Paris in the Dark

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In 1944 Parisians celebrated the Liberation of their city from Nazi control by going to the movies to watch Deanna Durbin in *Eve a commencé* (*It Started with Eve; 1941*). Brigitte Horney had appeared in Parisian cinemas at least until just before the August 1944 Liberation, as *Münchausen*, according to the last available listings, continued to play in multiple cinemas.\(^1\) Just a few months later, though, this Nazi star of the Occupation gave way to the young woman with the grown-up lyric soprano when *Eve a commencé* was the first “new” American film to play in the recently freed French capital and Durbin became the first great symbol from Hollywood of liberated Paris. This shift from one actress to another, however, gets us just a little ahead of the story of the film culture of Paris after the Germans surrendered the city.

Even before the end of the Occupation, a group of filmmakers associated with the French Resistance—Jacques Becker, Jean Painlevé, and others—had been making plans for a new, postwar French cinema, one that would reject the fantasy excess of *Münchausen*, that sought to reclaim French cinematic sovereignty from Continental Films and German control, and that planned to reeducate an all too often collaborationist, or at least acquiescent, French population. To facilitate their project they formed the Comité de la libération de cinéma français, the CLCF, and in their first “bulletin official” from October 1944, the founders claimed, “We have an ideal: the cinema, and through cinema, France.”\(^2\) Nevertheless, despite the nationalist, heroic rhetoric, things still moved slowly in bringing the film culture of Paris, let alone the rest of France, back to anything resembling the vibrancy of the prewar
period. For the first two months after the Liberation, film enthusiasts in Paris had only limited opportunities for going to the movies, as the cinemas in the city could show films only two nights a week, almost certainly because of ongoing shortages of electricity and other essentials for operation. As a sign of some progress, that same CLCF bulletin for October 1944 announced that cinemas now would be authorized to show movies five days a week, all except Tuesday and Thursday, and instead of just a single evening screening at 9:30, cinemas now were allowed to show one matinee on Saturday and two on Sunday.³

Assessing the last few weeks of the Nazi Occupation and the first few months following the Liberation remains extraordinarily difficult. The evidence is thin at best, and is often nonexistent. To the extent that information is available, it appears that, during the Occupation, there was no significant damage to the city’s exhibition sites. In fact, despite the fighting in the streets of the last days before the Liberation, between Resistance forces and the Germans, Paris was left more physically intact than other European cities that had been centers of ground combat and aerial bombardment, and that had not been occupied by the enemy. While the cinema infrastructure remained intact, there were other obstacles to a fully functioning film culture. Immediately after the Liberation, for example, the hundreds of barricades that had gone up throughout the city during the street fighting were almost certainly still in place, inhibiting movement around Paris. There were also administrative standoffs between various groups seeking some control over the city, Gaullists and Communists, for instance, as well as smaller bureaucratic and military units, such as the Commission d’action militaire, or the Conseil national de la Résistance, or the Comité parisien de la Libération. All of this, along with crippling shortages of electricity and other necessities, no doubt slowed the development of Parisian post-Liberation cinema.⁴

The available primary materials tell us that by the end of July 1944, some forty-five cinemas remained open in Paris.⁵ Just three weeks later, around the middle of August, with German control of the city weakening, that number had gone down to three: the Normandie on the Champs-Élysées in the eighth arrondissement and two other cinémas d’exclusivité in the eighteenth, the Palais-Rochechouart and the Gaumont-Palace.⁶ During this period, these three cinemas seem mostly to have been screening documentaries, and within just a few days the Gaumont-Palace would be closed. Cabarets were closing as well, and so were theatres, and those of the latter that remained open often presented their shows only in the daytime (“jouant à la lumière du jour”), probably to save on the electricity that was in such short supply in the city.⁷
CE QUE NOUS VOULONS

Il y a deux mois, les Allemands occupent encore Paris. Aujourd'hui, on nous lève, enfin, nos Alliés se bâti-

tent. Les glorieux F.F.I. débarrassent la France des derniers liens de résis-
tance.

Pendant ce temps, nous, nousupportons de Châteaud'Ivoire, dans les bureaux de la maison de Production, l'imagi-

nale enceinte. Le rire de ces prochains incidents, parfois, est bien de la France, et s'agit-il d'une partie de cette icône?

Nous en avons un idéal : le Cin-

e, et, à travers lui, la France. Nous nous aurons beau.

Tant pis pour ceux que notre ac-

cion attire. Il n'y a pas, cependant, une grandeur entre ceux qui ont participé à la rési-

ance et ceux qui n'y ont pas parti-

cipé. Les problèmes de l'immédiate, parce qu'ils n'ont pas concerné. On estime même d'amor-

cer des campagnes, pour le moment simplement verbales. Il y aura tout

ouvres des équipes, des écrans par

ceux qui ont parmi particulier unité

s, nous partageons avec nous.

Nous nous engageons à vous, à vous, à

Louis DAQUIN,

Secrétaire Général du C.L.C.F.

L'activité et les buts du C.L.C.F.

Le Comité de Libération du C.L.C.F. s'est réuni les représentants des dif-

erents Groupes de Libération, qui sont

situe dans le milieu de l'opposition al-

lemannique, et qui étaient en contact direct avant

la Libération de Paris. A la tête, le C.L.C.F.

