supplies a fascinating dialectical counterpoint to France’s own embattled and censorious history of anti-colonial cinema. For example, the period between *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse* witnessed the emergence of what many consider to be the first French anti-colonialist film, Rene Vautier’s documentary short *Afrique 50* (1950), a 17-minute film which critiqued French colonization in Côte d’Ivoire. The film was prohibited from being shown for 40 years, and Vautier was imprisoned for a year for directing the film. The year after the release of *La Putain Respectueuse*, Chris Marker and Alain Resnais directed *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), a film that was similarly subject to governmental censors because of its anti-colonialist point of view; the first two reels were allowed to be shown in 1960, but the film wasn’t allowed to be screened in its entirety until 1968. As Régis Dubois noted in *Les Noirs dans le cinéma français*: “C’est un fait, les réalisateurs hexagonaux semblent avoir plus de facilité à parler des Noirs <<exotiques>>…que des Noirs français,”  

199 For more on the use of montage as a tool to negotiate representational difficulties, particularly in Godard and Antonioni’s transnational address of politics, see David Fresko, “Magical Mystery Tours: Godard and Antonioni in America,” in *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt.* ed. Timothy Scott Brown and Andrew Lison, Palgrave, 2014.
As Dubois points out, out of the many notable French films in the 1960s and 70s to document the struggle of blacks, including *One + One*, Agnes Varda’s *Black Panthers/Huey* (1968), William Klein’s *Muhammed Ali, The Greatest* (1969) and *Eldridge Cleaver* (1970) and *Angela Davis, l’enchaînement* (Jean-Daniel Simon, 1977), few, if any addressed anti-Black racism in France (52).

To apprehend the enterprise of French postwar films that address the exploitation of labor and anti-black racism in the United States, we should bear in mind how France’s efforts to repress cinematic representations of its own colonialist and racist histories constitute part of the offscreen space.

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200 It is a fact, the directors from the Hexagon seem to have an easier time talking about “exotic” blacks than French blacks, a phenomenon that the sixties would only confirm” (Dubois 42).

201 Dubois also notes that most of these films took a documentary, rather than fiction, approach.
In their writing and films, French critics of the late 1940s and 1950s regularly turned to American literary modernists like William Faulkner to frame their ambitions for the cinematic medium, using the names of authors to signify how film could break away from classical conventions to resemble the American literary modernism that was in vogue in postwar France. The first part of this chapter explores how Faulkner, along with other American modernist writers, functioned as a rhetorical trope in postwar French film criticism leading up to the emergence of the Nouvelle Vague. In the second part of this chapter, I analyze La Pointe Courte, Agnès Varda’s deliberately impure adaptation of The Wild Palms. Finally, I illuminate how Jean-Luc Godard has cited William Faulkner throughout his cinematic oeuvre. By retracing this history, I establish how Varda’s La Pointe Courte was the first film of the Nouvelle Vague to successfully translate Faulknerian modernism to the big screen, an innovation in cinematic form that would echo in subsequent, more well-known works affiliated with the Nouvelle Vague. Although Varda was an outsider to the cinephilic culture out of which the more well-known directors of the French New Wave emerged, it was

Excerpts from this chapter previously appeared as an article in Comparative Literature Studies. The original citation is as follows: Du Graf, Lauren. “What Is a Digital Author? the Faulknerian Author Function in Jean-Luc Godard's film Socialisme”. Comparative Literature Studies 51.4 (2014): 533–556.
this same outsider status, I argue, that made her unencumbered by standards of cinematic convention, and able to produce an adaptation that was deliberately impure.

Despite recent studies that consider individual directors’ citations of William Faulkner,\(^{203}\) the centrality of Faulkner and American literary modernism to the French New Wave and the postwar intellectual climate that birthed it continues to be routinely underestimated by scholars of the film movement. Take, for example, the following quote from Kelley Conway’s 2015 monograph on Agnès Varda: “Varda’s acknowledged inspirations and citations—Faulkner and Brecht situate her first film not so much in postwar French cinephilia, but instead in the broader currents of mid-century modernism, with its investment in experimental narrative forms, its refusal of spectacle and easy emotion, and its implicit challenge to viewers.” (15). Conway correctly affirms what Varda has herself acknowledged, that prior to making La Pointe Courte, Varda did not participate in the institutions that cultivated postwar cinephilia, such as ciné-clubs like Objectif 49 and film journals like Cahiers du Cinéma. Nevertheless, building on work in previous chapters, here I bring to light how Faulkner and American modernism were woven into the discursive fabric out of which both postwar French film culture and the Nouvelle Vague emerged.

As I explored in previous chapters, postwar intellectuals including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Maurice-Edgar Coindreau, and Claude-Edmonde Magny heralded the American modernist novel as a key poetic innovation, one which promised a much-needed infusion of new energy to a French literary and cultural landscape dragged down by old traditions. In turn, prominent postwar film critics brought this same discourse into the

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\(^{203}\) See, for example, Du Graf (2014) and Kodat (2007).
vibrant world of film journals. Critics including André Bazin, Alexandre Astruc, and later, Jean-Luc Godard, would cite Faulkner and his novels as representative of the sort of literature which film should aspire to emulate. In 1948, Astruc had sketched out a concept of _caméra-stylo_, the idea that a filmmaker would be able to author films just as a novelist wrote novels. In his essay, Astruc cited Faulkner among the names of writers whose work the cinema would soon be able to emulate. In his article “Naissance d’une nouvelle avant-garde,” Astruc wrote “From today onwards, it will be possible for the cinema to produce works which are equivalent, in their profundity and meaning to the novels of Faulkner and Malraux, to the essays of Sartre and Camus,” wrote Astruc. Nevertheless, as critics such as Godard had noted, particularly in his unpublished critique of Astruc’s 1954 film _Les Mauvaises Rencontres_, there was a discrepancy between Astruc’s theory of the _caméra-stylo_ and how he put the theory into practice in his own efforts as a filmmaker. Godard would later continue this line of reproach in his reviews of Astruc’s _Une Vie_ (1958). In an August 1958 interview with Godard that appeared in _Arts_, Astruc had referenced Faulkner’s _Wild Palms_ as an inspiration for the development of his characters in _Une Vie_, to which Godard snarkily replied, “You preach modernism, and yet you make a costume film?” In a review of the film that appeared in the _Cahiers du Cinéma_ three months later, Godard dismissed the

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204 Although Astruc is perhaps best remembered as a film critic, his writerly oeuvre also included literary criticism; for example, in the March 1945 issue of the René Tavernier-edited journal _Confluences_, Astruc contributed a review of a special American issue of _L’Arbalète_, which included short fiction by Richard Wright, Thomas Wolfe, Nathanael West, Horace McCoy, Peter Cheney, and Damon Runyon, among others.


206 “Jean Luc Godard Interviews Astruc,” _Arts_ 684, 20 August 1958, qtd. in _Godard on Godard_ 91.
nouvelle avant-garde pretense of Astruc’s citation of Faulkner and Charlotte Rittenmayer of The Wild Palms as little more than hot air: “…but Astruc himself has already talked of them so much – too much – that the admirers of Le Rideau are now looking for difficulties and being surprised to find none.”

Released in 1955, Varda’s La Pointe Courte had already explicitly borrowed the narrative structure of Faulkner’s Wild Palms (If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem, 1939), alternating a tautly framed love story of a disillusioned couple with a documentary-like account of the struggles of the fishing village of La Pointe Courte that was reminiscent of Italian neorealism, even though Varda at that point did not know what Italian neorealism was. Varda’s cinematic stylization was heralded by André Bazin as the answer to the nouvelle avant-garde that the critics of the film society Objectif 49 had imagined in their criticism. Indeed, it was Varda who was the first filmmaker to execute Astruc’s hitherto unfulfilled prophecy in the 1948 essay on the caméra-stylo. Independently of Astruc, Varda

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207 “Une Vie,” Cahiers du Cinéma 89, November 1958, qtd. in Godard on Godard, 96.

208 Referred to hereafter as The Wild Palms.


210 From André Bazin, “Agnès et Roberto”, Cahiers du Cinéma, 1955, Issue 50, p. 36: “C’est une oeuvre dont nous aurons certainement à reparler longuement, mais dont nous pouvons dire déjà en cette occasion qu’elle illustre bien la notion d’avant-garde telle que nous cherchions à la définir au temps d’Objectif 49. Bien loin des recherches formelles et de la négation du sujet qui caractrisaient l’avant-garde des années 25.” Translation: “It is a work which we will certainly be discussing for a long time, but of which we can already say on this occasion that it well illustrates the notion of the avant-garde that we were trying to define at the time of Objectif 49. Quite a ways away from the formal studies and the negation of subject that characterized the avant-garde of les années 25”
would develop a similarly intermedial term of *cinécriture*\(^{211}\) to describe her practice of literary filmmaking. Varda’s modernist narrative experimentation would reverberate in the subsequent, literary-oriented films of *La Pointe Courte*’s editor Alain Resnais, who would go on to work with *Nouveau Roman* authors in his subsequent cinematic efforts. Varda’s use of *The Wild Palms* would also echo in the work of Jean-Luc Godard, who went on to cite the novel in two of his films and has continued to cite the Southern author in the most recent of his cinematic efforts, including *Adieu au Langage* (2014). By illuminating this marginalized history, I hope to clarify the significance of Varda’s Faulknerian *glanage*, which made her the first auteur of the *Nouvelle Vague* to translate the discontinuous, multi-perspectival modernism of Faulkner successfully to the big screen.

While scholars have established Faulkner’s place within the world of cinema – particularly his work as Hollywood screenwriter – the legacy of his modernist narrative strategies on film history is, by contrast, far less understood and appreciated. Bruce Kawin’s monograph *Faulkner in Film* (1977) made important early inroads in recognizing Faulkner’s impact on *Nouvelle Vague* directors; as Kawin noted, Faulkner “is the most cinematic of novelists” in his use of techniques like freeze-frame, slow motion, and visual metaphor in his fiction (5). As Kawin suggested, it was the contribution of Faulkner’s fiction, not his work as a screenwriter, that best secured Faulkner’s proper place in film history—a place that Kawin lamented “has yet to be established or appreciated” (145). T. Jefferson Kline’s 1992 volume *Screening the Text: Intertextuality in New Wave Cinema* helped to advance our

\(^{211}\) Varda would define her use of the term *cinécriture* in her autobiographical monograph, *Varda par Agnès* (1994): “The cutting, the movement, the points-of-view, the rhythm of filming and editing have been felt and considered in the way a writer chooses the depth of meaning of sentences, the type of words, number of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or break its flow, etc. In writing its called style. In the cinema, style is *cinécriture.*” (14)
scholarly understanding of the literary foundations of *Nouvelle Vague* cinema; nevertheless, this work focuses on the influence of British and French literature on cinematic modernism. Dorota Ostrowska's *Reading the French New Wave* (2009) further illuminated the abundance of literary sources that inspired the *Nouvelle Vague*, particularly the *Nouveau Roman*, but only mentions Faulkner in passing. David Trotter's *Cinema and Modernism* (2007) explores the deep poetic affinities between literary and cinematic modernism, but focuses on Anglo-American sources, such as D.W. Griffith, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Charlie Chaplin. By establishing the discursive position of American modernist literature – and Faulkner as its emblematic figure in the Hexagon – in post-war French film culture, this chapter underscores the centrality of Franco-American exchange in the emergence of cinematic modernism.

**Critical Contexts**

The French critical discourse surrounding the American modernist novel was essential to the intellectual milieu in which postwar French film criticism and the *Nouvelle Vague* came of age, informing the literary affinities of these intertwined movements. In essays such as those collected in Sartre’s 1938 *Situations I* (including “Sartoris”), Sartre asserted the philosophical significance of the disjunctive poetics and non-linear temporality of novels by American authors including William Faulkner and John Dos Passos. Faulkner’s novels in particular supported Sartre’s concept of literature as philosophically *engagée*. Sartre sought to explain Faulkner’s novelistic technique as emerging from a metaphysics that preceded the creation of the text; Sartre pointed to the intersections between Faulkner’s

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metaphysics of time and Heidegger’s suggestions that consciousness must temporalize itself.\textsuperscript{213, 214}

In February 1938, Jean-Paul Sartre’s first piece of literary criticism—an article on William Faulkner’s \textit{Sartoris}—appeared in \textit{La Nouvelle Revue}. In the article, Sartre praised the underhanded elusiveness of Faulknerian narratives, which forced readers to perform acts of divination in order to interpret meaning.\textsuperscript{215} Elsewhere, Sartre would praise Faulkner's novels for their metaphysics of temporality, both on the level of chronological shuffling as a narrative technique as well as the use of time as thematic element.\textsuperscript{216} Sartre pointed to Faulkner's rejection of chronological progression and retelling of the past as an ineluctable, ineffable part of the present. Sartre’s characterization of Faulkner’s narrative strategies would surface roughly a decade later in French film criticism, as postwar critics increasingly turned to American authors such as Faulkner as a way to describe developments in cinematic style, including ellipsis. For instance, in 1948, André Bazin would echo Sartre in his citation of Faulkner among the exemplary practitioners of literary ellipsis,\textsuperscript{217} which introduces “…a

\textsuperscript{213} \textit{Critical Essays} 117.

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Film Socialisme} cites M. HEIDEGGER in the section of the credits titled TEXTOS.

