
H-France Review Vol. 19 (June 2019), No. 87

Philippe Met, ed., *The Cinema of Louis Malle: Transatlantic Auteur*. London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2018. x + 314 pp. Foreword, interview, varia, afterword, filmography, and index. \$30.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9780231188715.

Review by Armelle Blin-Rolland, Bangor University.

“Who else has made films of such spectacularly wide-ranging subject matter, fiction, non-fiction, adapted from books, dreamed-up in his imagination, mined from his own personal experience?” asks Wes Anderson, a long-time admirer of Louis Malle, in the afterword that closes this remarkable edited volume (p. 301). If this wide range and versatility makes Malle a fascinating—and, for artists such as Anderson, inspiring—film director, his uncategorisability may also partly explain the relative dearth of critical works on his œuvre, and in particular of book-length studies, which stands in stark contrast with the scholarly attention devoted to the Young Turks of the New Wave. As editor Philippe Met points out in his introduction, a key aim of this volume is therefore to redress this critical neglect (p. 5), and as such *The Cinema of Louis Malle: A Transatlantic Auteur* is a welcome and important addition not only to the study of Malle, but more broadly to the field of French cinema. In fact, as the title indicates the focus here is also in particular on Malle as a *transatlantic* auteur, and an important strand of the volume is to assess the influence of the director not only within French, but also more broadly American and international cinema. In this sense, it goes beyond analyses of Malle that frame him primarily in relation to the French New Wave—a movement of which Malle was “within and without,” to use Hugo Frey’s words [1], taking us back to the problems of classification his work presents.

In contrast with and in complement to relatively recent English-language books on the director by Frey (2004) and Nathan C. Southern (2006) [2], this is an edited volume rather than a monograph, and this format is well suited to exploring and illuminating the multiple facets of Malle’s works, as it serves to bring together a range of voices, focal points, and theoretical approaches in a book that is both wide in scope and extremely well organised. Met’s introduction posits “three guiding principles” of Malle’s output that then resonate and develop across the chapters: intellectual curiosity and humanistic openness, passion and *acharnement* for filmmaking, and “a constant *shuttling* between poles that are habitually regarded as distinct and distant, if not divergent and incompatible” (p. 7). The core of the book consists of ten transversal studies that explore a motif, theme, or style in two or more films, and eight monographic chapters that are organised chronologically and focus on a specific film. Themes recur across the volume, notably the relationship between documentary and fiction; adaptation/intermediality in dialogues and exchanges between film, literature and theatre; and

the importance of jazz and sound more broadly in Malle's work.

The first four transversal studies are linked by a discussion of Malle's documentary practice. Guillaume Soulez, discussing Malle and Cousteau's *Le Monde du silence* as well as little-known films and sequences Malle shot and/or directed during that period, sees them as not only being part of the director's apprenticeship, but also bearing the traces of his early formal experimentations. Caroline Eades, with a focus on the importance of technology and the director's ethnographic concern (similar to Jean Rouch's), locates the emergence of fiction filmmaking in Malle's early documentary practice. Derek Schilling looks at the 1974 twin documentaries *Humain trop humain* and *Place de la République*, discussing in particular how they went against the grain of contemporary critical and ideological discourse. Closing the "documentary sequence," Alan Williams provides a transatlantic study of Malle's nonfiction corpus, situating his analysis of changes in the director's practice in the broader context of contrasts between and evolutions in French and American documentary filmmaking.

In the next chapter, Sue Harris focuses on Malle's star films of the 1960s, a decade during which he oscillated between auteurism and a more commercial film career, and provides a reading of *Vie privée*, *Viva Maria!* and *William Wilson*, discussing them in relation to the director's 1970s criticism of the French star system. The following two chapters are linked by a focus on the relationship between cinema and literature. Ian Fleishman analyses experimental adaptive practice in the transposition of Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro* and of giving filmic form to Surrealist automatic writing in *Black Moon*; Michel Ciment explores Malle's relationship with three writers, Roger Nimier (who scripted *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*), Drieu La Rochelle (whose *Le Feu follet* Malle adapted) and Patrick Modiano (who co-wrote *Lacombe Lucien*). Both Nimier and Drieu were associated with the far-right, and Ciment frames this in relation to an important discussion of the politics of the Young Turks of the New Wave. In the following chapter, T. Jefferson Kline starts back from his own 1992 reading of *La Carte de Tendre* in the opening credits of *Les Amants* to develop an exploration of Malle's "gendered geography of death" through the Orpheus myth, across *Damage*, *Le Feu follet* and *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, positing Malle's films as exemplary of the Bazinian absent presence. Justine Malle then provides a detailed analysis of the figure of the mother in *Milou en mai*, *Au revoir les enfants* and *Le Souffle au cœur*, discussing them in particular in light of an autobiographical vein (that is more broadly key to the director's works, and as such recurs across the volume) and the discrepancy between fact and fiction. Jean-Louis Pautrot's chapter closes the transversal studies section with an exploration of jazz as counterpoint across three films in which the use of this musical genre is particularly meaningful and diverse, *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud*, *Le Souffle au cœur* and *Pretty Baby*.