On August 25, 1944, the Germans surrendered Paris. As difficult as it is to find information about the cinema there in the weeks just before the Liberation, it is, apparently, impossible for the five weeks that followed. By October 1, at least five cinemas had opened: once again the Gaumont-Palace and the Normandie, but also the Savoie in the eleventh arrondissement, the Ciné-Batignolles in the seventeenth, and the Paramount in the ninth. Audiences did not have much choice, however, about what they saw. All of those cinemas showed the same film, *France libre*, a compilation of actuality footage made by the CLCF that documented the Liberation of Paris.⁸

At least seven cinemas had opened by October 15, and audiences had by then a limited range of films from which to choose. The 1939 World War I melodrama starring Junie Astor and Léon Mathot, *Deuxième bureau contre kommandantur*—which, as I mentioned earlier, had been released initially just a few days before the 1940 French surrender and so probably never had played widely in France because of its anti-German sentiment—showed at two cinemas, the Aubert-Palace and the Club des Vedettes, both in the ninth arrondissement. At two cinemas just a couple of blocks apart on the boulevard des Italiens in the second arrondissement, a new French film, *Coup de tête* (1944), premiered at the Marivaux, and Jean Delannoy’s *Pontcarral, colonel d’empire*, from 1942, was in reissue at the Impérial. Just two weeks after *France libre* blanketed the city, the only real reminder of the war played at the Normandie, a documentary that became something of a hit in Paris, *Un jour de guerre en URSS*, a 1941 Soviet film detailing a single day of the war.⁹

*Eve a commencé* is the film that provides the most compelling information about post-Liberation film distribution in Paris, and also exposes the limits to what we might find out, at least given the evidence available to us. Durbin’s film, the first Hollywood movie in Paris since 1940, also played in two of those seven cinemas, just like *Deuxième bureau contre kommandantur*: in the second arrondissement at the Rex, one of the largest cinemas in Paris and that, as a soldatenkino, had been reserved for members of the German military during the Occupation, and also at the Avenue cinema in the eighth arrondissement.¹⁰ Why was it Durbin’s film that had this particular significance in Parisian film history, and how had it gotten to Paris in the first place?

Film historians have been aware for a long time of Durbin’s incredible celebrity in the United States and Great Britain, especially among teenage girls and young women, the fans who were around the same age as the actress when she was at the peak of her popularity in the late 1930s and early 1940s.¹¹ At the same time, Durbin was also extremely popular in France and France’s colonies. In October 1937, the film journal *Ciné France* ran a photo
of Durbin across half of its front page, with the caption “new star, new singer, and the new ingenue who triumphs” in Deanna et ses boys (One Hundred Men and a Girl; 1937). That same year, the daily newspaper Le Petit Parisien also put a photo of Durbin on its front page, and in fact ran a double column practically down the length of the page to advertise a long story about the performer the newspaper called “the great new star from the Hollywood sky.” A year later, again in Ciné France, an article compared the teenager to the great new French star Michèle Morgan, herself only eighteen, and predicted a global trend toward ever younger actresses. That article referred to Durbin in a mixture of French and English as “la child-woman,” who “knew how to cry and laugh through her tears, and who was one of the most gracious stars” of cinema. French radio played Durbin’s recordings throughout the country, and her celebrity reached the colonies and the French expatriate community, with the Saigon newspaper Le Nouvelliste d’Indochine, for example, profiling her in a January 1938 column on “Stars from Hollywood.”

Still, there were other Hollywood stars who were just as famous, if not even more well known, and whose films made during the Occupation might seem even more appropriate for breaking the embargo on Hollywood movies that had been imposed by the Nazis. The historical importance of Durbin’s film almost certainly had more to do with the vagaries of international film distribution during wartime than with the preferences of Parisian audiences. Of course, the Nazis had banned American films in the Occupied Zone, including Paris, in 1940, and then in southern France, in Vichy, in 1942, bans that would stay in effect until the Allies drove the Germans out of France in the summer and fall of 1944. French North Africa, however, where there seems never to have been a significant Nazi embargo on American films, had been liberated by early 1943, and movies from Hollywood played steadily in major urban areas like Algiers very shortly after that. By August 1944, Eve a commencé was showing there, at the Mondial cinema and then at the Royal.

It would make things convenient to be able to say that Durbin’s film simply moved from Algiers to Paris when cinemas began to open after the Liberation, but following that run at the Royal, Eve a commencé came back to Algiers, playing at the Caméo cinema at precisely the same time as it showed in Paris, in mid-October 1944. Those two prints of Eve showing in Paris, along with the other one at the Caméo in Algiers, probably indicate that there were several copies of the film in North Africa when Paris was liberated, making it easy to move to the French capital while also staying in colonial cinemas.

Because of the scarcity of exhibition information, it remains difficult to know if this was the standard procedure for the period just after the Liberation,
with films going to major North African cities and then to Paris, reversing the usual route. There were films, though, that ran truer to prewar form. Another of the first America films to play in Paris after the Liberation, *Un américain pur sang* (*Joe Smith, American; 1942*) opened there about the same time as Durbin’s film did, in October 1944, and then premiered in Algiers at the Bijou about six weeks later. So it seems possible that American film companies established their Paris distribution offices, or at least their methods for getting films into Paris, within just a few weeks of the Liberation.