\textsuperscript{215} See, for example, Sartre’s description on Faulkner’s elliptical narrative style in the following passage: “Il y a une recette: ne pas dire, rester secret, déloyalement secret—dire un peu... Furtivement, en une demi-phrase qui risque de passer inaperçue, don’t on espère qu’ell passera presque inaperçue.” [There is a formula, and it consists in not saying, in keeping secret, underhandedly secret—in saying a little. . . . Stealthily, in a half-sentence that might well pass unnoticed, and which the author hopes will pass almost unnoticed] \textit{Situations I} 14; translated in \textit{Critical Essays} 2.

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid. 105.

\textsuperscript{217} See Bazin, André. “Le Réalisme Cinématographique Et L'école Italienne De La Libération.” \textit{Esprit} 141 (1) (1948): 58–83. Bazin is careful to note that “No doubt the metaphysic of the ellipsis is not the same in Malraux, Camus, or Faulkner, for example.”

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gap into reality, a gap which the reader can bridge intellectually but which is painful to the
mind of the spectator.” Bazin, along with his Esprit colleague Claude-Edmonde Magny and
fellow L’Ecran française writer Alexandre Astruc, were among the earliest to describe film
in terms of the American novel,²¹⁸ part of an emergent critical vocabulary to vindicate
cinematic works that expressed ambiguity, difficulty, new forms of realism, or in some way
challenged or rescripted the conventions of Classical Hollywood Cinema. Like Astruc,
Bazin similarly celebrated American modernism in his film criticism; to say that something
was the filmic equivalent of the American novel was a high form of praise and a measure of
cinematic innovation. Bazin, for example, used American literature to explain the genius of
Orson Welles²¹⁹ and the acting of Humphrey Bogart.²²⁰ Bazin would also explain the
brilliance of Italian neorealism in terms of American literature, describing the aesthetic of
post-Liberation Italian cinema as “simply the equivalent on film of the American novel.”²²¹

While reverential, these references were often uncritical and generic, universally
complimentary towards American literature as an ideal to which a new avant-garde cinema
could aspire. The names of American modernist authors – including Faulkner, Ernest


²¹⁹ “We had to wait for Orson Welles to show what the cinema of the American novel would be.” “Cinematic Realism and the Italian School of the Liberation,” in André Bazin and Italian Neorealism, 49.


²²¹ Bazin, “An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism”.

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Hemingway, John Dos Passos, Erskine Caldwell\textsuperscript{222} – were deployed as interchangeable signifiers. Bazin, for example, writes:

“Certain qualities of the language of Faulkner, Hemingway, or Malraux would certainly not come through in translation, but the essential quality of their styles would not suffer because their style is almost completely identical with their narrative technique—the ordering in time of fragments of reality…A Faulkner, a Malraux, a Dos Passos, each has his personal universe which is defined by the nature of the facts reported, but also by the law of gravity which holds them suspended above chaos.”\textsuperscript{223}

The non-specific assertion that “their style is almost completely identical” demonstrates how author’s names were used in the service of cinematic analysis. While Bazin’s references to American literature are abundant, rarely do they specify what the technical innovations of American literature are, nor do they quote from specific works of literature. Rather, Bazin’s references to American authors function as a shorthand for stylistic innovation. For example, in Bazin’s analysis of Rosselini’s \textit{Paisa}, he credits the film for being “unquestionably the first film to resemble closely a collection of short stories.” Writes Bazin:

“…Above all, the length of each story, its form, contents, and aesthetic duration, gives us for the first time precisely the impression of a short story. The Naples episode of the urchin — a black-market expert, selling the clothes of a drunk Negro soldier — is an excellent Saroyan story. Another makes us think of Hemingway, yet another (the first) of Faulkner. I am not merely referring to the tone or the subject, but in a profound way to the style. Unfortunately, one cannot put a film sequence in quotation marks like a paragraph, and hence any literary description of one must of necessity be incomplete. However, what follows is an episode from the final story which reminds me now of Hemingway, now of Faulkner.”\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{222} French writers, including André Malraux, Albert Camus, and Jean-Paul Sartre were also sometimes cited alongside these authors.


\textsuperscript{224} "Le réalisme cinématographique et l’école italienne de la liberation," 44-45.
Here, Bazin struggles with the critical conventions of quotation and analysis; as he notes, it “put a film sequence in quotation marks like a paragraph,” and thus a “literary description of [a film sequence] must of necessity be incomplete.” As a stopgap to this critical impasse, Bazin references the names of American authors as point of reference. On the one hand, the practice of citing names of American authors is congruent with a broader post-war program of establishing a cinematic language and criticism on par with literature. However, the non-descript citation of American authors also appears as an analytical crutch, a way to expand the vocabulary of film criticism as it strained to describe an evolving cinematic style.

The Faulknerian Gleaner

While already known to French intellectuals during the late 1930s and 1940s, the Southern author’s international star rose even higher after he received the Nobel Prize in 1950. Les Palmiers Sauvages, originally published in the United States in 1939 as The Wild Palms, was the first new translation of a Faulkner novel to appear in France after he was awarded the Nobel. Maurice-Edgar Coindreau’s translation of the novel was published first in 1951 in Les Temps Modernes, with an edition appearing the following year in Gallimard’s “Du Monde Entier” series.225 The Wild Palms would take on special significance for Varda and Godard, who engaged the work in both of their first feature-length efforts – La Pointe Courte and À Bout de Souffle.

The Wild Palms consists of two short novellas, “Old Man” and “Wild Palms”, told in alternating chapters. At first glance, the two stories — one depicting a Mississippi convict

225 Like Vian’s J’irai cracher sur vos tombes, the cover of the Gallimard edition indicated that the novel was “traduit de l’américain.”
who is swept away in a flood, and another about a couple who are intent on suffering for love at all costs — appear to be unconnected. Nevertheless, the plots of these stories are contrapuntally related, each one illuminating the other through contrast. Indeed, *The Wild Palms’* doubled plot evoked the structural logic of parallel editing. Further, the dynamic, contrapuntal juxtaposition between the two storylines evoked the principles of Soviet montage, a structural allusion that bears out in the novel’s reference to Sergei Eisenstein. Indeed, Eisenstein was among the Soviet filmmakers who theorized and pioneered the use of montage as a technique to juxtapose voices from various social strata – a technique that Varda would adopt, although to less overtly ideological ends. In *The Wild Palms,* Faulkner deploys the phrase “Eisensteinian Dante” as a way to describe the visual bedlam and surreal hell of the Utah mines, while evoking the names of two artists whose works are both visual and, like the contrapuntal plots of *The Wild Palms,* multilayered and architechtonic.

The thematic preoccupations of Faulknerian literature had already found their way onscreen in films like Renoir’s *The Southerner,* to which Faulkner was a silent contributor. As discussed in Chapter 2, earlier French cinematographic efforts to cinematically render the innovations of the literary South, such as *The Southerner* and *La Putain Respectueuse,* had used realism and the conventions of classical narrative cinema to portray the American South – strategies that ultimately ended up highlighting the cultural discontinuities between the United States and France. Varda, by contrast, instead gleaned from Faulkner a multi-vocal, contrapuntal narrative structure, which she repurposed to juxtapose the divergent lives, both public and private, of this small yet socially heterogeneous fishing village on the Mediterranean coast. Varda recounted her experience of reading the doubled narratives of *The Wild Palms:*

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I remember very well that with thinking I was very clever, I said, very well, I’m going to read chapter 1, 3, 5, and 7. And then I’ll read 2, 4, 6, and 8 to reach each storyline straight through. Yes, it’s fascinating, but still, there’s a reason for his artistic choice, and I reread it again in order, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6…So I in fact read it in three different ways. What I understood was that if there was no connection between these two stories, the juxtaposition of the two was critical, creating an effect of osmosis…So this impression I felt so strongly, I said to myself, hey, if I can read a book like this, why not try to find an equivalent form of cinema?  

Indeed, Varda’s filmic translation of Faulkner’s contrapuntal narrative structure represented a radical departure from previous efforts to make American literary modernism into cinema. Bazin would herald the resultant film style as "free and pure" — affirming its revelatory importance by writing reviews of the film and organizing a special screening for Varda's film at Cannes. Although Varda claims to not have seen many films before making La Pointe Courte, the film’s visual style evoked elements that Bazin had associated with neorealism, including long takes, profondeur de champ composition, outdoor filming, and the use of local, non-professional actors. Varda’s unwitting realism is on display, for instance, in a scene depicting the unexpected death of a young child from a mysterious illness. In one shot, we see three planes of activity. In the first plane, we see the mother grieving for her dead child — an image that in and of itself contains contrast between herself and the dead child. In the next room, children ignorant of the tragedy are at play, and outside the door, a group of women from the village crowding around to see what has happened.

\(^{226}\) Qtd. in Conway 136.
The mobility of the camera further affirms the *La Pointe Courte*'s democratic gaze; the film opens with a series of almost Wellesian long takes that move down the streets of the village, voyeuristically moving in and out of open windows and doors, highlighting the interconnections between neighbors' homes. The prominent view of laundry wafting in the wind, suspended from clotheslines like banners, further conveys the intimacy of this tight-knit fishing village.

Like Faulkner’s use of his “own little postage stamp of native soil”\textsuperscript{227} in Mississippi,

\textsuperscript{227} *Lion in the garden: interviews with William Faulkner* 255.
Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* depicts the eponymous fishing village in Sète which she knew well; she and her family hid in Sète during the Second World War and returned every summer for 15 years thereafter. Like the Mississippi Gulf, Sète is coastal and culturally diverse, its Mediterranean location making it a magnet to a host of languages (including French, Italian, Catalan, languages of the Maghreb, and local patois). In Varda’s film, the Sètois linguistic diversity is on display, from the sometimes crude vernacular of La Pointe Courte residents (played by actual residents of the eponymous fishing village), to the refined Parisian speech of the film’s female protagonist (referred only to as “elle”) played by French theater actress Silvia Monfort. Varda based some of the film’s dialogue on transcriptions of expressions she had heard uttered by villagers during her visits to La Pointe Courte, and had intended to include patois in the film. Nevertheless, because she could not afford to record sound, voiceover sound was later dubbed in by Parisian actors who, in a Southern accent, did their best to match Varda’s transcription of what the local resident-actors had said during filming. While some of the local linguistic particularity was lost in the *doublage*, some of the sayings survived, including the humorous expression for having passed a certain point in life: "nous avons chié la moitié de notre merde" or “we have crapped out half of our shit.”

In this regard, Varda’s film educes the *heteroglossia* of *The Wild Palms*, a novel that comprises a diverse range of voices including the narrator, the competing perspectives of the *bourgeois-bohème* couple and the Mississippi convict, as well as non-English speaking secondary characters, including the French-speaking alligator hunter “Cajan” and the Utah miners, whose language is so ambiguously foreign to Wilbourne that he cannot identify it and must rely on drawings to communicate.

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Although Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* was not a strict adaptation of Faulknerian prose, it nonetheless exudes a striking faithfulness to *The Wild Palms*’s narrative structure, toggling between roughly five episodes each of the villagers and of the couple. Save for a few brief establishing shots that aren’t focalized through either narrative in particular, the film contains nearly the same number of chapters as the novel. The Faulknerian narrative structure enables Varda to connect the concerns of a socially diverse cast of characters – from poor fisherman and their families (played by residents of La Pointe Courte), to state health inspectors, to a refined woman from Paris. After a fashion, the social diversity of Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* continues the thematic preoccupations of French cinema from decades past, particularly the Popular Front social cinema exemplified by the upstairs-downstairs world of Renoir’s *La Regle de Jeu* (1939). Nevertheless, unlike the films of Renoir (whose movies Varda claims not to have seen before making her first film), Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* all but abandons the Aristotelian conceit that these diverse characters must engage in a unified
action. Rather, Varda deploys Faulkner’s doubled narrative structure to oscillate between two stories — that of the villagers of La Pointe Courte, as well as the story of the disillusioned couple — that unfold with only a thin membrane of tissue to connect them.

**Temperamental Natures**

"...[T]he morning breeze from the sea had dropped, gone on, as if the bright still cumulus-stippled bowl of sky and earth were an empty globe, a vacuum, and what wind there was was not enough to fill it but merely ran back and forth inside it with no schedule, obeying no laws, unpredictable and coming from and going nowhere, like a drove of bridleless horses in an empty plain."


As in Faulkner’s novel, the point-counterpoint chapter structure of *La Pointe Courte* reverberated in a formal and thematic strategy of contrast and juxtaposition that pervaded the film’s composition. Like Faulkner’s *Wild Palms*, Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* deployed an antithetical poetics of both structural and thematic contrast to achieve an extended meditation on contrast, paradox, and irrationality in both the natural world and in human behavior. Both Varda’s film and Faulkner’s novel treat the elements — including wind, water, and sun — as recurrent motifs in their investigation of the contradictory and often volatile temperament of nature, both environmental and human.

