



Ensemble: The Filmmakers from Richard Linklater's *Nouvelle Vague*

Les Cousins

Les Cousins The Cousins
A film directed by: Claude Chabrol
Production: AJYM Films
Presented by: Films Marceau
A film produced by: Claude Chabrol
Production Manager: Jean Cotet
Unit Production Manager: Jean Lavie
Production Administrator: Roland Nonin
1st Assistant Director: Philippe de Broca
2nd Assistant Director: Olga Waren
Script Girl: Jacqueline Parey
Scenario: Claude Chabrol
Dialogue: Paul Gégauff
Director of Photography: Henri Decaë
Cameraman: Jean Rabier
1st Assistant Camera: Pierre Ginet
2nd Assistant Camera: Alain Levent
Editor: Jacques Gaillard
Assisted by: Gisèle Chézeau
Art Directors: Jacques Saulnier, Bernard Evein
Assistant Art Director: Georges Glon
Set Decorator: André Labussière
Properties: Raymond Lemoigne
Key Make-up: Irène Charitonoff
Make-up: Lucette Deuss
Laboratory: GTC
Music: Paul Misraki
Music Extracts: W. A. Mozart, Richard Wagner
Orchestra under the Direction of: Georges Dervaux
Sound Recording: Jean-Claude Marchetti
Recordist: Jean Labussière
Boom Operator: Maurice Dagonneau
Music Published by: Éditions Impéria
Studio: Studios de Boulogne
Cast:
Gérard Blain (Charles)
Jean-Claude Brialy (Paul)
Juliette Mayniel (Florence)
Guy Decomble (bookseller)
Geneviève Cluny (Geneviève)
Michèle Meritz (Yvonne)
Corrado Guarducci (Comte Minerva)
Stéphane Audran (Françoise)
Paul Bisciglia (Marc)
Jeanne Pérez (concierge)
Françoise Vatel (Martine)
André Chanal
Gilbert Edard
Clara Gansart
Jean-Louis Maury (bridge player)
Virginie Vitry
Jean-Marie Arnoux
Robert Barré
Michel Benoist
Gaby Blonde
Chantal Bouchon
Catherine Candida
Jacques Deschamps
Abdou Filali
Yann Groël
André Jocelyn (waiter with champagne)
Jacques Kemp
Jean-Pierre Moulin (student)
Sabine Moussali
Christian Pezey
Emmanuel Pierson
Jacques Ralf
Taty Rocca
Colette Teissèdre
Jean-Paul Thomas
Simone Vannier
Anne Zamire
Claude Cerval (Clovis)

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

The story told in Chabrol's *Les Cousins*, his second film, is wonderfully simple, or, if you prefer, simply beautiful. It begins like a story straight out of Balzac, for it presents the Rastignac of *Père Goriot* living with the Rastignac of *Une étude de femme*. But *Les Cousins* could also be a fable by La Fontaine, presenting as it does, a city rat (Jean-Claude Brialy) showing off for his country cousin (Gérard Blain), while a cricket (Juliette Mayniel) jumps from one to the other with typically Parisian disgust. In short, *Les Cousins* is the story of a contest between crying Jean and laughing Jean. Chabrol's originality lies in his ability to make laughing Jean come out the winner despite his flashy appearance.

For the first time in years, perhaps since *La Règle du jeu*, we find a French director who pushes his characters as far as they can go by transforming their evolution into the Ariadne's thread that unravels the story. This was one of the principal attractions of *Le Beau Serge*. But the process is even more apparent in *Les Cousins*. We're interested in the characters not so much because they work hard, sleep with 'the right women,' or get drunk, but because their actions show them in a continuously different light throughout the film. This turns out to be a crucial element. For Chabrol has successfully managed to make the transition from the theoretical beauty of a screenplay written by Paul Gégauff to a kind of practical beauty, the film's representation on screen. Chabrol's success is significant because it's extremely difficult to get it right. Antonioni, for example, was unable to pull it off when he directed *Il grido*.

The difference between *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins* is equivalent to that between a Cameflex and a Super Parvo. Throughout nearly the entire film, Chabrol's heavy camera pursues his characters, with tenderness and cruelty, to all four corners of the astonishing set designed by Bernard Evein. Like a large animal, it suspends an invisible threat above Juliette Mayniel's pretty head, forces Jean-Claude Brialy to reveal his hand, encloses Gérard Blain within the camera's amazing circling movement. I can offer no finer praise of Chabrol's work than by saying that he has invented the panning shot, the same way Alain Resnais invented the dolly shot, Griffith the close-up, or Ophuls the use of framing.