Opening as it did a new era in Parisian film culture, *Eve a commencé* generated a great deal of excitement. *Combat* headlined its movie page “Les Premiers films étrangers à Paris” (“The First Foreign Films in Paris”), and then went on to discuss Durbin’s film and also *Un américain pur sang* (which as far as I can tell had not yet premiered). The reopening of Parisian cinemas had brought huge crowds, so many that exhibitors “thought they were dreaming.” Then *Combat*, founded as a Resistance newspaper and hardly known for its sentiment, itself went on dreamily about Durbin, viewing her as the perfect symbol of a new beginning but also of what was lost during the Occupation. This wonderful reopening of cinemas “was also cruel for us,” because “it reminded us how we had aged.” *Combat* continued that when Parisians had last seen Durbin (this was probably in *First Love*, from 1939, or *That Certain Age*, from 1938), she was “just a little girl,” and now “we find her almost a woman.” This aging appears to be less a reference to films that were made, really, only a couple of years apart, but rather to not having seen Durbin at all, or any American films, for the four years of the Occupation.

*Eve a commencé* seems to have been reviewed in every Parisian newspaper of every political persuasion: *Temps présent, Figaro, Jeunesse, Carrefour, Libération, Ce soir, Front National, Les Lettres françaises, L’Humanité, Populaire*, and others. As well, some of the most distinguished critics in Paris weighed in on the film. Roger Leenhardt, who would begin a significant career as a filmmaker in a few years, praised Durbin in *Les Lettres françaises*, but then acknowledged that the film could not stand up against the great American prewar comedies directed by Frank Capra, *L’Extravagant Monsieur Deeds* (*Mr. Deeds Goes to Town; 1936*) and *Monsieur Smith au Sénat* (*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington; 1939*). The journalist Jeander, who as we have seen lectured on film history in Nazi ciné-clubs in Paris during the war, called the film “charmante” in *Libération*, which had begun in 1941 as a newspaper of the Resistance. Paul Barbellion, who worked as Robert Bresson’s assistant director on *Les Dames du Bois du Boulogne* (1945), also wrote about *Eve a
commencé, and so, too, did André Bazin, for Le Parisien libéré, which had begun publication only two months before (Bazin would remain a critic there until his death in 1958).  

Bazin used the occasion of the film—at first calling attention to Durbin’s great beauty—to comment on the state of American cinema, and comedy in particular. For Bazin, the film proved how Hollywood comedies had become more and more standardized, and in such a way that it was impossible to be bored while watching them. Nevertheless, the conditions of the screening also needed to be standardized. As proof, Bazin moved to a recent viewing at the Madeleine cinema in the eighth arrondissement of a revival of Ernst Lubitsch’s great 1938 comedy, La Huitième femme de Barbe-Bleue (Bluebeard’s Eighth Wife). That experience was ruined for Bazin because the film had been dubbed. He wrote that he didn’t understand a word of English, but nevertheless subtitles would allow any viewer’s imagination to become perfectly oriented to the story, and that one would soon forget that the film was in a foreign language.

Eve a commencé may seem like a negligible film to us now. At the time of the Liberation, however, after years of waiting for American films, which themselves would signal the end of German control of Paris, Durbin’s movie was anything but inconsequential. Eve a commencé certainly tells us something of interest about international distribution during the period, but also shows how little we can actually know, and how difficult it is to assess how films came not only to conventional cinemas just after the Liberation and after the end of the war, but also to ciné-clubs and other sites. In this case, we are left, then, simply with Deanna Durbin, “toujours aussi jolie” (“always so pretty”) according to Bazin, and the extraordinary impact that she had on Parisian audiences in October 1944, an impact that could only lessen as more cinemas opened and more American films came to the city.

By early November, in fact, around thirty cinemas showed films, including the posh Biarritz in the eighth arrondissement (with the Paris premiere of Julien Duvivier’s 1942 Hollywood film, Six destins [Tales of Manhattan]) and also, in the second arrondissement, the Ciné-Opéra, one of three cinemas in the city showing the 1941 Alfred Hitchcock film M. et Mme Smith (Mr. and Mrs. Smith), which was playing in Paris for the first time. As typically had been the case in prewar Paris, there were also important reprises: L’Extravagant Monsieur Deeds at the Cinéma des Champs-Élysées, and perhaps most significantly given the recent Liberation, Jean Renoir’s celebration of the French Revolution, La Marseillaise (1938), at the Moulin Rouge in the eighteenth arrondissement.
By the end of 1944 more than fifty cinemas had reopened in Paris. They showed new French films (Jean Delannoy’s *Le Bossu* [1944] at the Vivienne in the second arrondissement), Russian movies (*L’Arc-en-Ciel* [1944] at the Max Linder in the ninth), a range of American films from before the war (*Âmes à la mer* [*Souls at Sea*; 1937], at the Gaité-Clichy in the seventeenth), and Hollywood films that had been kept out of Paris because of the Occupation (John Stahl’s comedy *Mme et son clochard* [*Our Wife*; 1941], at the Ermitage in the eighth). One such Hollywood film playing at the time stood out as perhaps the most eagerly anticipated movie event of the immediate post-Liberation period, René Clair’s *Ma femme est une sorcière* (*I Married a Witch*), from 1942, showing at both the Biarritz in the eighth and the Caméo in the ninth. The popular press at the time typically understood Clair as the father of modern French cinema, and a Clair film that Parisians had to wait more than two years to see caused even greater excitement than a new film by the master.