Varda’s visual style comprises an inextricable component of the film’s portrayal of nature’s paradoxes. The film’s careful framing and intra-image composition reflect Varda’s background as a visual artist, having studied art history and photography at the École du
Louvre, and later cutting her teeth as a photographer in the famed Studio Harcourt, as well as under Jean Vilar at the Théâtre National Populaire. For instance, the harsh midday Mediterranean sun in Sète allows Varda to illustrate high-contrast landscape of sun and shadow. As Varda has noted, the landscape of the village of La Pointe Courte itself is naturally site of visual contrast: because of its peninsular geography, one side often remains in the sun while the other is in shadows. Further, by training her lens on billowing fabrics and waving grasses, Varda highlights the famous mistral of the midi, the strong wind that can be felt throughout Southern France. While the mistral is a source of fresh breeze, clearing the air of dust and creating the light windblown landscape so favored by painters from Cezanne to Matisse, it is also famously harsh and relentless, blowing at speeds in excess of 90 miles per hour. Indeed, much of the film’s action unfolds on the “Quai du Mistral.” A thematic preoccupation with wind can also be found in Faulkner’s novel, whose very title, The Wild Palms, indexes the significance of gusty weather. At first glance, the title The Wild Palms may evoke positive connotations – relaxation, tropical fronds, and freedom; however, in the context of Faulkner’s novel, the wildness of the palms is associated with the violent winds around the Mississippi gulf area; the whistling, sibilant noise consumes Wilbourne as life crashes in on him. Wilbourne’s perception of the sound of the palms (“the

229 Roland Barthes wrote of Varda’s and Therese Le Prat's photography in the Harcourt Studio: “they always bequeath the actor his fleshly face and enclose it frankly, with an exemplary humility, in its social function, which is to 'represent' and not to lie” (Mythologies 18). By contrast, Francois Truffaut would write dismissively of Varda’s careful framing in La Pointe Courte, calling it “un peu trop cadrés” (Qtd. in Conway 25).

230 Agnès Varda: Interviews xxi

threshing of the invisible palms, the wild dry sound of them”)232 becomes acute when he is in the beachfront cabins with Charlotte as she is hemorrhaging blood after a botched abortion. As Wilbourne continues to lose touch with reality in prison, the sound of the palms grows louder "….the wild frenzied palm which still sounded dry and across the roof of the cell…” (265).

Like wind, water figures in both Varda’s film and Faulkner’s novel as an element that is both generative and menacing. In La Pointe Courte, water offers visual pleasure and cinematic beauty that is a connective tissue between the stories of the couple and the villagers. In the film, the presence of water is also antithetical — both salutary and life-threatening. The villagers depend on a nearby lagoon for fishing; nevertheless, they are not legally permitted to fish in their own waters because their waters have not yet passed inspection by the state health department. Further, there is no running water in the houses – it was connected at one point, as brother of the male protagonist (“Lui”) notes, but was shut off, presumably due to the presence of bacteria in the local water source. Thus, while water is an omnipresent element in La Pointe Courte, it is also limited and inaccessible.

Figure 3.4: Still from La Pointe Courte.
“Lui”’s brother demonstrating how La Pointe Courte’s water supply has been disconnected.

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232 The Wild Palms 248.
The motif of water recurs throughout *The Wild Palms* as a site of death and of birth. Charlotte, the mercurial female protagonist, loves being in the water and forebodingly tells Wilbourne of her desire to die there, foreshadowing her eventual death in a rented seaside cabin on the Mississippi gulf coast. In the “Old Man” chapters, water functions an agent of liberation, temporarily freeing the captive from prison. Further, it is the site of birth; a woman, rescued by the captive from the flood, gives birth to a baby on the banks of a river. But the Mississippi floodwaters are also deadly, awash in animal carcasses caught in the furious tide, and nearly overtaking the captive’s life along the way.

Both *The Wild Palms* and *La Pointe Courte* juxtapose the survival stories of poor and working-class people against the stories of a romantic couple in crisis. Both Faulkner’s novel and Varda’s film depict people on the opposite side of the law; in *The Wild Palms*, a Mississippi convict becomes an unwitting escapee in the midst of a violent flood, and in *La Pointe Courte*, working class fishermen must evade the scrutiny of state health inspectors in order to fish in their waters. As a counterpoint to these survival narratives, both *The Wild Palms* and *La Pointe Courte* also include stories of couples struggling to stay in love despite the gravity of time and the torpor of habitual, mundane living. The female protagonists of both stories are idealists who worry about the insidious threat of inauthentic love and easy happiness on their long-term romantic relationships.

In *The Wild Palms*, Charlotte’s extreme philosophy on the struggle and torment to keep love alive echoes as a refrain throughout the novel. Says Charlotte: “...love and suffering are the same thing and that the value of love is the sum of what you have to pay for it and anytime you get it cheap you have cheated yourself” (41). Later in the novel, she forebodingly adds: “They say love dies between two people. That’s wrong. It doesn’t die. It
just leaves you, goes away, if you are not good enough, worthy enough. It doesn’t die; you’re the one that dies. It’s like the ocean: if you’re no good, if you begin to make a bad smell in it, it just spews you up somewhere to die” (71). The female protagonist of *La Pointe Courte* utters similar truisms about the dangers of habitual love and unquestioned happiness. She challenges her husband’s constant optimism (“Being happy at all costs got us here,” she tells him) and questions whether their love is authentic (“Do we really love each other, or do we live together out of habit,” she asks.) Indeed, a number of descriptions of Charlotte reverberate in Varda’s portrayal of a woman who has grown cynical about love. For example, Charlotte’s eyes are described as containing a “profound and distracted blaze of objectless hatred in the strange woman’s eyes” (11) — a description that a resonates in *La Pointe Courte*’s female protagonist, whose eyes reflect a similar distant and vague distress, particularly towards the beginning of the film.

Varda’s framing and intra-image composition brings into focus the incongruent emotional lives of the couple; in one frame their faces are juxtaposed, highlighting their divergent gazes, and in another frame, their distance is emphasized by their blocking on opposite sides of a fence.

![Figures 3.5 and 3.6: Stills from *La Pointe Courte* demonstrating Varda’s intra-image juxtapositions](image)

The optical contrast between the couple in *La Pointe Courte* is further emphasized by their
wardrobe. While the film’s female protagonist, with her tailored suit, high heels, and bourgeois demeanor is at home in Paris, her tailored and glamorous physical presence stands in stark contrast to the natural and humble environment. Her heels are hardly suitable for the rough and unpaved path from the train station to her husband’s humble family abode. She steps into puddles, and one point trips near a broken fence. The color composition further adds to their opposition; the blackness of her tailored suit contrasts with the light, unbleached environment and her husband’s humble white cotton tunic and espadrilles.

Figures 3.7 and 3.8: Stills from La Pointe Courte. The film’s contrapuntal storylines emphasize social and class differences within the village, further emphasized by contrasts in wardrobe.
The tailored dress of the Parisian woman further contrasts with the humble smocks and aprons worn by women of the village, whose labor Varda dignifies by tightly framing a woman’s hands as they struggle against the wind to pull clothespins off the laundry line. Such an image echoes a scene in *The Wild Palms*: "he could distinguish the color of the garments flapping in the morning sea-wind and watched later a tiny figure which he knew to be a woman taking the garments from the line, believing he could distinguish the gesture with which she put the clothes pins one by one into her mouth” (264). Varda’s close-up of the village woman’s hands anticipates the preoccupation with women’s work that would continue in Varda’s later films; indeed, she would memorably reflect on her life and work through a close-up of her own age-spotted hands in *Les Glaneurs et La Glaneuse* (*The Gleaners and I*, 2000).

![Figure 3.9: Still from *La Pointe Courte*.](image)

A close-up of hands removing laundry highlights both the wind and the labor of women in the village.

Although *La Pointe Courte* was Varda’s only film to explicitly draw on Faulknerian
narrative strategies, many techniques that Varda first developed in this film would recur later in her oeuvre. As Sandy Flitterman-Lewis wrote in her study To Desire Differently, “[I]t is interesting to note just how important a structuring matrix this first film has proven to be, for it sets into place a number of textual mechanisms and preoccupations that recur throughout all of Varda’s work – recur, in fact, to such an extent that even her most recent work is entirely informed by these concerns.” As evidence, Flitterman-Lewis cites Varda’s continued interest in making films with a strong sense of place, where the place could be interpreted to be part of the narrative itself – consider, for example, the incorporation of Paris and Parc Montsouris in Cléo de 5 à 7 (1962), and the Hollywood of Lions Love (1969), Sausalito of Uncle Yanco (1967), and Rue Daguerre of Daguerréotypes (1976). Although Flitterman-Lewis doesn’t connect Varda’s regionalism to the early influence of Faulkner on her work, it is worth noting that both Faulkner and Varda expressed a lifelong preoccupation with the local in their work. Varda would also continue to use contrapuntal narrative strategies in her later films. In L’Opera Mouffe (1958), for example, Varda contrasts the private world of pregnancy with the public world of the market on Rue Mouffetard, juxtaposing tightly composed surrealist images with the documentary realism of street scenes.

Godard’s Citational Poetics

As numerous scholars, including T. Jefferson Kline, Rick Warner, and Dan Morgan, have noted, Godard’s prolific cultural citations constitute one of the most defining trademarks of his cinematic enterprise, a practice that Jacques Rivette once characterized

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233 See, for example, Warner, “Contempt Revisited”; T. Jefferson Kline, “Godard’s
as “intertextual terrorism.” As Morgan suggests, the abundance and diversity of these allusions, particularly in Godard’s films and videos since the late 1980s, can induce a profound sense of bewilderment, leading to an interpretive impasse. Morgan writes, 

Watching [Godard’s late work], we feel adrift amid vaguely present and confusing narratives, amid stunning images of natural and industrial beauty, and, most of all, amid a vast range of references and allusions to the history of literature, painting, philosophy, and cinema, seemingly too vast to negotiate . . . If there is a frequent impression, conveyed in part through weighty allusions and citations, that great things are at stake, that what Godard is doing is of the highest intellectual importance, there is also a nagging suspicion that it may all be in a sense, a sham, that we have gestures of seriousness instead of the genuine article. 

Indeed, if Godard’s citations exude a certain weightiness and difficulty, they also project a discomfiting offhandedness; his references to Faulkner often may be mistaken for a passing remark or a throwaway line. Yet, as Morgan suggests, these references are not trivial; rather, their opacity demands our attention in order to trace their intent and meaning. Amid the incalculable allusions to a variety of literary, cinematic, philosophical, and historical figures throughout Godard’s lengthy and prolific oeuvre, the references to Faulkner stand out for their obsessive frequency.


234 Qtd. in David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 312.

235 Morgan, Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema, 1.
In À bout de souffle (Breathless, 1959), Alphaville, une étrange aventure de Lemmy Caution (Alphaville, 1965), and Made in U.S.A. (1966), characters read and reenact passages from Faulkner’s novels. With a lightness characteristic of his early films, Godard’s reference to Faulkner in Breathless is playful and flirtatious. Patricia, played by Jean Seberg, asks Michel (Jean-Paul Belmondo), “You know William Faulkner?” to which Michel responds, “No, who’s he? Someone you slept with?” She goes on to cite a passage from Faulkner’s The Wild Palms, an allusion that has been analyzed at length by Catherine Gunther Kodat.236

In the spring of 1962, Godard hatched a plan to cast William Faulkner in an upcoming movie—a musical to be filmed in the United States, starring Gene Kelly and his then wife Anna Karina. In his sketch of the film, Karina plays a French actress who heads to the United States to seek out Gene Kelly and star in the movies. She arrives in New York and finds Kelly, who informs her that the musical comedy is a thing of the past. Godard said, “Then, I don’t know what, she needs money, she steals money, she meets people and it becomes a criminal episode. I would have wanted, for example, for her to get hired as a maid, or a gardener, or whatever, by Faulkner.”237 Godard’s scheme to cast Faulkner was abandoned after Faulkner’s death on July 6, 1962.

A few years later, drawing inspiration from the interwoven narratives of Faulkner’s The Wild Palms, Godard wanted to have the two films he shot in the summer of 1966, Made in U.S.A. and 2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle (2 or 3 Things I Know About Her), shown in alternating reels. Antoine de Baecque suggests Godard later realized this strategy of

alternating narratives in 1968’s *One + One* (known in the United States by the name *Sympathy for the Devil*). 2 ou 3 choses que je sais d’elle contains an explicit reference to Faulkner’s *The Wild Palms*. In his whispered voice-over narration, Godard ponders the arboreal backdrop of the film’s mise-en-scène, both wanting the trees in the shot to convey the same gravity as palms in Faulkner’s novel, while citing the characteristic intensity of Faulknerian heroines as a counterpoint to the banality of Juliette’s suburban lifestyle geared around consumerism and the joyless sex of prostitution: “There is foliage, and though Juliette is no Faulkner heroine, couldn’t it be as dramatically valid as the foliage in *Wild Palms*?” Indeed, *The Wild Palms*’ Charlotte Rittenmeyer, an artist with a fatal belief in romantic love and a problematic lack of concern for money, is almost Juliette’s antithesis.

