**Renoir, Jean (b. 15 September 1894, Montmarte, Paris, France; d. 12 February 1979, California, USA)**

Jean Renoir was a French director and writer responsible for over forty films from the silent period to 1970. He was born in Paris as the second son of famous Impressionist painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and studied philosophy and mathematics at university. Uncertain about his future, Renoir enlisted in the army with his brother Pierre, and both were severely wounded in the Great War. During rehabilitation, his love for cinema grew exponentially: he estimated that he watched around twenty-five films per week. Renoir subsequently worked as a reconnaissance pilot and a ceramic artist, but remained a devoted cinemagoer with a penchant for American films and the work of Erich von Stroheim. These films fueled his idea of a French national cinema and inspired him to write a scenario for actor-director Albert Dieudonné entitled *Une Vie Sans Joie* (1924). Not happy with the final result, Renoir set out to direct his own films, and made his debut with *La Fille de l’Eau* (*Whirlpool of Fate*) in 1925. The film immediately marked Renoir as a social realist, since it dealt mainly with the pitfalls of a poor female outcast. However, it was also rife with symbolism, used avant-garde theatrical sets, and employed a cinematographic style — consisting of slow motion, multiple exposures, and unconventional angles — characteristic of the cinematic modernism of French impressionists such as Abel Gance and Jean Epstein. This dichotomy persisted throughout Renoir’s silent work, ranging from his straightforward Zola adaptation *Nana* (1926) to the more experimental dance film *Sur un Air de Charleston* (Charleston Parade; 1927).

Renoir is most remembered for his 1930s films. He made his sound debut with the Feydeau farce *On Purge Bébé* *(Baby’s Laxative)* (1931), popular fare made on the cheap to prove to producers that Renoir could make a commercially successful film. It allowed him to make the de la Fouchardière adaptation *La Chienne* (1931) — remade by Fritz Lang as *Scarlet Street* (1945) — which displayed the beautiful long takes and crisp focus that Renoir is famous for. He followed this up with the social realist classics *Boudu Sauvé des Eaux* *(Boudu Saved from Drowning*) (1932), *Toni* (1935), and *Partie de Campagne* (*A Day in the Country)* (1936). These foreshadowed the political films he would make in the spirit of the left-wing Front Populaire alliance the following years. The late 1930s saw what many consider his greatest masterpieces: the pacifist war film *La Grande Illusion* *(Grand Illusion)* (1937), which Orson Welles said he would take with him on the Ark; and the sharp comedy of manners *La Règle du Jeu (The Rules of the Game)* (1939), consistently regarded as one of the best films ever made. Renoir traded in France for the USA when World War II broke out, where he made *Swamp Water* (1941) for Fox. His next high point was his first color film, *The River* (1951), a wonderful romantic Technicolor drama that had future Indian director Satyajit Ray as one of its assistant directors. Renoir returned to Europe to make a couple more films, but spent his final years in Los Angeles, where he passed away at age 84.

**Further Reading:**

Bazin, A. & Truffaut, F. (ed.) (1992) *Jean Renoir*, New York: Da Capo Press.

Renoir, J. (1991) *My Life and My Films*, New York: Da Capo Press.

Renoir J. & Volk, C. (transl.) (1989) *Renoir on Renoir: Interviews, Essays, and Remarks*, New York, Cambridge & Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Renoir, J. & Herbert, R. L. (intr.) (2001) *Renoir, My Father*, New York: New York Review of Books.

Braudy, L. (1989) *Jean Renoir: the World of His Films*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Phillips, A. & Vincendeau, G. (2013) *A Companion to Jean Renoir*, Malden, Oxford & Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

**Selected Works:**

*La Fille de l'Eau* (*Whirlpool of Fate*; 1925)

*La Chienne* (1931)

*Boudu Sauvé des Eaux* (*Boudu Saved from Drowning*; 1932)

*Toni* (1935)

*Partie de Campagne* (*A Day in the Country*; 1936, but only released in 1946)

*Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936)

*La Grande Illusion* (*Grand Illusion*; 1937)

*La Bête Humaine* (1938)

*La Règle du Jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*; 1939)

*Swamp Water* (with Irving Pichel; 1941)

*The River* (1951)

*Le Carrosse d'Or* (*The Golden Coach*; 1952)

**Paratextual Material**

- A Jean Renoir smorgasbord, featuring pictures and essays on his major films on the Criterion website (<http://www.criterion.com/explore/8-jean-renoir>)

- Orson Welles’ written tribute to Jean Renoir upon his death (<http://www.wellesnet.com/?p=120>)

- Jean Renoir as painted by his father Pierre-Auguste when he was a boy (<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0b/Pierre-Auguste_Renoir_-_Jean_en_tant_que_Chasseur.jpg>)

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