Along with the much-anticipated opening of Clair’s film, the event that marked the return of Parisian film culture was certainly the Grande Quinzaine du cinéma français (the Great Fortnight of French Cinema). We tend to think of the 1946 Cannes Film Festival, held for the first time after the war put the 1939 planned opening on hold, as the sign that French cinema had regained its prominence. As important as that may have been on an international scale, on a more local level the Grande Quinzaine marked Paris once again as a film capital. For two weeks beginning on December 4, the Normandie cinema on the Champs-Élysées, always one of the most important exhibition sites in Paris, screened fourteen “grandes productions” made between 1940 and 1944. These films played in addition to the newly released movie showing exclusively at the Normandie throughout December, the Annie Ducaux vehicle *Florence est folle* (1944). A film schedule for the Quinzaine seems no longer to exist, but it is safe to assume that nothing shown there would have been made by Continental, the German studio that produced so many French-language films during the war. Available sources provide just one film in the festival, Jacques Becker’s rural melodrama *Goupi mains rouges*, from 1943 celebrated for its critique of the Vichy regime’s idealization of peasants. Les Films Minerva, a company that began in the 1930s, well before the war and so without any direct links to the Occupation, produced Becker’s entry in the Quinzaine.

We can find other, less elevated signs of the film culture of Paris having returned to something resembling its pre-Occupation place, as well as indications of the demilitarization of the city in general. Also in December, just as the Quinzaine got underway at the Normandie, the major cinema chains in
Paris announced an end to the post-Liberation policy of giving French soldiers discounted admissions to Saturday and Sunday screenings.  

Postwar

A little less than a year later and just a few months after the war had ended, things had changed considerably. The evidence is still scant for the modern researcher, but a new movie weekly, Cinévie, began publication in October 1945 and typically ran complete listings for Paris as well as articles that give us a sense of film culture in the city in the immediate postwar period. At the time, there were around 275 cinemas in Paris. About forty of them would be considered cinémas d’exclusivité, the most important cinemas in the city and mostly in the “best” locations, in the eighth arrondissement, for instance, on and around the avenue des Champs-Élysées, or on the boulevard des Italiens in the second and ninth arrondissements. Some, like the Gaumont-Palace in the less chic eighteenth arrondissement, were simply among the very largest cinemas. These locations showed the newest films and, with foreign movies, in subtitled rather than dubbed prints just as they had before the war. The other sites were those cinémas des quartiers, many still in the better parts of Paris but others that were farther away from the center and from the more affluent districts. These locations tended to show films only after they had shown en exclusivité for at least a week, and then frequently showed dubbed versions of foreign films. The distinctions between these two brands of exhibition sites were not, however, always absolute.

Cinévie listed not only the addresses, metro stops, and feature films at cinemas in the city, but also which days they would be open for business. Paris still faced a shortage of electricity in fall 1945, the “régime des restrictions d’électricité” according to Cinévie, and this utility problem was the great equalizer among cinemas. Most of them only showed movies on Sundays, or perhaps also on Saturdays, and practically all of them were only open for one afternoon screening and one in the evening, usually at 8:00 or 8:30, a restriction apparently mandated by law. Only a few cinemas ran films every day, and none of them was a cinéma d’exclusivité. In the fourth arrondissement, the Rivoli and the Saint-Paul stayed open “tous les jours,” as did the Fantasio in the eighteenth arrondissement and just a very few others, while the Alésia-Palace in the fourteenth added a third evening, Thursday, to its Saturday and Sunday offerings. By the end of November 1945, Cinévie announced that because electricity was now in somewhat better supply, cinemas would be allowed to schedule one or two extra screenings, depending on the length of the program, between 2:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.
A year later, at the end of 1946, some cinemas started their programs as early as 10:00 in the morning and some had final screenings after midnight. During the final week of the year, for example, the Marignan on the Champs-Élysées had its last screening of Marcel Carné’s *Les Portes de la nuit* (1946) at 12:30 in the morning. Nevertheless, most cinemas still were only open on weekends. The Delambra cinema, the Denfert, and the Univers-Palace, all in the fourteenth arrondissement, now were open every day, as was the Nouveau-Théâtre in the fifteenth, all of these neighborhood cinemas more or less on the periphery, geographically and otherwise, of Parisian film culture. Some cinemas had schedules that make no sense to us now, unless they were intended to decrease demand on electricity in certain areas. In the nineteenth arrondissement that same week in 1946, the Belleville held screenings on Saturday, Monday, and Thursday, while the Éden, also in the nineteenth, opened on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and the Renaissance in the same neighborhood showed movies on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.28

If we return to the end of October 1945, twenty-six films were playing in the thirty-five exclusive cinemas that reported their listings to Cinévie. There were American films made during the war that now appeared in Paris for the first time, such as Alfred Hitchcock’s *L’Ombre du doute* (*Shadow of a Doubt*; 1943) at the Triomphe cinema at 92 avenue des Champs-Élysées, and *Prisonniers de Satan* (*The Purple Heart*; 1944), with Dana Andrews, at the Biarritz just across the street. Parisians might also see new French films like *La Route du bagne* (1945), with the great star Viviane Romance, or *La Cage aux rossignols* (1945) featuring Noël-Noël. These major cinemas did not just show new films, however, and there were also some reprises of movies with stars who had large followings in Paris. The most notable that week was *Drôle de drame* (1937), directed by Marcel Carné and featuring two iconic performers, Louis Jouvet and Michel Simon. Throughout the rest of Paris, in the neighborhoods, around 120 films were playing, and most of them were either American or French. Many of these were reprises of older movies, and some of them were films that had recently been showing en exclusivité. As might be expected, given his consistent status as one of the most significant of all French directors, René Clair was well represented, with films in the best cinemas as well as the neighborhoods during this period, while other movies demonstrated the typical range in Parisian film culture, from low- to highbrow.29