As Godard’s films become more vigorous in their narrative experimentation, his references to Faulkner become increasingly abstruse. A reference to Faulkner appears in *Weekend* (1967), although viewers dependent on English subtitles may have difficulty identifying it. Godard’s intertitle reads “Lumiere d’Aoû,” also the title of Maurice Coindreau’s translation of Faulkner’s *Light in August*. The translator responsible for the English subtitles in the American edition of the DVD, however, apparently missed the reference to Faulkner’s novel, translating the intertitle as “August Light.” Indeed, the mistranslation (or missed translation, perhaps?) of “Lumière d’Août” as “August Light” may have affected the film’s scholarly reception. Take, for example, one scholar’s recent description of the intertitle, which misses the Faulkner reference entirely: “The scene ends with a title card that reads ‘Lumière d’Août’ invoking the cinematic inventor Auguste

“Étrange. C’est ça qu’on appelle un nouveau roman?” asks Patricia. Emile responds that he has no idea, but that it doesn’t matter because he knows where it came from and how it functions. In *Une Heure du Travail Littéraire*, we are told, a man who works at a bookstore memorizes bits of text on the job in the few seconds after customers purchase them; the resultant novel is an assemblage of textual snippets from one hour of work. While the bookstore worker started out by learning the alphabet and times tables, after thirty years on the job, he now reads Chomsky and Faulkner. This extract plays on definitions of literary work by foregrounding the labor of a bookstore worker—“une parti pratique de la production littéraire francaise,” as the film’s female protagonist Patricia reminds us. The novel’s assemblage of textual snippets underscores a model of literary creation that is explicit in its dependence on quotation.

Citations of Faulkner also persist throughout Godard’s late work, including *Grandeur et décadence d’un petit commerce de cinema* (1986). *Grandeur et décadence* features a procession of actors auditioning for a film that is supposed to be an adaptation of a pulp detective novel (James Hadley Chase’s *The Soft Center*), but the snippets of dialogue they

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239 Shana MacDonald, “Materiality and Metaphor: Rape in Anne Claire Poirier’s *Mourir à tue-tête* and Jean-Luc Godard’s *Weekend,*” in *Rape in Art Cinema*, ed. Dominique Russell (New York: Continuum, 2010), 58.

240 “[T]he practical piece of the French literary production.”
deliver are actually taken from Faulkner’s 1954 short story “Sepulture South: Gaslight.”

Even the protagonist of Grandeur et décadence, a frustrated screenwriter named Gaspard Bazin (no doubt an allusion to film critic and Cahiers du Cinema cofounder André Bazin, played by Jean-Pierre Léaud), evokes a young Faulkner in his appearance and styling.

As Céline Scemama’s online index of references further reveals, Godard alludes to Faulkner throughout Histoire(s) du cinéma (1988–98). Éloge de L’Amour (2001) features the aging couple Jean and Françoise, once heroes in the Resistance, who, in need of money, sell the rights to their story to Steven Spielberg. After the war, the couple changed their prewar last name, Samuel, to their Resistance name, Bayard. Bayard, of course, is also the name of one of Faulkner’s most frequently recurring characters; indeed, the name Bayard Sartoris, which, confusingly, is passed down through four generations of Yoknapatawphans, appears in a number of Faulkner’s stories, including Sartoris, Flags in the Dust, The Unvanquished, Requiem for a Nun, and The Town.

Godard’s career-long habit of referencing Faulkner continued in his 2010 work Film Socialisme. There are two instances where the movie’s dialogue is lifted directly from Maurice Coindreau’s translation of William Faulkner’s novel Light in August. One does not, however, find Faulkner’s name mentioned anywhere in Film Socialisme, nor in the film’s opening credits. In the credits, the Latinized Greek heading “TEXTOS” heralds a list of 34 names of literary, philosophical, and historical figures whose texts have presumably influenced the film, including “JP.SARTRE,” “W.BENJAMIN,” and “P.RICOEUR.” These

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credits abbreviate the first initial of each author’s name—perhaps a mere stylistic choice, but one that makes name recognition even more challenging as the credits swiftly pass before our eyes.

Godard’s version of a published script—the 107-page *Film Socialisme: Dialogues Avec Visages Auteurs*—obliquely acknowledges more of the film’s literary, philosophical, and historical sources. The book is as discursive, provocative, and richly allusive as the film it accompanies. It retains formal aspects of the film’s montage, juxtaposing images and text in a rhythmic and contrapuntal manner. The book renders the film’s dialogue as free verse, unpunctuated and unattached to a particular speaker. Interspersed throughout the text is a selection of screenshots and intertitles from the film, as well as paintings and photographs of a number of *auteurs* (including Faulkner), signaling where their work or ideas appear throughout the film’s dialogue. Nevertheless, these attributions are only available to readers who are able to identify these *auteurs* by *visage*. Two uncaptioned, unattributed photos of Faulkner appear next to the fragments of texts that Godard borrowed from *Light in August* for his film. Moreover, this method of attribution tempts *contrefaçon*, the French criminal offense for infringing upon *droits d’auteur*; as David Lefranc, a French attorney specializing in intellectual property, has noted, “A publisher who omits the name of an author could in theory face up to three years’ imprisonment.”

While it is quite difficult to identify all the *Light in August* references simply by viewing *Film Socialisme*, readers who examine *Film Socialisme: Dialogues Avec Visages Auteurs*—Jean Luc Godard, *Film Socialisme: Dialogues avec visages auteurs* (Paris: P.O.L., 2010).  

Auteurs may notice that two photos of the Southern author appear in the text. Upon closer examination, readers may then discover that each of these photos appears next to a bit of text that reworks a short excerpt from Coindreau’s *Lumière d’Août*. In Coindreau’s translation, the text reads, “*Elle n’a pas de mère, car le sang paternel haït, plein d’amour et d’orgueil, tandis que le sang maternel, plein de haine, aime et cohabite.*” In *Film Socialisme*, the *Light in August* quote is truncated, modified, and divided into two separated clauses: “Parce qu’il y a de l’amour et de l’orgueil dans le sang paternel et donc de la haine,” and “le sang maternel plein de haine aime et cohabite.” Each clause appears independently in the film’s second act, slipped seamlessly into monologues appearing a few minutes apart, spoken by different characters—the father (Jean-Jacques) and mother (Catherine) of the Martin family, respectively.

These excerpts point back to a short fragment from *Light in August*: “*She has no mother because fatherblood hates with love and pride, but motherblood with hate loves and cohabits.*” The fragment appears near the beginning of the novel, as readers have begun follow the journey of Lena Grove, a young woman who has set out on foot for Jefferson, Mississippi, from Alabama. There, Lena believes, despite much evidence to the contrary, she will find Lucas Burch, the father of her unborn child, who fled town after learning she was pregnant. While those she encounters along the way think her journey is hopeless, Lena’s intention to find Burch and raise their child together is steadfast. She proceeds with confident composure, exuding a disarming combination of willful ignorance and naïveté; her countenance is described as reflecting “an inwardlighted quality of tranquil and calm

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unreason and detachment.”²⁴⁷ Hoping to find a ride into town, Lena meets Jody Varner, who runs a store twelve miles from Jefferson. In the original text, the quote depicts Varner’s thoughts as to why and how Lena Grove’s kin could have left her in what he interprets to be a pitiable and beleaguered state—young, nearly penniless, pregnant, and traveling by foot from Alabama to Mississippi in order to track down Burch. *Light in August’s* montage of perspectives—a hallmark of Faulknerian narrative style—highlights the disparity between Lena’s narrative of her situation, and the views held by others. That is, the text demonstrates a narrative strategy that delegitimizes the authority of a singular interpretation by juxtaposing various interpretations of the same event, all which depend on partial and contingent knowledge.

Further, in Faulkner’s original text, the quote exhibits a typographic variation—the shift from roman to italic script to denote a relational shift between public and private consciousness. Throughout his oeuvre, Faulkner experimented with typographical variation, even incorporating visual iconography into his text in *As I Lay Dying* and *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner even hoped to use colored type in the *Sound and the Fury*, writing in a letter to his editor Ben Wasson, “I wish publishing was advanced enough to use colored ink . . . I’ll just have to save the idea until publishing grows up to it.”²⁴⁸ As Stephen M. Ross has noted, Faulkner’s use of italics constituted the author’s “most consistent play with print.” Ross writes: “Verbalized thoughts—that is, words in the mind that the thinker could plausibly utter—appear in single quotes. Italics, without quotation marks and usually without final punctuation, represent thought drawn from deeper levels of consciousness less amenable to

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

²⁴⁸ *Selected Letters of William Faulkner* 44–45.
voluntary control, thought that perhaps the character could not utter.”

Thus, it is in this private, unutterable layer of consciousness that Varner speculates that the fatherblood borne more prominently by her brother and father caused Lena Grove’s male kin to abandon her. If Lena’s mother were around, Varner speculates, she would not have been abandoned, as motherblood can “with hate love and cohabit”—a sentiment which, as the italics indicate, is formed at an unsayable level of consciousness.

The allusions to *Light in August* appear in the film’s second act, which opens with the camera trained on the father of the Martin family, Jean-Jacques, in the midst of a monologue. This is a likely eponym for Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the eighteenth-century philosopher who was credited as a screenwriter in Godard’s *Le Gai Savoir*. Jean-Jacques is discoursing on France’s failure to live up to the enlightenment ideal of *fraternité*. The Martin parents, we are told, are in the middle of an annual debate with their children. The debate recurs annually on August 4, the day when both Martin children, Florine and Lucien, were born. As Florine reminds us, August 4 is also a date of revolutionary significance—it is the date when, in 1789, the French National Constituent Assembly did away with feudalism, abolishing *droits particuliers* in favor of *droit commun*—a universally applicable common law.

In his monologue, Jean-Jacques appears both exasperated by his children’s antagonistic questioning and depressed by the topic up for debate: *fraternité*. To Jean-Jacques, France’s professed commitment to the enlightenment ideal of *fraternité* has become ridiculous. France is unable to conceive of itself as intrinsically related to a broader, collective self (“Il faut savoir dire ‘nous’ pour pouvoir dire ‘je’” [“It is necessary to know

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249 *Fiction’s Inexhaustible Voice* 148.
how to say ‘we’ in order to be able to say ‘I’”), and lacks the courage to think. Jean-Jacques suggests that after fifty years of wars, France is incapable of self-love—perhaps a nod to the Rousseauian concept of *amour-propre* which, when healthy, can benefit a society and sustain moral equality. On account of this, Jean-Jacques suggests, France is unable to love its neighbor. Says Jean-Jacques, “Il faudrait s’aimer soi-meme assez pour ne pas faire du mal au prochain. Aujourd’hui ça devient impossible” (“You have to love yourself enough in order to not hurt your neighbor. Today that becomes impossible”). Thus, amid this Rousseau-inflected dialogue, Jean-Jacques references Jody Varner’s supposition that *fatherblood* hates with love and pride: “Parce qu’il y a de l’amour et de l’orgueil dans le sang paternel, et donc de la haine.” Here, Jean-Jacques’s use of Faulkner refers to both the love- and pride-entrenched hatred France holds toward its European neighbors, as well as to the hostility between the Martin children and their parents. Faulknerian *fatherblood* plays on the double entendre of *fraternité*, in the literal sense of brotherhood as well as the philosophical concept that comprises one-third of France’s motto.

A few minutes later in the film, we encounter Catherine in the midst of a monologue, presumably in response to another question her children have posed in the debate. Catherine explains how she goes through the motions of life as a means of self-preservation, keeping her own existential awareness of life at bay in order to keep the illusion of time and space intact: “Oui, pour les garder intacts, l’espace et le temps, j’ai menti. Je néglige de les vivre . . .” (“Yes, to keep them intact, space and time, I lied . . . I neglect to live them”). Later, Catherine references *Light in August*’s Lena Grove, though not by name, as a character who

undergoes a similar form of detachment:

Il y a un personnage, celui de la Mère, à qui, par contre, il n’importe nullement d’avoir une vie si l’on considère le fait d’avoir une vie comme une fin en soi. Elle ne doute pas elle, pas le moins du monde, d’être encore vivante. Il ne lui vient jamais à l’idée de se demander comment et pourquoi, ni de quelle manière elle l’est. Elle n’a pas conscience, en somme, d’être un personnage car elle n’est jamais, même pendant un seul instant, détachée de son rôle. Elle ne sait pas qu’elle a un rôle . . . Mais voilà: le sang maternel, plein de haine, aime et cohabite.\textsuperscript{251}

Like Lena Grove, Catherine’s disconnection from reality is justifiable as a mechanism of maternal survival. Nevertheless, Lena and Catherine exhibit crucial differences. First, Catherine’s narrative reflects her critical awareness of her everyday deceit, whereas Lena’s does not; Catherine articulates her process of disengagement almost as one would reflect on cognitively dissonant behavior with a therapist. Second, in contrast to Lena, Catherine is bourgeois—she owns a garage with her husband, is a politician with aspirations to run for office, drives a new MINI Cooper, and is evidently educated enough to cite Faulkner off the cuff. Moreover, Lena’s numbness to reality is ultimately vindicated within the narrative of \textit{Light in August}—although she does not find Lucas Burch, in the end her unswerving faith in

\footnote{\textsuperscript{251}“There’s a character, the Mother, who could care less if she has a life, if life is considered an end in itself. She doesn’t have the slightest doubt that she is still alive. It never occurs to her to wonder how and why or in what way she is. In short, she is not aware of being a character because she has never, not even for a moment, been detached from her role. She doesn’t know she has a role. But there you are: maternal blood, full of hatred, loves and lives together.”}
both her journey and in the hospitality of others does not betray her. *Film Socialisme*, on the other hand, does not vindicate Catherine’s turn away from reality. Instead, Catherine’s detached mode of living is coded within the film’s larger critique of turning away from unpleasant political and social realities and the injustices of war, a way of life that we are to understand is concomitant with capitalism.

