



## BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

# Au revoir les enfants

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Director: Louis Malle

Production Companies:

Nouvelles Editions de Films, MK2 Productions, Stella Film, NEF Filmproduktion, Centre national de la cinema, Investimage, Images Investissements, Créations

Participation: Raiuno

Producer: Louis Malle

Production Manager: Gérald Molto

Unit Production Manager: Jean-Yves Asselin

Location Manager: Alain Guyard

Assistant Directors: Yann Gilbert, Patrick Cartoux

Casting: Jeanne Biras, Iris Carrière, Sylvie Meyer

Screenplay: Louis Malle

Director of Photography: Renato Berta

Steadicam Operator: Mark Koninckx

Editor: Emmanuelle Castro

Art Director: Willy Holt

Costume Designer: Corinne Jorry

Costumer: Hélène Robin

Make-up: Susan Robertson

Sound Recording: Jean-Claude Laureux

Sound Re-recording: Claude Villand, Bernard LeRoux

Post-synchronization: Jacques Lévy

Sound Effects: Daniel Couteau

Production Adviser: Christian Ferry

Cast:

Gaspard Manesse (*Julien Quentin*)

Raphaël Fejtő (*Jean Bonnet*)

Francine Racette (*Mme Quentin*)

Stanislas Carré de Malberg (*François Quentin*)

Philippe Morier-Genoud (*Father Jean*)

François Berléand (*Father Michel*)

François Negret (*Joseph*)

Peter Fitz (*Muller*)

Pascal Rivet (*Boulangier*)

Benoît Henriët (*Ciron*)

Richard Leboeuf (*Sagard*)

Xavier Legrand (*Babinot*)

Arnaud Henriët (*Negus*)

Jean-Sébastien Chauvin (*Laviron*)

Luc Etienne (*Moreau*)

Daniel Edinger (*Tinchaut*)

Marcel Bellot (*Guibourg*)

Ami Flammer (*Florent*)

Irène Jacob (*Mlle Davenne*)

Jean-Paul Dubarry (*Father Hippolyte*)

Jacqueline Staup (*nurse*)

Jacqueline Paris (*Mme Perrin*)

René Bouloc

Alain Clément

Michaël Rottstock

Detlef Gericke

Michaël Becker

Thomas Friedl

Christian Sohn

Michel Ginot

Philippe Despiaux

France-Germany-Italy 1987

103 mins

Digital

### SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

'Do you realise,' muses the 12-year-old Julien Quentin, rapt in the entranced solipsism of early adolescence, 'that there'll never be another 17 January 1944? Never ever? I'm the only one who thinks about death at the college. It's incredible.' As the date implies, he could hardly be more wrong. Many of those around him are thinking about death, and in far less theoretical terms.

The moment of adolescent crisis, the point at which the adult world, in all its messy ambiguity, drives in upon, and disrupts, childhood certitudes, has long fascinated Louis Malle. From *Zazie* (who turned the tables with some disruption of her own), through *Le Souffle au coeur*, *Lacombe Lucien*, *Black Moon* and *Pretty Baby*, his young protagonists have found themselves confronted with a world that operates according to no rules they've been led to expect. With *Au revoir les enfants* Malle homes in on the autobiographical reference-point of this theme, the moment that 'may well have determined my vocation as a filmmaker,' when, aged 11, he watched a Gestapo official enter the classroom of his Fontainebleau school and summon a fellow pupil by an unfamiliar, Jewish name. The film, a 're-invention of the past,' traces the wary, prickly friendship between Julien, Malle's surrogate, and the Jewish boy, Jean Bonnet (played by Raphaël Fejtő with the raw, wounded stare of the young Kafka).

Malle has brought us here, or hereabouts, before. The betrayal of Bonnet comes through the resentment of a Lacombe Lucien in the making – a disabled scullery lad, mocked, abused and eventually dismissed for the black-marketing in which several pupils, Julien among them, have actively colluded. This Joseph, returning in the Gestapo's wake, swaggers uneasily in his flashy new suit, confronting Julien's gaze of appalled realisation. 'Don't start coming all pious – c'est la guerre, mon vieux,' he blusters, while Julien registers his own inescapably shared guilt.

Earlier, the film has skirted the lush territory of *Le Souffle au coeur* in the relationship between Julien and his mother – once again passionate, sexually charged but also (unlike the earlier film) exposed as faintly ludicrous in its hot-house romanticism. Already in the opening separation scene, set (where else?) on a railway station, Malle slyly subverts the tone as the pair luxuriate in melodramatic cliché, with Julien's Byronic angst ('I'll be miserable. I hate you!') capped by his mother's Fidelio: 'Do you think I like it? I'd like to dress up as a boy and come with you.' This evoked image, at once erotic and ridiculous, self-indulgently unreal, sets up one side of the ironic counterpoint that underpins the film. On the one hand, Julien's smugly moneyed background, politics sampled *à la mode* ('But *nobody's* a Petainiste any more!' protests Mme Quentin, with the pique of one accused of favouring last season's hemline); and against this, the stark actuality of the terror endured by Bonnet, for whom no luxury of choice exists – parents vanished or arrested, probably dead, and every passing German soldier a source of anguish.