Firmly in the former category, various parts of the twelve-episode, low-budget Republic Pictures serial *Les Vautours de la jungle* (*Hawk of the Wilderness*; 1938) played throughout Paris at the end of 1945, featured at cinemas, at various times, in the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and thirteenth arrondissements, and so
too did Universal’s African adventure serial, *Richard le Téméraire* (*Tim Tyler’s Luck*; 1937). At the other end of the scale, however, Robert Bresson’s *Les Dames du Bois du Boulogne* had just opened in Paris at two cinémas d’exclusivité, the Ermitage on the Champs-Élysées and the Rex on the boulevard Poissonnière. This was only the director’s second feature-length film and perhaps the most accessible of all his works, but it is a Bresson film nevertheless, and we might not think of it today as a possible commercial hit. Yet *Les Dames* played exclusively throughout the late summer and early fall of 1945, and then moved immediately and systematically to cinemas in the neighborhoods. During the week of October 31, and after having left its exclusive engagements, the film showed in seven cinemas, including one of the larger locations in the city, the elegant, Egyptian-style Louxor-Pathé in the tenth arrondissement, and also two cinemas each in the sixteenth and seventeenth arrondissements. A week later, *Les Dames* had left the Louxor, and its run had contracted to three cinemas, all of them different from the week before. Showing, perhaps, the logic of Parisian distribution, Bresson’s film moved that week from one edge of the eighteenth arrondissement to the other, from the Sélect cinema on the avenue du Clichy on the western edge to the Capitole on the rue de la Chappelle on the eastern border. The following week, the film had crossed the eighteenth arrondissement again and gone back to the western side at the Métropole cinema, and opened at four cinemas in the seventeenth and two in the sixteenth, as well as one in the third.30

*Les Dames du Bois du Boulogne* has come down to us as a significant critical and commercial flop, mostly because of François Truffaut’s 1975 retrospective on the movie’s reception, when the filmmaker wrote that the public came to see *Les Dames* only to smirk, and that the producer “was ruined.”31 This indeed may have been the case.32 The evidence in *Cinévie*, though, seems to indicate that Bresson’s film found an audience just after the end of the war, in Paris if not the rest of France, and this apparent success perhaps indicates the possibility for a film with significant artistic pretensions having a place in the everyday film culture of the city. There also may have been a broader economic incentive to the way *Les Dames* made its way through Paris, as it seems to have been part of a distribution package of films with high aspirations, paired with *Sérénade*, a 1940 Franz Schubert biopic starring Louis Jouvet and the great German actress Lilian Harvey, who had left Germany and her career as a Nazi star just the year before. At each of the cinemas where *Les Dames* had played in the week of October 31, *Sérénade* appeared the following week. The films had been made by different, and very small, production companies, but their apparent combination here does seem to hint at the project of
larger distribution firms handling films like these, renting them in packages to neighborhood cinemas.

Other films show the differences between exclusive showings and those in the neighborhoods, and also that these locations were not in absolute opposition one to the other. Charles Chaplin’s *Dictateur* (*The Great Dictator*; 1941) had opened in Paris in the spring of 1945, and by the fall of that year was still playing en exclusivité at the Avenue cinema in the eighth arrondissement, although it is unclear whether this was a continuation of an extended opening run or a return engagement. At the same time, however, the film also played at the Royal-Haussmann in the ninth arrondissement, and over the next few weeks the neighborhood engagements would extend to other arrondissements. As a result, Parisians might choose the most convenient neighborhood to see the film that counted as one of the great cultural events in the city that year. But they could also make an aesthetic and technological choice. At the Avenue, *Dictateur* played in *version originale*, that is, subtitled, but throughout the rest of Paris, the movie could only be seen *doublé*, or dubbed.  

As I have mentioned, dubbed films were typically the case in the neighborhoods, but not always. That same week, just a short metro ride away from...
the Royal-Haussmann and still in the ninth arrondissement, audiences could have seen Humphrey Bogart and the Dead End Kids dubbed into French in *L’École du crime* (*Crime School*; 1938) at the Delta cinema, or French actors speaking for Conrad Veidt and Valerie Hobson in Michael Powell’s *Espionne à bord* (*Blackout*; 1940) at the Cinécran. But just as close by and in the same arrondissement, another British film, *Sublime Sacrifice* (*Pastor Hall*; 1940), as well as *Gung Ho* (1943), with Randolph Scott, played with French subtitles.34

Throughout this period, in exclusivity and in the neighborhoods, subtitled and dubbed, there were René Clair films. *Cinévie* wrote about the French master throughout the last few months of 1945, calling him “much more than a well-known director,” and indeed “a great Frenchman,” in an article with a title that seemed to sum up a nation’s gratitude: “Merci, Monsieur René Clair.”35 A few months after this, in March 1946, the magazine ran an article assuring readers that, in Clair’s own words, “I count on coming back to France” after having spent most of the war in Hollywood.36 At the end of the year, *Cinévie* wrote about his next film, Clair’s first French film since before the war, which would unite the great director with the great French star, Maurice Chevalier, in *Le Silence est d’or* (1947). Finally, Clair could return from Hollywood and make films back at home.37

In early October 1945, two Clair films played at exclusive cinemas.38 Parisians could go to the Marbeuf cinema in the eighth arrondissement to watch *C’est arrivé demain* (*It Happened Tomorrow*), a 1944 Hollywood film that naturally had not played during the Occupation. They could also go to the Normandie cinema, one of the most prestigious in Paris, on the Champs-Élysées to see Clair’s 1935 British film, *Fantôme à vendre*, which had shown extensively in Paris on its initial release a decade earlier, had been reprised a number of times, and had been a staple of ciné-club screenings. For any Clair film, apparently, there was always an audience, even one that may have seen the movie a number of times.