As I have shown, *Film Socialisme*’s engagement of *Light in August* suggests a double-edged view of language. As the excerpts deployed in Jean-Jacques’s and Catherine’s monologues show, language is a medium that can fail to represent the world around us and allow us to construct simple narratives that insulate us from reality. Language gives us recourse to convenient mottos like *fraternité*, even when we treat our neighbors terribly. There remains, however, a glimmer of hope at the bottom of Godard’s linguistic Pandora’s box. Through his use of Faulkner, Godard demonstrates his faith in a particular type of narrative—one that permits contradiction and gives voice to a range of perspectives, and even multiple registers of consciousness. Godard’s commitment to language finds expression in a narrative style that is deliberately inconvenient; put otherwise, it is a language that contests the very limits of language itself.

In *Adieu au Langage* (2014), Godard’s latest work, Faulkner’s name appears in the closing credits. Thus, Godard’s allusions to Faulkner persist from his first feature to his most recent. While there is no consistent form for Godard’s allusions to Faulkner, they appear to be deliberately abstruse; they often tend to be so fleeting that they may hardly seem worth commenting on, or so opaque that they remain unrecognized, or even misrecognized. Godard’s allusions to Faulkner persistently position his films in dialogue with the Southern author’s fiction. Perhaps this could be read as a decades-long homage. Nevertheless,
Godard’s Faulknerian allusions simultaneously convey a certain impertinence, both in their fleeting offhandedness as well as their infidelity to original source material.

In an interview with the French magazine Les Inrockuptibles, Godard sketches out Film Socialisme’s method of appropriating and redeploying source materials:

Dans mon film, il y a un autre type d’emprunts, pas des citations mais simplement des extraits. Comme une piqûre lorsqu’on prend un échantillon de sang pour l’analyser . . . C’est pas une citation . . . c’est un extrait que je prends, que j’incorpore ailleurs pour qu’il prenne un autre sens.252

By distinguishing between citation and extraction, Godard is explicit: his extractions in Film Socialisme avoid a one-to-one correspondence with original source material. Thus, the extractions function tropologically, turning and twisting the authorial intention of source material in order to signify anew. Godard’s continued citation of Faulkner also evoke an earlier tradition of postwar film criticism in which the names of authors functioned as a trope to signify the aspirations of a cinema that endeavored to be more modernist and literary in its poetics.

Varda and the Origins of the Nouvelle Vague

Although Varda was an outsider to postwar film journals and ciné-clubs, Bazin

252 “In my film, there is another type of borrowing, not citations but simply extracts. Like the prick of a needle when they take a blood sample for analysis . . . [It is] not a citation . . . it is an extract that I take, that I incorporate elsewhere so that it takes on another meaning.” Jean-Marc Lalanne, “Le droit d’auteur? Un auteur n’a que des devoirs,” Les Inrockuptibles, 10 May 2010, http://blogs.lesinrocks.com/cannes2010/2010/05/18/le-droit-dauteur-un-auteur-naque-des-devoirs-jean-luc-godard/.
heralded *La Pointe Courte* as the answer to the *nouvelle avant-garde* that the critics of *Objectif 49* had envisioned. While Bazin fêted the accomplishment of *La Pointe Courte*, the younger generation of critics were less impressed. As Kelley Conway points out, Truffaut, who had not yet released a film of his own, wrote a critique of *La Pointe Courte* that was “oddly malicious”; Truffaut criticized Varda’s direction of actors as “uncertain,” her cinematography as “a little too framed,” and even made fun of her appearance, comparing her looks to the film’s male lead, Philippe Noiret (qtd. in Conway 25). The Young Turks’ lukewarm engagement with the film was also evident in 1959, when critics from *Cahiers du Cinéma* held a roundtable discussion to discuss Alain Resnais’ film *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959). The discussion opened by referencing American literature as a way to calibrate the innovation of Resnais’ modernist narrative:

Rohmer: I think everyone will agree with me if I start by saying that *Hiroshima* is a film about which you can say everything.

Godard: So let’s start by saying that it’s literature.

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253 Wrote Bazin: “C’est une œuvre dont nous aurons certainement à reparler longuement, mais dont nous pouvons dire déjà en cette occasion qu’elle illustre bien la notion d’avant-garde telle que nous cherchions à la définir au temps d’Objectif 49” (“Agnès et Roberto”). (“It is a work which we will certainly be discussing for a long time, but of which we can already say on this occasion that it well illustrates the notion of the avant-garde that we were trying to define at the time of Objectif 49.”)

254 The critics included Jean Domarchi, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Jean-Luc Godard, Pierre Kast, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer.
Rohmer: And a kind of literature that is a little dubious, in so far as it imitates the American school that was so fashionable in Paris after 1945.\textsuperscript{255}

In the discussion, the Cahiers critics described Hiroshima as unlike any other film in the history of cinema; Godard described the film as “totally devoid of any cinematic references. You can describe Hiroshima as Faulkner plus Stravinsky, but you can’t identify it as such and such a film-maker plus such and such another.” The critics at the roundtable touted Hiroshima as the first film to translate the psychologically-splintered and discordant modernist aesthetic previously achieved only through other media – from Picasso’s Guernica, to the music of Stravinsky, to the literature of Faulkner – into sound cinema. Said Rohmer:

To sum up, Alain Resnais is a cubist. I mean that he is the first modern film-maker of the sound film. There were many modern filmmakers in silent films: Eisenstein, the Expressionists, and Dreyer too. But I think that sound films have perhaps been more classical than silent. There has not yet been any profoundly modern cinema that attempts to do what cubism did in painting and the American novel in literature, in other words a kind of reconstitution of reality out of a kind of splintering which could have seemed quite arbitrary to the uninitiated. And on this basis one could explain

\textsuperscript{255} Here, Rohmer is diminutively referring to Nouveau Roman, the group with which Hiroshima’s screenwriter Marguerite Duras was affiliated (Hillier, 59). Dorota Ostrowska’s Reading the French New Wave discusses the Nouveau Roman and Nouvelle Vague’s parallel engagement of American literary modernism.
Resnais’ interest in *Guernica*…and also the fact that Faulkner or Dos Passos may have been the inspiration, even if it was by way of Marguerite Duras.\(^\text{256}\)

Nevertheless, as the roundtable wears on, Godard modifies the record:

Godard: There is one film that must have given Alain Resnais something to think about, and what’s more, he edited it: *La Pointe courte*.

Rivette: Obviously. But I don’t think it’s being false to Agnès Varda to say that by virtue of the fact that Resnais edited *La Pointe courte* his editing itself contained a reflection on what Agnès Varda had intended. To a certain degree *Agnès varda* becomes a fragment of Alain Resnais, and *Chrismarker* too.\(^\text{257}\)

While Agnès Varda’s *La Pointe Courte* is briefly mentioned in the discussion, it is fascinating that none of the critics at the roundtable seemed to recognize that *La Pointe Courte*\(^\text{258}\) – which, as Godard mentioned, Resnais had himself edited four years earlier – had already succeeded in bringing Faulknerian modernism to the big screen. Further, when one rereads this transcript of the roundtable with *La Pointe Courte* in mind, it is striking that so many of the characteristics that the *Cahiers* critics assign to Resnais’ *Hiroshima Mon Amour* – the film’s lack of cinematic reference, its revival of Eisensteinian montage in the age of sound cinema, its “dialectical unity” – were also qualities of Varda’s film. Furthermore, the similarity in personnel between the two films went further than just Alain Resnais; Anne

\(^{256}\) Qtd in Hillier 61.

\(^{257}\) Ibid. 66.

\(^{258}\) Conway 142.
Sarraute, who had edited *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, had gotten her start assisting Resnais on Varda’s *La Pointe Courte*. Hiroshima’s screenwriter, Duras had been in the audience for *La Pointe Courte*’s preview screening at Studio Parnassus in 1956, along with Nathalie Sarraute, Anne’s mother.¹ It was only after working as an editor on *La Pointe Courte* that Resnais began to collaborate with writers associated with the Nouveau Roman: Jean Cayrol, Marguerite Duras and Alain Robbe-Grillet to work on his subsequent projects *Nuit et Brouillard* (1955), *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) and *L’Année Dernière à Marienbad* (1961). We can even see echoes of *La Pointe Courte* in Hiroshima’s interweaving of the private world of love and subjective memory juxtaposed against the collective memory of war as represented by documentary footage.²⁵⁹ We may even notice that, like *La Pointe Courte*, the female and male protagonist of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* are not given names, and are referred to only as “elle” and “lui.” Years later, Varda would explain how Resnais almost turned down working on *La Pointe Courte* because “ce cinéma correspondait trop à ce que lui-même rêvait de faire.”²⁶⁰

By understanding how the directors and critics affiliated with the *Nouvelle Vague* used Faulkner and American modernist literature as a central reference point and model for what the cinema could become, we can better understand the *longue durée* and transmedial

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²⁵⁹ Varda would herself recognize something of *La Pointe Courte*’s narrative strategy, aimed at affording the spectator greater agency in constructing their own interpretation, echoed in Resnais’ *Marienbad*. Said Varda in a 1962 interview with screenwriter Pierre Uytterhoeven: “It was neither allegorical nor symbolic, just a feeling you get from reading which moves back and forth between these two stories. It’s up to the reader to be able to reorganize these feelings. It’s exactly like what Resnais is asking of his audience in Marienbad.” Uytterhoeven, Pierre “Agnès Varda from 5 to 7” (qtd. in Agnès Varda: Interviews, 34)

²⁶⁰ “This cinema corresponded too closely to what he himself had dreamed of making.” (Bounoure 140, qtd. in Emma Wilson, *Alain Resnais*).
impact of American modernism as it continued to be vibrantly engaged in French postwar film culture. But more importantly, this history is essential to reconstructing the gravity and consequence of Varda’s innovative film *La Pointe Courte* where it has been obscured. When I interviewed Varda in the summer of 2013, I mentioned to her that Godard had continued to cite Faulkner in his films, including his most recent film at the time, *Film Socialisme*. Varda quickly replied, “Yes, but they’re just citations.” I was surprised by the sharpness of her response, but I also understood it. Her outsider status – as a stranger to French film ciné-clubs and film journals, as a photographer, and indeed, as a woman – has meant that she is often cast in a secondary or tangential role to the *Nouvelle Vague* – its mother or grandmother, or part of a Left Bank offshoot. Nevertheless, it was this same outsider status, which meant she was unencumbered by the baggage of cinematic conventions, that made it possible for her to translate the modernist montage of Faulkner onscreen, which, in turn, inaugurated a series of American modernist or *nouveau roman*-inspired films by Godard and Resnais that would be celebrated as some of the most important films of the French New Wave. To trace this historical trajectory is to understand that Varda is not the *Nouvelle Vague’s* grandmother, but its architect.
CHAPTER 4
CULTURAL MOBILITY AND POLYPHONIC POETICS
IN TARIQ TEGUIA’S ROME PLUTÔT QUE VOUS

Tariq Teguia’s Rome Plutôt Que Vous (2006) begins on the road — a coastal highway at dusk, to be more precise. A long take sweeps between an inland view of nondescript hillside brush, panning slowly to the other side of the road towards the water, the first of several ocean-facing vistas in the film. The view of the ocean is temporary, however; the camera shifts and roves upwards to the sky, then toggles back inland to face the hillside brush. At the very outset of Rome Plutôt Que Vous, the spectator is in motion; as the Algerian director has said, the film is a “slow-motion road movie.”  The film’s dominant locus, and the site of the film’s first and last scenes, is a car.

The oscillating gaze of the film’s opening scene, drifting between the opposing horizons of ocean and land, is suggestive of Rome Plutôt Que Vous’s deeply ambivalent outlook on life beyond its borders, even amidst the profound distressing conditions of life during Algeria’s civil war. Known as la sale guerre (“the dirty war”), the war between Algerian government and Islamist rebels claimed up to an estimated 200,000 casualties between 1991 to 2002 – including extreme acts of violence against journalists, foreigners,

and civilians. Set in the midst of this war, the film follows two young Algerians, Kamel (Rachid Amrani) and Zina (Samira Kaddour), as they take to the road on a quixotic quest for false papers with which they hope to leave the country. The choice between heeding the siren call of life abroad or tending to affairs at home is as ancient as Homeric epic. Nevertheless, as *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* compels us to imagine, the cognitive dissonance surrounding each route is particularly acute for young Algerians, who must navigate a multitude of conflicting political vectors and existential challenges, including the symbolic weight of their country’s occupation and decolonization, and the omnipresent violence and rise of Islamic militancy in its civil war-embroiled political present. Like the shifting camera movement, the film leaves these questions undecided.

*Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, Teguia’s first feature length film, voices a range of competing perspectives on life within and beyond Algerian borders, in part, through a handful of cultural and literary allusions. Interspersed throughout the film are fleeting intertextual references to a panoply of European and American authors and cultural figures, including Chester Himes, D.H. Lawrence, Eldridge Cleaver, and Franz Kafka, a poetic strategy

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262 Joseph McGonagle, for example, has also written about the significance of this particular camera movement, although his analysis differs considerably from mine. McGonagle notes a right to left camera movement that mirrors the direction of Arabic script, and interprets the meandering gaze of the camera serves as “a warning that Teguia will thwart any desire for teleology amongst viewers and eschew the linearity that characterizes more conventional road movies.” See *Open Roads, Closed Borders* 90.