Jean-Luc Godard, *Arts*, 17 March 1959

By the chances of distribution, English audiences are likely to see Claude Chabrol's *Les Cousins* before his first film, *Le Beau Serge*. This is a double misfortune, not only because the two films are to some extent complementary, but because the second falls some way short of the qualities contained in the first. Both films have the same leading players: Gérard Blain and Jean-Claude Brialy, two young actors discovered through the short films of François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard, Chabrol's colleagues on *Cahiers du cinéma*. Gérard Blain (who played *Serge*) is here a young man from the provinces, Charles, who comes to Paris to study law at the Sorbonne and to lodge with his cousin Paul, a law student less attached to his work than to the organisation of wild parties. Charles stands for innocence, conscience, hard work; Paul represents corruption, cynicism, easy living. In their exam Charles the worker fails while Paul the cynic passes, at the cost (it is tentatively and improbably suggested) of

Sophie Grimaldi (*girl on the Champs-Elysées*) *
France 1959
112 mins
Video
* Uncredited

The screening on Thu 8 Jan will be introduced by
season curator Diana Cipriano

Ensemble: The Filmmakers from Richard Linklater's *Nouvelle Vague*

The 400 Blows Les Quatre cents coups

Thu 1 Jan 12:30; Fri 30 Jan 18:00

Journey to Italy Viaggio in Italia

Thu 1 Jan 15:00; Sun 18 Jan 15:10;

Wed 28 Jan 20:45

Orphée

Sat 3 Jan 20:50; Thu 15 Jan 21:00;

Sun 25 Jan 15:20

Léon Morin, prêtre Léon Morin, Priest

Sun 4 Jan 12:20; Tue 27 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by

season curator Diana Cipriano)

Paris nous appartient Paris Belongs to Us

Sun 4 Jan 18:00; Fri 16 Jan 20:20

Slacker

Mon 5 Jan 20:45 (+ intro by season programme
assistant Sean Atkinson); Thu 29 Jan 18:00

Last Year at Marienbad L'année dernière à
Marienbad

Tue 6 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by film critic Phuong Le);
Tue 13 Jan 20:45

Le Bonheur Happiness

Wed 7 Jan 20:40 (+ intro by film critic

Christina Newland); Sat 17 Jan 12:00

Les Cousins The Cousins

Thu 8 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by season curator
Diana Cipriano); Sat 31 Jan 20:30

Pickpocket

Thu 8 Jan 20:45; Wed 28 Jan 18:15 (+ intro by
Muriel Zagha, writer and broadcaster on film, and
co-host of cross-cultural podcast *Garlic & Pearls*)

My Night with Maud Ma nuit chez Maud

Fri 9 Jan 20:40; Wed 14 Jan 18:00;

Thu 22 Jan 20:30

Out 1: Noli me tangere

Sat 10 Jan 11:40 (Episodes 1-4);

Sun 11 Jan 12:10 (Episodes 5-8)

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bribing the examiner. Charles' disillusionment is a double one, since Paul also steals his girl friend Florence (Juliette Mayniel).

The assumptions behind this film are sometimes arbitrary, but *Les Cousins* is chiefly of interest for the light it throws on the moral attitudes taken by its writers, the director and his co-scriptwriter, the novelist Paul Gégauff. *Le Beau Serge* had already pointed the way; in this story of the reclamation of a lost soul, of the alcoholic Serge, apparently rescued from corruption by the intervention of his childhood friend François, the surface truth diverged from a deeper truth. François, the well-meaning, well-spoken Parisian, was in reality a hundred times less deserving than his friend, the lost soul in a country village and the drama's true hero. At the end of his first film, Chabrol presented us with a symbolic road to Calvary, as François dragged the drunken Serge through the snow and sleet to the bed where his wife was giving birth; and one could accept or reject this symbolism.

In *Les Cousins* the Christian references, while less obvious, are no less significantly worked out in the characters. Chabrol is known in France for his studies of Hitchcock's work, particularly his idea of the exchange, almost the 'reversibility', of moral guilt (*I Confess*, *Strangers on a Train*). Here Chabrol himself carries still further this trick of a shift between the characters. At first sight it seems clear that Paul, the rake and the immoralist, is unlovable, while the hard-working, well-meaning Charles makes exclusive claims to our sympathy. But Chabrol is also concerned with deciphering the smallest gestures in moral terms, with revealing that we are all of us, in the last analysis, capable of any action – in short, with coming to grips with some eminently Catholic theories of free will. If it is finally Paul, for instance, who shoots Charles at their game of Russian roulette (with one bullet in the revolver), we mustn't forget that the embittered Charles had himself previously pointed the gun at the head of the sleeping Paul. In intention, in other words, Charles had already killed Paul; and in fact he is killed himself in the course of a game.

This twisted and slightly diabolic dialectic – very much Chabrol's own – demands consideration because it helps to clarify the director's attitude to his people. Chabrol sacrifices realism, the chance to situate his characters more firmly in time and place, in order to arrive at a 'pure' relationship between them. His own private preference, one feels, is for Paul, just as in *Le Beau Serge* the real hero was not François, with his clumsy good intentions, but Serge himself. Chabrol, in fact, is much concerned with a particular Catholic theme: the part played by masochism in determining choice. This makes for an attitude coherent in itself and demanding respect, however much it may jar on people unable to adjust themselves to such an angle of vision. Certainly the film can be seen simply as a brilliant stylistic exercise, considerably under the influence of the American cinema. And I am not sure that the director himself is fully aware of all the implications contained in his subject. His film is none the less clearly a revelation of the sort of preoccupations affecting the young French directors, their concern with things of the spirit and their near-nihilism. The essential thing about these young filmmakers is that they are working with an independence which previously seemed the novelist's prerogative: one may criticise their message, but not the intensity of its expression.

Louis Marcorelles, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1959