Those two films ran at the Marbeuf and the Normandie for about a month, and *Fantôme* would return in early 1946, this time at the Panthéon cinema in the fifth arrondissement.39 During this time, another Clair film, *Ma femme est une sorcière*, which as we have seen had opened in Paris to much fanfare in 1944, played throughout the neighborhoods (at four cinemas, for example, in mid-November 1945), and also back en exclusivité at the Agriculteurs cinema in the ninth arrondissement.40 In the immediate postwar period, it seems as if the surest sign of a return to “normal,” pre-Occupation Parisian film culture was the omnipresence of Clair throughout the city.
There were other returns to Paris practically as triumphant as Clair’s. At least since the mid-1930s, Jean Gabin’s movies, either new or reprised, had been a constant of Parisian film culture. When it became apparent that the great star would not leave Hollywood and return to France during the war, the Nazis banned his films. After Remorques in 1941, Gabin did not make another French film until Martin Roumagnac (1946). Following the war, however, his films once again played throughout Paris. A quick and random look through the Cinévie listings seems always to show an available Gabin film. In October 1945, Pépé le Moko, with Gabin in perhaps his most iconic role, began making its way through Paris, first in the fifth arrondissement and then in the sixteenth. In early January 1946, Pépé le Moko played once again, at the Cardinet in the seventeenth, and so too did Remorques, in the tenth. The next month, Les Bas-Fonds (1936), which Gabin made with Jean Renoir, played at the Sebastopol-Ciné in the second, and a year later, while Martin Roumagnac played exclusively at the Normandie cinema on the Champs-Élysées and the Olympia on the boulevard des Capucines, La Bête humaine (1938), another collaboration with Renoir, showed at the Royal-Haussmann in the ninth arrondissement. There also would be showings of Quai des brumes, the 1938 film that Gabin made with Marcel Carné, and which turns up very early in the available Cinévie listings, at the end of October 1945 at the Paris-Ciné in the tenth arrondissement.

From its original release, Quai des brumes has come down to us as among the great star turns in French film history, introducing audiences to Michèle Morgan, who would become one of the legendary figures in European cinema. Indeed, Quai des brumes, with Morgan holding her own against the formidable Gabin, did indeed make an extraordinary impact on Parisians in the summer and fall of 1938 at least until the beginning of 1939, when the film played continuously in Paris at several of the city’s best cinemas. Even before this, the actress had begun to impress audiences. She made a few films before Quai des brumes, including, when she was only seventeen, a costarring role opposite another monumental French actor, Raimu, in Gribouille from 1937. Morgan worked constantly during this period, and made two more films with Gabin, Le Récif de corail (1939) as well as Remorques.

Morgan then left France for Hollywood until the end of World War II, a self-imposed exile that, however professionally expedient it may have seemed at the time, was also an act of resistance to the Nazi Occupation of Paris and the rest of the country. Indeed, the Nazis understood that getting Morgan back was a major part of their project of making French and Parisian culture seem just as it was before the war began. When Morgan refused to return,
the Germans threatened the safety of her family, who had stayed in France, threats that came to the attention of the United States Department of State. Because Morgan still would not come back, the Nazis seem to have given up their efforts to force her return and banned her films in France, just as they did with Gabin’s. After an up-and-down career in Hollywood, Morgan came back to France, but her first new French film, *Symphonie pastorale*, would not appear until 1946.

Well before that, however, *Cinévie* heralded her return from the United States as one of the surest signs that the war really had ended. Throughout the last few months of 1945 and the beginning of 1946, the magazine focused on stars who now could come back to France. When Simone Simon returned to France and then to the capital, in December 1945, *Cinévie* announced that “Paris was Simone Simon’s Christmas gift.” Later that month, the magazine began a series bylined by Simon herself about her stay in the United States, “America in Five Episodes.” In the case of Sessue Hayakawa, who had been a great celebrity in Paris since the sensation of *Forfaiture* (*The Cheat*; 1915), it was not so much his own return to France as it was the return of the actor’s work to Parisian cinemas. Hayakawa had made a few French films that had appeared after the surrender to Germany, but perhaps had played only sporadically, because according to *Cinévie* in 1946, it had been “six years since we have seen” the great star, and now, finally, the public would get to watch him in his latest French movie, *Le Cabaret du grand large* (1946).