263 While the film makes reference to other western countries in Europe, as well as Australia, the intertextual references in *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, this chapter will not analyze the references to D.H. Lawrence and Franz Kafka in *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, focusing instead on the citations of Chester Himes, Eldridge Cleaver, and Archie Shepp. Nevertheless, Teguia’s fleeting reference to Kafka’s *Amerika* adds an intriguing, dystopian layer to the film’s intertextual depiction of emigration to the United States. In Kafka’s unfinished novel, a young German immigrant arrives in the United States to escape scandal at home and find a better life; nevertheless, he is perplexed by the people and customs he encounters, is buffeted
which, as a number of scholars have noted, recalls the literary allusions of films by Jean-Luc Godard. In *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, these transnational intertexts signal the extreme cultural mobility characteristic of an increasingly globalized world, highlighting the promiscuous flow of ideas and obscure literary references across increasingly porous borders – indexing a transnationalism that mirrors the movie’s production, a joint effort between French, German and Algerian film organizations.

Nevertheless, these literary and cultural references are also more than just generic signifiers for the transnational flow of information – they also function as a form of indirect critique. Indeed, all three Americans referenced in *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* — Chester Himes, Eldridge Cleaver, and Archie Shepp — were African-Americans who mobilized their artistic and literary voices in order to shed light on anti-black racism in the United States. In addition, each wrote texts or performed music that served to critique or raise awareness of injustices perpetrated within the American prison system. Finally, all three were, at some point in their careers, expatriate artists and writers who spent a significant amount of time outside of the United States.

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264 Austin 132.


266 These works include Himes’ *Cast the First Stone*, Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, and Archie Shepp’s *Attica Blues* (1972)
Scholars have cited *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*’ allusions to the 1969 festival as evocative of a romantic era in Algerian history when the country was a revolutionary success story, a beacon of postcolonial independence, and the “acme of Algerian cultural influence,” as Guy Austin writes.\(^{267}\) As such, the references are taken to highlight the starkness in contrast between the optimism of then and the bleakness of Algeria’s civil war-embroiled present: “the cultural flowering derived from the revolution that is mourned as lost, in this brief echo of 1969.”\(^{268}\)

While such explanations are valid, they tend to overlook how these references invoke the historical context of a shared Algerian and African-American discourse in the global fight for freedom against colonial oppression.\(^{269}\) Rather, I contend that Teguia’s intertextual references to Himes, Cleaver, and Shepp direct us towards African-American perspectives on American racism which, by extension, function as a form of indirect critique against American governance and societal injustice. By deploying the written and musical productions of African-American artists to critique the United States, *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* creates distance between the voice of cinematic auteur, the character redeploying the citation, and the cited work or referenced cultural figure. As such, the citation allows the film eschew ham-fisted didacticism, avoiding the reductiveness of one-sided narratives which might, for example, posit a utopic view of globalization, or conversely pit the desperation and limitations at home against the wealth of opportunities abroad. Neither does the film posit a

\(^{267}\) Austin 132; in McGonagle 97, and Evans and Phillips 97-8.

\(^{268}\) Austin 132.

\(^{269}\) McGonagle’s analysis of the film raises the significance of this constellation of references, but does not pursue it further: “Whilst the narrative never quite clarifies the continued salience of such links between Algeria and the US, the exuberance of that period of Algerian history…certainly feels distinctly distant,” *Open Roads, Closed Borders* 98.
nationalist narrative, celebrating the local as the site of resistance, diminishing Algeria’s
global interdependence. Rather, the film both acknowledges the hardship of daily life in
Algeria while deploying literary and cultural allusions to evoke a matrix of African-
American expression that has condemned systematic injustice in the United States, including
mass incarceration, police brutality, and discrimination. In so doing, the film creates a
dialectical opposition, both making the case for why emigration is such a compelling option
for young Algerians, all while revealing the naiveté inherent to the idealization of life in the
so-called developed world. Thus, I argue that these references signify polyphonically,
offering competing truths about the benefits and drawbacks of what it means for goods and
humans to travel across borders. In so doing, the intertexts constitute a vital element of Rome
Plutôt Que Vous’ complex and indeterminate portrait of human, cultural, and commercial
mobility as it plays out in the context of contemporary Algeria. The moral field of the film
remains, to a certain extent, discursively open, leaving space for the agency of the spectator
to consider for herself the complicated field of options and obstacles offered to young
Algerians in the midst of a gruesome civil war.

**Algerian and African-American Discursive Sympathies**

While the film does not make the historical context explicit, Teguia’s allusions to
Himes, Cleaver and Shepp conjure a long tradition of discursive ties between African-
Americans and native Algerians, who endured parallel struggles against oppression,
colonization, and structural racism. For example, both African-Americans and Algerians

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270 As Lionnet and Shih have noted, local and global studies, when confronted by the
transnational, tend to retreat to some permutation of this narrative, “romanticiz[ing] the local
as not necessarily pure but stubbornly the site of resistance.” Minor Transnationalism 9.
were victims of discriminatory black codes that upheld a matrix of racial privilege at their expense. In 1865, after the end of the American Civil War, numerous Southern states passed black codes in order to restrict the legal rights of African Americans, upholding white supremacy after the end of slavery. Just five years later in 1870, France enacted a comparable set of laws on its colony in Algeria – the *Code de l’Indigénat*, which afforded French colonial settlers a privileged status and restricted the human and civil rights of Algerian natives.²⁷¹ Nearly a century later, both Algerians and African-Americans would achieve major victories in the 1960s, as the Algerian war for independence would occur on a timeline that roughly paralleled major landmarks in the U.S. Civil Rights movement. After a bloody seven-year war and more than 130 years of occupation, Algerians achieved independence in 1962, just one year prior to the March on Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, both Algerian and African-American activists, cultural theorists, and writers began to detail continuities between the Algerian struggle for independence and African-American freedom movements. Among the earliest writers to examine the connection was Frantz Fanon, whose work reveals an abiding fascination with the fiction of Chester Himes – both Himes’ early social novels as well as the *romans policiers* published in Gallimard’s *Série noire*, which earned him fame throughout the French-speaking world. Fanon’s *Peau Noir, Masques Blanches* (1952) referenced Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) and Chester Himes’ *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945).²⁷² According to Fanon biographers, the Martinican psychiatrist’s fascination with Himes could

²⁷¹ Slavin 8.

²⁷² See *Black Skin, White Masks* 118; 134.
be observed as he was a professor at the University of Tunis, where Fanon was a professor from 1959 to 1960 while he continued his work for the FLN during the Algerian War for Independence.²⁷³ There, he taught a course on “The Social Psychology of the Black World;” and, according to biographer Irene Gendzier, he “would come carrying books by Chester Himes in the French Série Noire edition, and his citations suggested that he knew the material well.”²⁷⁴ In another Fanon biography, Alice Cherki stated that his lectures in this course were “mainly about Chester Himes.”²⁷⁵,²⁷⁶ The fiction of Himes and Richard Wright helped to expand Fanon’s understanding of racism and violence; as David Macey suggested in his biography of Fanon, novels, including those written by Himes and Wright were the Martinican writer’s “main – if not sole – source of information about life in the United States.”²⁷⁷

In turn, African-American writers and political activists would come to see themselves in the Algerian struggle, and sympathize with the violent post-independence backlash against Algerians.²⁷⁸ In 1959, Hoyt Fuller, then the editor of the Negro Digest, 


²⁷⁵ Cherki 125; qtd. in Thomas 220.

²⁷⁶ Although it has yet to be discovered, in an interview, Chester Himes referenced the existence of a Fanon-authored article on the treatment of violence in Himes’ novels. Conversations with Chester Himes, 78.

²⁷⁷ Macey 125.

wrote that the African-American freedom movement and Algerian independence movements were “the same war.” As Algeria was on the brink of independence, black expatriate writers in Paris witnessed anti-Algerian sentiment boil to the surface in two major acts of state-sponsored massacres: the October 17, 1961 massacre of an estimated 300 peaceful Algerians demonstrating against police repression, and the February 8, 1962 killings of nine anti-fascist Communist-leaning activists and sympathizers at the Charonne metro station. It was in the summer of 1962 that, as Alice Kaplan has reminded us, a young Angela Davis arrived in Paris after her first year at Brandeis, just in time to witness the full force of French hatred and violence against Algerians. Of her experience at a pro-Algeria rally in Paris, Davis wrote: “When the flics broke it up with their high power water hoses, they were as vicious as the redneck cops in Birmingham who met the Freedom Riders with their dogs and hoses.” Indeed, as Tyler Stovall would note much later, “the Algerian war effectively buried the myth of colorblind France for African American expatriates.” Although African-American expatriate writer William Gardner Smith’s 1963 novel The Stone Face remains relatively unknown, a number of scholars, including Kristin Ross, Tyler Stovall, and Lia Brozgal have argued for the novel’s significance as one of the earliest and only accounts of the October 17, 1961 massacre. The novel took on special importance in light of the

279 Qtd. in Meghelli 100.

280 Kaplan 157.

281 Davis 122.


283 Of The Stone Face, Kristin Ross writes, “It is a mark of the success surrounding the official blackout of information about October 17 that Smith’s novel, written by a foreigner
French state’s historical suppression of the massacre – both in the omission of important details in French official accounts and severe restrictions placed on access to police archives.\textsuperscript{284}

The Algerian struggle for independence would serve as an important model for the Black Panthers, who demanded an end to the occupation of their own communities in Oakland and across the United States, subject to what Eldridge Cleaver would call “community imperialism.”\textsuperscript{285} The works of Fanon became available in English in 1963 with the Grove Press publication of \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, which the Black Panthers used to educate and train their members in the revolutionary ideology and practices of the FLN, along with Gillo Pontecorvo’s \textit{La Bataille d’Alger} (1965).\textsuperscript{286} As Eldridge Cleaver reminded readers in a 1970 pamphlet on Black Panther Party ideology, it was only after studying the work of Frantz Fanon that Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale would begin to apply his

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\textsuperscript{284} For a thoroughgoing discussion of the French state repression of records related to October 17, 1961, see House and MacMaster, “General Introduction.”

\textsuperscript{285} See, for example, Cleaver, Eldridge, “Pig Power Structure Uptight,” 1.

perspectives on colonialism to the African-American struggle.\textsuperscript{287,288}

The apex of African-American and Algerian cultural and political solidarity arguably occurred in 1969 with the Festival Panafricain d’Alger, which opened on July 21, 1969 – the same day that Americans landed on the moon.\textsuperscript{289,290} The festival, organized by the Organization of African Unity, lasted 10 days and 10 nights and featured more than 10,000 visitors from over thirty African countries, the Americas, the Caribbean, Europe, and Asia who were interested in the liberation of Africa. Amidst an ocean of delegates, the Black Panthers were especially visible, having been authorized by Mohammed Ben Yaya, Algeria’s Minister of Information, to set up an exhibit in a government-owned office building in downtown Algiers.\textsuperscript{291} Thousands of visitors passed through the Black Panther-run Afro-American Center on Rue Mourad Didouche, “a chic office with large plate glass display windows in downtown Algiers,” as Black Panther Party Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver recalled.\textsuperscript{292} In addition to the Cleavers, BPP Chief of Staff David Hilliard was in attendance, as was Minister of Culture Emory Douglas, whose revolutionary artwork was on display. Julia Hervé, Richard Wright’s daughter, was also on hand at the Center to help with

\textsuperscript{287} On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party, Part 1, 5-6.


\textsuperscript{291} “Back to Africa,” 213.

\textsuperscript{292} Ibid.
French language translation and to help host lectures and discussions. After the festival, reports of the Center’s popularity surfaced in American press: “The Center was jammed every hour of the day, as long as the doors remained open,” reported the Village Voice. “Algerians pushed in to look at an exhibit of photographs of Huey Newton, Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, Charles Garry, and assorted less well-known Panthers and friends.

In addition to the Black Panthers, African-American musicians were in attendance at the festival, including Nina Simone and Archie Shepp. Rome Plutôt Que Vous pays homage to the African-American presence in Algeria through the inclusion of “Brotherhood at Ketchaoua,” a track off of Archie Shepp’s Live at the PanAfrican Festival album, as well as a through a reference to Eldridge Cleaver, who was also present for the festival. Live at the PanAfrican Festival would become a landmark recording, released on the French jazz label BYG, and the first of six live free jazz performances in the label’s Actuel series. Prior to the

293 Meghelli, Samir. ““A Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation,” 176.


295 The festival, along with Shepp’s music, were captured in two documentary films by William Klein, Festival Panafricain d’Alger (1969), which commissioned by the Algerian government, and Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther (1970).
festival, Shepp had established his voice in black freedom struggles through albums including *Fire Music* (1965), which featured the elegiac track “Malcolm Malcolm Semper Malcolm,” the African-inspired album *The Magic of Ju-ju* (1967), and *Kwanza* (1969). The performance at the PanAfrican festival continued in a similar vein, introduced by the African-American poets Ted Joans and Don Lee (Haki Madhubuti), who read texts that addressed the theme of the return to Africa. As Joans announced to the crowd, “We are still Black and we have come back. *Nous sommes revenus.* We have come back and brought back to our land, Africa, the music of Africa. Jazz is a Black Power!...Jazz is an African Power!” Shepp’s performance with Touareg musicians would be met with raucous applause from the more than 3,000 spectators in attendance the performance held in the largest hall of Algiers, including the president Boumedi, “(peut-être) le premier chef d’Etat amateur de Nouveau-jazz,” remarked Daniel Sauvaget in the September 1969 issue of *Jazz-Hot.* Sauvaget noted the historic gravity of the performance: “Cette rencontre constitue mieux qu’un symbole; c’est un véritable événement musical et une des productions

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296 In addition to being a poet, Lee co-founded the Third World Press in 1967, now one of the largest black-owned independent presses in the United States. In 1974, he adopted the name to Haki Madhubuti, derived from Swahili words meaning “justice” and “precise, accurate and dependable.”