The film's moral centre – unexpectedly enough from the director of *Viva Maria*, though it's worth recalling that Malle was once Bresson's assistant – resides in a priest, the school's director, Father Jean (Philippe Morier-Genoud, conveying fierce compassion beneath an aspect of bony austerity). His are the two crucial decisions: first, to harbour Bonnet and two other Jewish boys under false names; and second, to sack Joseph while not expelling, out of consideration for their parents, his accomplices among the pupils – a discrimination whose inequity causes him evident pain. A figure of awkward integrity, he preaches to the assembled affluent parents a diatribe against the callousness of the rich and laconically dismisses Julien's professed interest in the priesthood: 'I don't think you've any vocation. Anyway, it's a rotten job.'

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Mon 2 Oct 18:10

### Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45;

Sat 30 Sep 15:40

### Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40;

Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,

Programmer-at-Large)

### Notorious

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Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

### The Wind Will Carry Us

#### (Bad mara khahad bourd)

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Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex);

Fri 15 Sep 20:40

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Fri 29 Sep 18:00

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Mon 18 Sep 20:50

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Tue 26 Sep 20:55

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BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes &

Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

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### Au revoir les enfants

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Two vividly contrasted scenes – one dark, one light – evoke the murky moral cross-currents of the period. A game of Treasure Hunt leaves the two boys lost together in the forest, with night falling and gaunt rocks looming like primeval wood-spirits. ‘Are there wolves?’ inquires Bonnet nervously. But here in the twilight, the dangers are illusory. All that appears is a solitary wild boar, trotting hastily off into the bushes. Even the German soldiers whom they encounter, menacingly silhouetted in steel helmets, prove a lot less than monstrous, wrapping the boys solicitously in a blanket and wistfully trying to establish common ground (‘We Bavarians are Catholics too’).

A few days later, in the genteel ambience of a restaurant where Mme Quentin takes Julien, his elder brother François, and Bonnet to lunch, the real monsters manifest themselves. A group of French Fascist militia, dangerous buffoons in fat, floppy berets, arrive to harass a dignified old Jew, demanding his instant ejection. Commotion, pro and con, among the other clientele; one plump, over-dressed woman shouts, ‘Send the Jews to Moscow!’ The contretemps is ended when a Wehrmacht officer, under whose admiring glances Mme Quentin has been preening, objects to having his lunch disturbed and drives the militia ignominiously from the room. ‘He only did it to impress you,’ François observes to his mother. ‘Are we Jewish?’ Julien inquires ingenuously. ‘Certainly not!’ she exclaims; then, catching herself, ‘Not that I’ve anything against Jews ... except that Socialist, Blum. They can hang him.’

These events are doubly refracted to us: through Bonnet’s apprehensive gaze, and also through Julien’s intrigued scrutiny both of the events and of his friend’s reactions, as it gradually impinges on him what it means to be another person, and a Jewish person at that. In Malle’s sympathetic portrayal, Julien rings wholly true as a creature poised on the final brink of childhood, agitated by contrary impulses – touchy, curious, veering unpredictably from cruelty to kindness, savouring the erotic passages in *The Arabian Nights* and still prone to bed-wetting. Gaspard Manesse (a non-professional like all the younger cast-members) inhabits his role with total conviction. Around him Malle skilfully recreates the rhythms and petty details of boarding-school life of the period: the unappetising food, the welcome break of an air-raid, stilt-battles in the playground, the history teacher (a First World War veteran) marking Allied advances with flags on a map. And a film show, Chaplin’s *The Immigrant*, rapturously received by staff and pupils alike, of which one sequence acquires unwonted poignancy: as the steerage passengers, stock ghetto types in beards and headscarves, are roped off on deck like cattle, misgivings temper the laughter on a few watching faces.

Just occasionally, the film verges on stereotype; as in *Lacombe Lucien*, Jewishness equals cultural superiority. Bonnet must excel not only academically but also musically, delighting the pretty young piano teacher with his sensitive Schubert. This can be forgiven, though, for the moment of joyous complicity when, alone with Julien during an air-raid while everyone else has retreated to the shelter, he leads his friend in an exuberant burst of fourhanded boogie-woogie.

Given such moments, *Au revoir les enfants* – for all its tragic subject matter and elegiac finale – is anything but depressing. In the last scene, as the three Jewish boys and Father Jean are led away to their deaths, Bonnet glances back, and Julien raises his hand in timid salute. In that small, affirmative gesture can be read a promise which this film, with its emotional commitment, its richness of incidental detail and the warmth and lucidity of its regard, has now duly fulfilled.

Philip Kemp, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1988