Always and above all others, there was Morgan. In January 1946, the magazine began the multipart series “Five Years in America, Told by Michèle Morgan,” which included stories about her love life and her work. When *Cinévie* reported that “A New Michèle Morgan Was Born . . . in a Hair Salon,” the magazine ran sketches of four hairstyles that the star had rejected, and then a photograph of the fifth one, “the best.” In April, Morgan appeared on the cover of *Cinévie* with her costar Pierre Blanchar, in a publicity photo from the long-awaited *Symphonie pastorale*. Certainly there were other stars who were celebrated in *Cinévie*, stars who had stayed in Paris during the Occupation: Edwige Feuillère, for instance, as well as perhaps the greatest of all French actresses at the time, Danielle Darrieux, whose third marriage required a cover photo and a multipage spread of photographs and stories. For the French film culture of the immediate postwar period, however, and at least in the one movie magazine that is available to us today, it is the triumphant return of exiled French stars, and especially Morgan and Gabin, that signified the end of the war and of German control.
Figure 6.3 "A New Michèle Morgan Was Born . . . in a Hair Salon," Cinévie, January 23, 1946. Source: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
French authority over its own cinema might be marked in other ways. The cinemas themselves could indicate a national patrimony interrupted by the Germans but certainly not ended by the Occupation. In March 1946, Cinévie announced a new Parisian cinema in the ninth arrondissement, this one called the Méliès in honor of one of the first and certainly one of the greatest French filmmakers, Georges Méliès, whose films almost half a century before had reached a global audience. The location itself seemed predetermined for a cinema that honored the great magician of the movies, the man who made *Le Voyage dans la lune* (1902) and so many other films full of astonishing sleights of hand. The Théâtre Robert-Houdin, founded by the great magician Houdin himself, and which Méliès had owned for a few years, had been on that site from the late nineteenth century until its demolition in the 1920s. The film that inaugurated the new cinema was American rather than French, but seems to have been perfectly suited to the occasion, *Le Magicien d’Oz* (*The Wizard of Oz*; 1939). In this case, then, the location of film viewing rather than the film itself, and the history of the exhibition site, asserted the continuity of French cinema and Parisian film culture.

What is most noticeable about that film culture is the astonishing availability of films, with the entire city providing a sort of vast film repertory. To fill the demands of all of the cinemas in the city, films kept coming back, and might well play, at any one time, throughout Paris. In the immediate postwar period, for instance, there seem to have always been any number of options for seeing films made by Max Ophüls. *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* (1940), which starred Edwige Feuillère, played throughout the city in 1945, at five cinemas the week of October 10, at nine different cinemas the following week, and then at twelve new locations two weeks later. Ophüls’s *Yoshiwara* (1937), with Sessue Hayakawa, appeared in one cinema for one week only beginning on October 31. Frank Capra’s films apparently were as popular as Ophüls’s, with reprises during this same period, in the neighborhoods and at exclusive cinemas, of *Vous ne l’emporterez pas avec vous* (*You Can’t Take It with You*; 1938) at the Ursulines cinema, *Monsieur Smith au Sénat* first exclusively at the Biarritz and then at the Cinéac-Madeleine in the eighth arrondissement, and *L’Extravagant Monsieur Deeds* playing for one week in the fifteenth arrondissement.

As we move into 1947 and farther away from the war, the evidence of the film culture of Paris becomes scantier. Cinévie may have ceased publication by this time, or, at the very least, issues after 1946 are unavailable to the historian working in the United States. My evidence in this instance comes from a lucky discovery at the now long-gone magazine store I mentioned in the introduction to this book, Archives de la presse in the fourth arrondissement. Among
a bunch of issues of the film magazine L’Écran français, there was one that still had a four-page insert listing all of the films playing in Paris, and at which cinemas, for the week of January 15, 1947. By then there were just over three hundred cinemas in Paris and another fifty or so in the nearby suburbs. There were about 150 films showing in Paris, and by my count seventy of those came from Hollywood, mostly made after the French surrender in June 1940 and before the Liberation in August 1944, the period during which the Germans banned Hollywood movies throughout the Occupied Zone of France. Now Parisians could see everything they had missed: Hantise (Gaslight; 1944), playing at the Max Linder in the second arrondissement as well as at the Ermitage; Le Tueur à gages (This Gun for Hire; 1942) at the Broadway in the eighth; Walt Disney’s Fantasia (1940) showing at the Empire in the seventeenth; the Marx Brothers in Chercheurs d’or (Go West; 1940) at the Ciné-Opéra in the second; and Citizen Kane (1941) at the Artistic in the ninth.

At least for this very brief postwar period, the French cinema held its own against the Hollywood product. During this same week in January more than sixty French films showed in Paris, and around thirty of them had been
released in 1946 or 1947. Jean Cocteau’s *La Belle et la Bête* (1946) continued its exclusive run at the very chic Madeleine cinema in the eighth arrondissement, and Marcel Carné and Jacques Prévert’s *Les Portes de la nuit* showed at the Marivaux in the second. There was also Duvivier’s *Panique* (1946) at the Olympia and at the Normandie in the eighth arrondissement, René Clément’s *Le Père tranquille* (1946) at the Club cinema in the ninth, and Marc Allégret’s *Pétrus* (1946), with the great star Fernandel, at the Studio Universel in the fourth and the Panthéon in the fifth, to name just a few of the new French films from the period. Indeed, 1946 would be a terrific year for French cinema, at least in terms of numbers, with the production of anywhere from 100 to 120 feature films (depending on the source reporting the figures), four or five times the total from 1944.\(^{58}\)

In addition to all of the new French films, there were also standards showing in the neighborhoods: Marcel Pagnol’s *César* at the Florida in the twentieth arrondissement, for instance, as well as his *La Fille du Puisatier* (1940) at the Abbesses in the eighteenth. As an ongoing signal to postwar audiences that the Occupation really had ended, Jean Gabin’s films continued to play in Paris. During that week in January 1947, his 1936 film *La Belle Équipe* showed in the eighteenth, at the Myrrha.