299 “...(perhaps) the first head of state [who is a] fan of New Jazz.” Sauvaget 32.
Cleaver had recently relocated to Algiers after spending eight months in Cuba, a fugitive after an April 1968 shootout between the Panthers and Oakland police officers. The shootout, which occurred two days after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., left 18-year-old Panther Bobby Hutton dead and four wounded. *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* alludes to Cleaver’s presence, perhaps ironically, through the speech of a police officer, played by veteran Algerian actor Ahmed Benaïssa. The officer tells Kamel, “Ceux qui ont fait l’Amérique savaient ce qu’ils fuyaient, sans imaginer ce qu’ils recherchaient. Quelqu’un de bien informé me l’a dit: Eldridge Cleaver.” He goes on to say that he met Cleaver in 1970, when he was living in exile in Algeria, a menace to the American state. This citation of Cleaver both invokes the history of Cleaver’s presence in Algeria, while lodging a critique of the United States – an opinion bolstered by the authority of the “bien informé” expert on

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300. *This meeting constituted more than a symbol; it was a veritable musical event and one of the most important productions of the festival*” Sauvaget 32.

301. “Those who founded America knew what they were fleeing, without imagining what they were looking for. Someone well-informed told me that: Eldridge Cleaver.”
American injustice, Eldridge Cleaver. The fact that this statement comes from the mouth of an Algerian police officer adds a layer of complexity to the reference to Cleaver, however, particularly given the Black Panther’s inimical relationship to law enforcement and the already suspect position of police officers in the film. As McGonagle has noted, the caution that the young Algerians display in the film speaks to their mistrust of Algerian police and the state that they uphold, perhaps representative of the unknown but widely feared group of individuals known as le pouvoir who make the majority of important decisions in the country. In addition, the fact that the police officer is much older and citing a 1970 encounter with Cleaver also highlights a generational divide that separates the political world of Algeria in the wake of independence and the concerns of the civil-war embroiled present.

The references to Cleaver, Himes, Shepp, and the Festival Panafricain d’Alger contribute to a more or less consistent picture of African-American artists and writers who moved beyond the United States, through pilgrimages, living in exile, and expatriation, either to combat or escape American racial injustice. As such, these references serve as an antithetical counterpoint to the narrative arc of Rome Plutô Que Vous, which hinges around Kamel’s desire to leave Algeria for the West in search of better opportunities. The omnipresence of imported goods only amplifies this perspective, from the borrowed Volvo in which Kamel and Zina cruise around the suburbs of Algiers, to the Spanish matches they depend on to light their stoves. In one of the film’s opening scenes, Zina is making coffee in the kitchen—a familiar cinematic milieu for depicting the labor and lived experience of women, like Maria in Umberto D. or Chantal Akerman’s Jeanne Dielman. But unlike Maria and Jeanne Dielman, Zina’s attempt to make coffee is foiled by material constraints. There is

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302 See McGonagle 96.
no running water in the kitchen faucet so she must use bottled water to fill her Moka espresso pot, and the matches that she tries to use to light the stove will not catch fire. Zina asks her mother why she didn’t purchase Spanish matches, to which her mother replies that they weren't available. Zina makes do; after borrowing a lighter from her father, she makes coffee, and moves on with her day. Nevertheless, the scene has delicately brought to light the unreliability of utilities and infrastructure in present-day Algeria, where the consumer goods on offer are inferior to what can be purchased abroad.

Figures 4.4 and 4.5: Stills from *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*. Zina struggles to light the stove with faulty matches.

In *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, the threat of violence is ubiquitous. Zina’s mother warns her to watch where she sits on the bus, for fear of bombs. Guns are exchanged by anonymous hands. There are allusions to massacres, both past and present, near Algiers. In one scene, we see Kamel seated at a bar, reading a newspaper with a headline about a massacre. In another scene, a police officer rattles off a list of sites of massacres as a way to admonish Kamel for wanting to head abroad in the face of atrocities at home. Later, we see a young man rehearsing and revising a speech about jihad in his downtime at work. Despite the omnipresence of violence, the film does not cash in on the cinematic spectacle of it; the threat of terror is deliberately muted, turned down to an almost ambient level. The strategy to subdue the specter of violence in Algeria is evident from one of the opening scenes of the film, through a play-acted execution, performed with no ammunition and no
death. Similarly, in the film’s final scene, we are led to believe that Kamel has been shot; nevertheless, we see no blood or any visual evidence that he has been shot, only the sound of a gunshot and the image of fleeing assailants. The only physical evidence that we see that suggests a violent act has been committed is an image of a body (presumably that of Bosco, the man with the counterfeit travel documents they have been searching for) lying face-down – again, no blood or death-stricken face on display to confirm a murder has been committed – only the implication. In this way, the film refuses to sensationalize violence, calibrating it almost to the level of background noise. Instead, the threat of terrorism is portrayed almost as ubiquitous and therefore unremarkable, an annoyance that one must learn to endure in Algeria, like high unemployment, faucets that don’t bring water, and matches that do not light.

Figure 4.6: Still from Rome Plutôt Que Vous. The front page of the newspaper tells of a massacre near Algiers.

While the motivation for emigration looms large throughout Rome Plutôt Que Vous, nevertheless, so do the barriers that occlude the possibility of transoceanic migration. One of the recurring oceanfront vistas of the film shipping yards at dusk, where anonymous bodies race around clandestinely, both a site of commerce, and illicit emigration. In the shipping yards, we witness the arrest of someone who is trying to smuggle himself aboard a shipping
container. As Zina has reminded us earlier in the film, “L’argent et les merchandises voyagent, pas les hommes.” In an era of globalization, free trade, and capitalism, mobility is both abundant and limited; the rights of business and consumer goods supercede those of people.

The fantasy inherent to Kamel’s desire to travel is underscored in one of the film’s opening sequences, as he sits to have his picture taken; his deadpan expression, the close-up mugshot framing with a bright blue background recall an identification photo, perhaps for a passport. Nevertheless, the film cuts from the close-up shot and transitions to a wider angle shot, revealing that the backdrop is actually an artificial beachfront landscape; the brightly saturated cerulean is actually a small section of a giant poster of a palm tree-shaded sandy shore. Shiny visible folds in the backdrop highlight the artifice of the mise-en-scène. The montage, which juxtaposes the pursuit of identification materials against a postcard-perfect landscape, stitches Kamel’s quest to emigrate to the naïve and deceptive promise offered by an exotic destination – a dream that, as the film’s final scene suggests, is ultimately futile. This cinematic suture conveys an attractive but patently defective idealism, a perspective that will echo throughout the film’s treatment of how young Algerians imagine life in the West.

Figures 4.7 and 4.8: Stills from Rome Plutôt Que Vous. Kamel sits for his portrait.

If Kamel’s vision of life beyond Algerian borders is naïve fantasy, Zina’s perspective is, by contrast realistic, informed by a skepticism and inquisitiveness about the existential
experiences, human rights, and living conditions of marginalized persons, both historical and present-day, in the United States. Zina is skeptical of the promise of life beyond Algeria; she wonders aloud what work she could find in the United States, and if she would have to live underground as an illegal immigrant. Her intellectual curiosity about the West is signaled, in part, by her literariness, on display in the first few minutes of the film as she appears to be deeply engrossed in the Chester Himes’ novel *Cast the First Stone* (1952). Zina’s worldview is further signified by the non-diegetic soundtrack of Shepp’s “Brotherhood at Ketchaoua,” a performance intended to celebrate and embrace African origins, and in so doing, repudiate the centrality of Western cultures. As Zina bounds down the staircase from her parents’ apartment, the sounds of traffic and blaring horns gradually transition into “Brotherhood at Ketchaoua”; the adventurous collision between Shepp’s free jazz and the indigenous rhythms of the Tuareg musicians music seems a fitting accompaniment for Zina, wearing a hooded sweatshirt and jeans rather than a hijab or headscarf, as she takes to the male-dominated streets of Algiers.

Zina’s worldview is again affirmed as she and Kamel are on the road again in the film’s final scene. Having finally secured the false papers necessary to leave Algeria, Kamel is shot by anonymous gunmen, likely an act of terror linked to the civil war. “Crétin [Moron],” Zina mutters as she drives away from the scene, with Kamel sagging down in the passenger seat. The film ends with a freeze frame on Zina’s face, recalling Jean-Pierre Léaud’s Antoine Doinel in *Les Quatres Cents Coups* (1959), again underscoring her significance to the viewer. Her on-screen presence is diminutive, her dialogue is unobtrusive; throughout the film, she is often relegated to the figure of sidekick or subordinate, told to be careful and chided for her dress by her parents, and pulled along for
the ride and to wait outside by Kamel. Nevertheless, as the final scene illustrates, it is Zina who is the heroine -- streetwise, perceptive, and in the driver’s seat.

While the film’s reference to a novel by Chester Himes is surprising, it is a surprise that is within the realm of reasonable expectation. Himes’ novels were widely available in Africa and, as the work of Pim Higginson explains, they even inspired a turn to the crime novel in late 20th century Francophone African letters. However, Teguia’s reference to *Cast the First Stone* is remarkable. Unlike the runaway success of Himes’ Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones detective novels that were published in Gallimard’s *Série Noire*, *Cast the First Stone* has been dogged by rejection and publication difficulties since before its first appearance in 1952. The text has struggled to remain in print ever since – this, despite the semi-autobiographical novel being one of Himes’ favorites. Carl Van Vechten was a great fan of the text as well, although he regretted how it was edited for publication from the original version, *Yesterday Will Make You Cry*. Van Vechten wrote: “*Yesterday Will Make You Cry*, his jail experience, is probably the best, but it was so cut for publication that in that form it was worthless.” Having finally secured a small run of a heavily edited version of the text in 1952, the book went out of print relatively quickly. As his letters reveal, Himes repeatedly and unsuccessfully sought to have the book republished after Coward McCann’s rights to it had expired. By 1969, the novel was so hard to find that Himes wrote to John A. Williams that he couldn’t find a copy of his own book anywhere. In 1970, Himes writes to

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304 Dear Chester, Dear John 1.

305 In a letter to John A. Williams, Himes wrote: “Speaking of *Cast the First Stone*, I wonder if you can possibly get a copy for me at any cost and I will repay you. It is one of the books
Williams that he was able to find a copy of the book, but it was of no use, because the London publisher didn’t want it after all. 306 Cast the First Stone was not reprinted until 1972, when, much to Himes’ surprise, the New American Library brought out an edition of the book (“I don’t know what the hell NAL is doing with my books,” Himes wrote to Williams). The book was not translated and published in France until 1977.

The obscurity of Cast the First Stone adds a valence of meaning to the film’s citation of the novel, one which highlights the extreme mobility of culture. Rome Plutôt Que Vous’s invocation of Cast the First Stone trains our attention on the affinity between the African-American and Algerian experience, all the while demonstrating the depths of the Algerian filmmaker’s engagement with even the obscure corners of the African-American literary tradition. Rather than referencing a more celebrated prison narrative, as in, for example, The Autobiography of Malcolm X, Teguia instead calls attention to Cast the First Stone, one of Himes’ most critically overlooked books. As such, the citation in and of itself contains an element of subversion; the reference makes visible a literary text with a marginalized history. The reference also hints at the profundity of Algeria’s understanding of the United States, finding value in what Americans have rejected and perceiving aspects of U.S. society that exceeds what Americans themselves are able to recognize.

As opposed to the fast-paced black comedy of the Coffin Ed and Grave Digger novels, Cast the First Stone is by comparison sobering and languorous, chronicling the

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306 “John Henrik Clarke found a copy of Cast the First Stone for me — it cost him $12, which I had Rosly pay him. But it turned out that the London publisher — Hodder & Stoughton — wasn’t interested anyway” (Dear Chester, Dear John 122).
protracted despair of James Monroe, the novel’s protagonist, as he serves out a 20-year sentence for armed robbery, a crime which he committed when he was a teenager. Rather than racing around Harlem at a dizzying speed, as in Himes’ 1957 novel La reine des pommes,\(^{307}\) the narrative tempo of Himes’ Cast the First Stone is relatively drawn-out, mirroring the slowness of incarcerated time. Recalls Monroe, “Each moment was absolute, like a still-life photograph; each happening lived its span and died, unrelated to the ones that came before and afterward. A day was not the seventh part of the week, but in itself infinity.”\(^{308}\) If, as Jean-Paul Sartre suggested, William Faulkner’s The Sound and the Fury presented a metaphysics of time, Cast the First Stone, by contrast, presents a metaphysics of doing time in its representation of how prison shifts and confounds one’s lived experience of temporality.