The eight monographic essays that follow provide detailed analyses of specific films, and that some of these were discussed in the transversal studies makes for a productive reading experience of the volume as a whole. The opening essay, by Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck, focuses on *Le Feu follet* and the texture of the film in a discussion of touching and *acharnement*. Philippe Met offers a reading of *Le Voleur*, one of Malle's least examined films, as a profoundly autobiographical work, drawing on genetic material to explore the process of self-portraiture and the portrait of time. Ludovic Cortade's chapter takes us back to documentary practice, focusing on *L'Inde fantôme*, and exploring Malle's complex relationship with India and reflection on ethnocentrism, reflexivity and social criticism. *Lacombe Lucien*, already discussed by Ciment, is then reconsidered by Steven Ungar as a work recasting the Sartrean questions of

“What is a collaborator?” and “What is a Jew?” into a “concomitant *Lacombe Lucien* question” (p. 186). Ungar situates the film’s evolving status and afterlives in relation to filmic representations of Occupation-era France. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis also explores questions of history in her chapter on *Au revoir les enfants*, reading it as progressively shifting from the protagonist’s story, to that of the hidden Jewish children and that of a generation, in a film that calls upon the viewer to actively engage with history and memory as alive rather than frozen, to use Malle’s own words (p. 209). Francesca Cinelli’s chapter on *Atlantic City* links back to Pautrot’s to posit the importance of sound in Malle’s works, providing a detailed analysis of the use of diegetic and nondiegetic music and sound effects with regard to characters’ relationship to the American dream. Tom Conley offers a reading of *My Dinner with André* as a film in which not only conversation but also a conversion happens and that becomes a “mystic fable” oscillating between familiarity and alterity (p. 225). Sébastien Rongier’s chapter closes the “monographic essays” section with an illuminating analysis of *Vanya on 42nd Street* as not a testament film, but rather the space of creation and friendship formed by an aesthetics of interweaving in productive exchanges between film and theatre. Fittingly, this chapter ends with the idea that the notion of “testament film” applies to *Vanya* only in the way in which it encourages us, as viewers, to re-watch Malle’s films, and “to forge the critical meaning of an artistic journey and the evolution of a life’s work” (p. 244)—and this invitation to return to Malle anew and to reassess his influence and versatile filmmaking is precisely what has been taken up in *The Cinema of Louis Malle: Transatlantic Auteur*.

In addition to the transversal studies and monographic essays, the value of this edited volume also lies in the extra material included. It is bookended by texts by Volker Schlöndorff and (as mentioned at the beginning of this review) Wes Anderson, who talk of Malle’s importance for their own filmmaking, and it also includes an interview with John Guare, giving an insight in particular into the making of *Atlantic City*. In addition, we find previously unpublished material: notes for a lecture delivered by Malle aboard the Queen Elizabeth 2 in the early to mid-1980s, with useful notes by Met to clarify their elliptical nature; and the unfilmed script of “The Loner,” Malle’s adaptation of Henry James’s novel *What Maisie Knew* and a fascinating look into what Met has theorised as “phantom cinema” (p. 263). In its scope and focus, the quality of the individual chapters and the links that weave across the volume as a whole, *The Cinema of Louis Malle: Transatlantic Auteur* is a major contribution to the study of a filmmaker who has been critically neglected. As such, it will be a key reference for future analyses of Malle, and we can hope that it will also contribute to a broader renewed interest in the works of this multifaceted and seminal transatlantic auteur.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Volker Schlöndorff, “Foreword”

Philippe Met, “Introduction”

Guillaume Soulez, “Malle Before Malle”

Caroline Eades, “The Art of Silence: From Documentary to Fiction”

Derek Schilling, “No Comment: Direct Cinema in *Humain, trop humain* and *Place de la*

République

Alan Williams, "Louis Malle's Nonfiction: Tradition, Rebellion and Authorial Voice"

Sue Harris, "Louis Malle's 1960 'Star' Films"

Ian Fleishman, "Experimentation and Automatism in *Zazie dans le métro* and *Black Moon*"

Michel Ciment, "Louis Malle and 'His' Writers (Drieu La Rochelle, Nimier, Modiano)"

T. Jefferson Kline, "A Gendered Geography of Death: Louis Malle's Orphic Voyage"

Justine Malle, "The Figure of the Mother in *May Fools*, *Au revoir les enfants* and *Murmur of the Heart*"

Jean-Louis Pautrot, "Jazz as Counterpoint in *Elevator to the Gallows*, *Murmur of the Heart* and *Pretty Baby*"

Elisabeth Cardonne-Arlyck, "*The Fire Within*: Touching"

Philippe Met, "*Le Voleur*: (Self-)Portrait of the Filmmaker as Thief"

Ludovic Cortade, "Absorption and Reflexivity in *Phantom India*"

Steven Ungar, "Fog of War: *Lacombe Lucien* and Its Afterlives"

Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, "Memory, Friendship and History in *Au revoir les enfants*"

Francesca Cinelli, "*Atlantic City*: When Sound Meets Utopia"

Tom Conley, "Between Conversation and Conversion: *My Dinner with André*"

Sébastien Rongier, "*Vanya on 42nd Street*: Inventing a Space of Creation"

Philippe Met, "Truth and Poetry: An Interview with John Guare"

(Varia) Louis Malle, "Notes for a Lecture on the Queen Elizabeth 2" and "The Loner': Treatment Suggested by H. James' *What Maisie Knew Louis Malle* (with introduction by Philippe Met)"

Wes Anderson, "Afterword"

NOTES

[1] Hugo Frey, *Louis Malle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 11.

[2] Nathan C. Southern, *The Films of Louis Malle: A Critical Analysis* (Jefferson, N.C.:

McFarland, 2006).

Armelle Blin-Rolland
Bangor University
a.blin-rolland@bangor.ac.uk

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ISSN 1553-9172