The narrative, aside from a few flashbacks, is told nearly entirely from within the walls of the prison, the gate to which, as in Dante’s Inferno, some inmates insist bears the inscription, “Ye who enter here leave all hope behind.” In prison, Monroe learns to survive behind bars, an undertaking that requires successfully detecting the shadowy power dynamics that underwrite prison social politics, coping with the volatility and emotional vicissitudes of unjust prison guards and other inmates, and surviving disasters – including a devastating prison fire, modeled after the 1930 Ohio State Prison fire, which killed 320 inmates. Above all, Monroe must resist the dark corners of his own mind; he is filled with regret, self-loathing, and at times, suicidal thoughts. He is tormented by his past transgressions, the

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\(^{307}\) The novel was originally published in French for the Gallimard Série noire, and later published under the English titles The Five-Cornered Square, For Love of Imabelle, and A Rage in Harlem.

\(^{308}\) Cast the First Stone 86.
psychological weight of a twenty-year sentence, and in particular, he is filled with shame and anger over his homosexual urges which have grown too intense to ignore.

In Himes’ masterful telling, the imaginative space of the prison is, like Dante’s nine circles of hell, both enclosed and expansive. *Cast the First Stone* develops the universe of the prison by detailing a cartography of networked dormitories, a maze of industrial buildings, offices, bathhouses, dining halls, prison schoolrooms, chapels, a gym, a baseball diamond, as well as the sky, a horizon of abridged by gates, exterior walls, and the guards who patrol them. Although Himes expands the prison through detailed descriptions, the spaces of the prison are (unsurprisingly) overwhelmingly claustrophobic – from the dark, dingy, and cramped interior spaces of bunks and cells, the miasmic stench of buckets of excrement and Lysol-drenched floors, the foreboding walkways that lead to execution chambers, and the most claustrophobic and terrible space of them all, the hole.

Monroe describes the experience of his incarceration by detailing what he sees from his perspective within the dormitory building:

I turned my head and looked out the window that was just a little above the level of my eyes. I saw the moon in a deep blue sky and a guard-turret with spotlights down the walls. I saw the guard silhouetted against the sky, a rifle cradled in his arm, the intermittent glow of the cigarette in his mouth. I saw the long black sweep of the walls beneath the deep blue distance. When you looked at the walls your vision stopped. Everything stopped at the walls. The walls were about fifty feet from the dormitory building. Just fifty feet away was freedom, I thought. Fifty feet — and twenty years.309

309 *Cast the First Stone* 20.
In this passage from *Cast the First Stone*, Monroe outlines both the visible horizon – the night sky abridged by an armed guard and walls – and the imagined, invisible horizon of freedom – the awareness of a vast universe that lay beyond the walls (“Everything”), as well as the amount of time it will take to reach it. The horizon of an inmate, as Monroe tells it, exists both in terms of what can be seen, as well as what is invisible.

Teguia’s allusion to *Cast the First Stone* brings the narrative of inmates in an American prison into dialogue with the experience of Algerians limited by political borders; as such, one might imagine James Monroe as a double for young Algerians like Kamel and Zina. The two works share in common their portrayal of the everyday experience of young people who can glimpse what exists beyond their borders, but are prevented from crossing over to reach it. *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* enacts a similar recurrent gaze towards freedom beyond a boundary that cannot be traversed through multiple shots, from the port, to the shipping docks, to the ocean. Thus, the citation of Himes’ novel evinces the film’s dominant theme of constrained mobility; as McGonagle notes, *Cast the First Stone* is “an apt choice given the atmosphere of confinement the film conjures.”

Such a generalized interpretation, however neglects to consider the context of the intertextual allusion within the film. As mentioned earlier, it is significant that it is Zina, and not Kamel, who is reading *Cast the First Stone*. As such, the intertextual citation of *Cast the First Stone* not only serves further to explain the perspective of Zina’s character, but serves as a counterpoint against Kamel’s unbridled enthusiasm for emigration. Furthermore, such an interpretation neglects *Cast the First Stone*’s complex portrayal of prison love, sexuality, and time, which as the novel suggests, are capable of defeating reason. As such, while *Cast

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310 McGonagle 97.
the First Stone depicts the misery of incarceration, the novel is also paradoxically redemptive in its portrayal of a life of confinement and constraints. For James Monroe, prison offered a site where, despite having one’s liberty taken away, one could still experience pleasure from recreation, if only through poker games and a prison softball league. More significantly, for Monroe, prison offered a venue for a freedom that could not have existed outside of the prison walls; namely, his queerness, which manifests throughout the novel, but especially through the romance between himself and another inmate named Dido. In the world outside of the prison, Monroe would be bound by the standards of his self-professed heterosexuality; however, within the sexually stifled, male-only environment of prison, Monroe ultimately yields to his same-sex desires. While Monroe expressed disgust at his own homosexual urges, he nonetheless felt desperate for Dido’s affection – a desperation that grew more intense after he learned that he would soon gain freedom after the Governor promised to commute the rest of his prison sentence. He became fearful of leaving prison, and his experience of time was again transformed:

Nothing was real. In all the world there was nothing so unreal. It was all fantasy and frenzy and delirium. It was dread and apprehension, new and weird and shameful; with its peaks very high and its depths in slop; but above all, indescribably fascinating. I had never known anyone like Dido, and knowing him was unreality, pure and sheer…The days passed through this grotesque unreality, wired together and meteoric, headed for September. But each day was filled to overflowing and could not hold it all. Always there was some left over that spilled into the day that followed, and the day that followed could not hold it all. There was not enough time to hold it all. There never had been…There was no time to think. Everything was a
feeling, an action, an emotion. Mostly emotion, ninety per cent emotion and the rest action and feeling, with perhaps a fraction of one per cent rationalization. It was like a fantastic dream. No one can rationalize in a dream. But even in the dream there was the tiny, insistent warning of awakening. September was coming. Time was running out. 311

Monroe’s description of his relationship with Dido suggests how, even while incarcerated, under the most unfree and repressive of environments, the desire for love and human connection could overcome one’s desire for freedom. Although Monroe had longed to leave more than anything else, his deep connection to Dido, combined with his awareness that the relationship would have to end in order for him to leave prison, began to confound reality (“Nothing was real…”), overwhelm reason (“There was no time to think”), and unravel the parameters and experience of time (“The days passed through this grotesque unreality, wired together and meteoric, headed for September…”). Indeed, Monroe’s feelings for Dido became so overpowering that he ultimately defied orders from prison authorities and continued to spend time with Dido, and, as a result, was written up for “Sexual Perversion” (“S.P.”), and was sent to the hole. In so doing, Monroe jeopardized the long-awaited gubernatorial pardon for which he and his mother had steadfastly appealed.

Thus, while Cast the First Stone paints a tremendously bleak picture of life behind bars, the novel’s concluding love story between Monroe and Dido complicates an otherwise straightforward denunciation of one’s loss of freedom behind bars. Rather, the novel also advances the idea than an unfree life with love, under certain circumstances, may be easier to bear than a life of freedom, and that the emotion and love that arise from human connection

311 Cast the First Stone 269-270.
can overwhelm reason. We might, then, consider this aspect of *Cast the First Stone* as an essential ingredient of the novel’s citation within broader narrative of *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*. For example, the logical and rational wish to leave Algeria in pursuit of a “better” life in Europe or the United States may, nonetheless, be an impossible compromise for those bound by irrational commitments, such as love.

**Godardian Affinities**

![Figure 4.9: Still from *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*. Zina reads Chester Himes’ *Cast the First Stone.*](image)

As scholars including Guy Austin and Joseph McGonagle have noted, *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* features numerous formal techniques, including tracking shots, long takes, jump cuts, intertitles, the conspicuous use of ambient sound, and direct address to the camera, reminiscent of Godard’s early films. In Teguia’s literary allusions especially, he invokes a tradition of citational poetics commonly associated with Godard (as discussed in Chapter 3), in particular the use of literary allusions as a narrative strategy. Indeed, one of Godard’s most notable and politically subversive literary references – the reference in *Le Petit*

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312 See *Algerian National Cinema* 132.

Soldat (1960) to Algerian journalist Henri Alleg’s banned text La Question (1958) involved Algeria. La Question, which was published by Éditions de Minuit and preaced by Jean-Paul Sartre, detailed Alleg’s imprisonment by the French army during the Algerian war, including waterboarding, electrocution, and pentathol injections. Godard’s citation of La Question functioned as a double provocation, one which amplified Le Petit Soldat’s depiction of torture, including waterboarding and electrocution. The French government censored the film; it was filmed in 1960 but wasn’t allowed to be screened until 1963, after the war had ended. Deputy Jean-Marie Le Pen called for Godard’s expulsion from France.

Figure 4.10: Still from Jean-Luc Godard’s Le Petit Soldat (1960)

The citational poetics of Rome Plutôt Que Vous is similarly subversive, registering a potent critique of the West. However the force of Teguia’s transnational references has largely eluded critical notice. Nevertheless, there are clear differences that distinguish

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As Benjamin Stora has discussed in La gangrène et l'oubli, the French government was extremely censorious of films that showed stories other than the official French version of what was happening in Algeria. In addition to Godard’s Le Petit Soldat, Alain Resnais’ Muriel (1959), René Vautier’s Algérie en flames and Afrique 50, and Jacques Panijel’s Octobre à Paris also suffered a similar censorship for their representation of the French army’s use of torture in Algeria, the Algerian resistance, and the October 17, 1961 massacre, respectively. See Stora 38-39.
Teguia’s citational poetics from Godard’s. Like *Rome Plutôt Que Vous*, Godard’s *One Plus One/Sympathy for the Devil* referenced the Black Panthers and the work of black revolutionaries and writers. In *One Plus One/Sympathy for the Devil*, Godard references a range of figures involved in various black liberation struggles, from LeRoi Jones and Eldridge Cleaver, to Malcolm X and Patrice Lumumba. Nevertheless, in Godard’s hands, these figures are treated as representative and generic black revolutionaries, and their texts are deployed as stereotypes of a black radical menace. For example, a fictionalized group of Black Panthers read passages from *Soul on Ice* aloud in a junkyard, groping and pointing machine guns at young white women in white nightgowns. Indeed, Godard edited excerpts from Cleaver’s already misogynistic *Soul on Ice* to be even more shocking and offensive than they already were, eliding any discussion of how his sexual imagination had been conditioned by enslavement and racial oppression. As British critic Raymond Durgnat wrote, “Godard’s Black Panther guerrillas, real in the Congo, real in the USA, are purely hypothetical in London 1969. Their rootless pathos is the effect desired.”315 In Godard’s hands, Cleaver’s text is a radically decontextualized intellectual exercise. By contrast, Teguia’s reference to Eldridge Cleaver is embedded within Algerian history, grounded in a local territoriality.

315 *The Essential Raymond Durgnat*, 64.
Figures 4.11 and 4.12: Stills from *One Plus One/Sympathy for the Devil* (1968)

While the film engages a poetic style most commonly affiliated with a Swiss director, Teguia nevertheless redeployes the texts and music in a manner that connects one margin to another, subverting Eurocentricism, Shepp’s “Ketchaoua,” for example, is a musical work that, while reflecting a creolization of African-American jazz and native African sounds, is also a work that performatively recenters the genre as African. The work was prefaced by Ted Joans’ poetry that suggested the performance marked not just a return to Africa, but an affirmation of jazz as a music that is always-already African.

As such, to draw on the work of Shuh-Mei Shih and Francoise Lionnet in *Minor Transnationalism*, *Rome Plutôt Que Vous* is resistant to more general theories regarding the transnational in its treatment of its relationship to the West, as it avoids a binarism between the minority and the centers of global capital that often characterizes the study of transnationalism’s account for minor literatures. As Shih and Lionnet have written: “Universalism demands a politics of assimilation, incorporation, or resistance, instituting a structure of vertical struggle for recognition and citizenship.”

*Rome Plutôt Que Vous* subverts the model of universalism; substituting a vertical struggle towards recognition and citizenship with a meandering, and ultimately pointless circuit. In so doing, the film both enacts a quest for American citizenship while simultaneously dismantling the reasons for pursuing it.

While the film’s literary and cultural references maintain a degree of open-endedness about the Zina and Kamel’s desire to emigrate, Teguia’s references are consistent in their gesture towards transnational cultural engagement as a tool in liberation struggles. The

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316 *Minor Transnationalism*, 2.
festival offers a moment when culture was upheld as an instrument of liberation; indeed, so much was stated by Eldridge Cleaver in his first press conference in Algiers (“La culture était alors un instrument de libération”).317 This attitude towards culture is not only affirmed in the film’s literary, cinematic, and historical allusions, but also within moments in the film’s diegesis. Two of the most transcendent scenes in the movie illustrate this point vividly: in one scene, Kamel and Zina take a break to play a game of pick-up soccer with kids on a beach, and later, in order to avoid being caught on the streets after curfew, they stop to stay the night at a friend’s house and an impromptu dance party breaks out as an Algerian raï by Cheb Azzedine318 plays on a cassette player. Such moments displace the cinematic time of the movie, interrupting the desperation and disillusionment, the pursuit of travel documents, and the constant comparison to life abroad. In its place, the experience of human connection unfolds. The film’s invocation of the literature and music associated with Black freedom struggles reminds us that culture remains a powerful tool for liberation, one which conveys the experiences of the oppressed and helps us to escape the confines of our own limited experience.

317 Sauvaget 32.

318 Like a number of other cultural intertexts in Rome Plutôt Que Vous, Azzedine spent six months in prison, convicted of critiquing Algerian police in his music.


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