The film culture of Paris in those first years after the Liberation, however, did not completely repudiate the memory of Nazi control. One of the films playing in the city that week in January 1947 had been made by Continental Films, the Nazi company founded during the war to produce “French” movies. *Pierre et Jean* (1943), directed by André Cayatte and starring Renée Saint-Cyr and Noël Roquevert, appeared at the Gloria cinema in the seventeenth arrondissement and the Stéphen in the eighteenth, neither one a prominent site. From just a week’s worth of evidence, it is difficult to tell whether Continental’s movies commonly showed in Paris at the time, or just filled in here and there, given the exhibition demands of the Parisian film market. Perhaps predictably, there seems not to have been much of a market for any German films in Paris. Only one played that week, at the cinema that had received so much publicity in *Cinévie* when it opened, the Méliès in the ninth arrondissement. That film was *Symphonie inachevée (Leise flehen meine Lieder)*, a 1933 period drama about Franz Schubert, significantly removed from any aspect of the war, and that had attracted large crowds to the Studio de l’Étoile in the eighth arrondissement when it played there, possibly in its Paris premiere, for six weeks in the summer of 1936.\(^{59}\)

There was, in fact, little presence of any other foreign films besides those from the United States. Ten or eleven films from Great Britain played in Paris
that week, including David Lean’s *L’Esprit s’amuse* (*Blythe Spirit*; 1945), along with *Le Septième voile* (*The Seventh Veil*; 1945) and *Elephant Boy* (1937). There were only about a half dozen other foreign films, with Roberto Rossellini’s *Rome, ville ouverte* (*Roma città aperta*; 1945) the most prominent and playing in multiple cinemas. *Ordet* (1943), from Sweden, and directed by Carl Theodor Dreyer, also showed, as did *Il était une petite fille* (1944) from the Soviet Union. Even the ciné-clubs that week concentrated on French and American films. At Ciné-Art, audiences could watch another Continental Films production, the Henri-Georges Clouzot classic *Le Corbeau* (1943). Two groups featured the work of Marcel Carné, the Club-Boulogne-Billancourt screening *Hôtel du Nord* (1938) and the Club universitaire showing *Jenny*. Both the Ciné liberté club and the Club Jeanson de Sailly showed Renoir’s *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936), and the Club Poissy played *Pépé le Moko*, with Jean Gabin. Fans of American films that week might go to the Ciné-Club for *La Chevauchée fantastique* (*Stagecoach*; 1939) or the Ciné-Club de Paris for *Murder My Sweet* (1944). Only two clubs showed movies that had not been produced in France or the United States: the Ciné-Club Renault with Luis Buñuel’s *Terre sans pain* (1933), produced in Spain although filmed in French, and the Moulin à Images, which showed Fritz Lang’s German classic, *Metropolis*.

Nevertheless, the postwar development of French—and especially Parisian—ciné-clubs indicates as much as anything else the return of a familiar film culture and the repudiation of the cinema of the Occupation. In terms of the films shown at the postwar clubs and the discussions that took place there, as well as the seemingly immediate development of a national administrative bureaucracy of affiliated clubs, the ciné-clubs of 1947, 1948, and 1949 would have felt comfortably familiar to club habitués of the prewar period. The national scope of the club movement was marked by the Fédération française des ciné-clubs, which began publishing its own newspaper, *Ciné-Club*, in October 1947. This is the source that we can use now, to chart the growth of the postwar ciné-clubs as well as their programs and speakers.

In March 1948 the Ciné-Club universitaire, on rue Yves-Toudic in the tenth arrondissement of Paris, hosted a series of speakers mostly from the French film industry. Georges Van Parys, who had composed the music for the 1934 Josephine Baker/Jean Gabin film *Zouzou*, addressed his audience on “La musique de film.” Nicholas Hayer, the cinematographer of *Le Corbeau* and many other films, discussed “Le rôle de l’image,” and screenwriter Denis Marrion, whose *Le Secret de Monte-Cristo*, starring Pierre Brasseur, would open in Paris later in the year, lectured on that perennial ciné-club favorite, René Clair.
More than three-quarters of a century later, however, the talk that most of us would have wanted to hear was about Jean Renoir, and delivered by a film critic and avid ciné-club enthusiast rather than a filmmaker, André Bazin. There were any number of events like this in Paris at the time, and throughout France as well. In fact, Hayer seems to have been on something of a junket, having just given another talk at a conference at the ciné-club in Alès in southern France.

*Ciné-Club* always provided details of groups throughout France. At the end of 1947, for instance, filmmaker Jean Painlevé visited clubs in Annecy, Saint-Hilaire du Touvet, Chambéry, Tournon, Besançon, and Vesoul. Claude Autant-Lara screened two of his films, *Douce* (1943) and *Le Diable au corps* (1947), at the club in La Rochelle in southwestern France. In early 1948, the Ciné-Club de Chartres hosted Renoir and the screenwriter Pierre Laroche for talks about comedy, while at around the same time the club in Dijon screened Eisenstein’s *Alexandre Nevski* (1938) and sponsored a talk by Georges Sadoul, while Charles Spaak screened the film he cowrote with Julien Duvivier, *La Belle Équipe*, at the club in Versailles.

There was also much talk of the new clubs in France, of clubs in Nemours, Privas, Roubaix, and Boulogne-sur-Mer, that had their first screenings at the end of 1947. There was discussion, too, of the incredible success of groups even in the least populated areas of the country, with the club in Poissy claiming 1,800 members despite a population of only 15,000. In addition, affiliated clubs had been created throughout Europe, in Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Portugal, and Romania. The Fédération française des ciné-clubs took special interest in colonial North Africa, announcing in October 1948 the formation of the Fédération nord-africaine des ciné-clubs and the opening of five clubs in Algeria—two in Algiers and others in Tiemcen, Oran, and Bône, as well as one in Saïda, in France’s former colony, Lebanon.

Closer to Paris, there was a flourishing club culture in the suburbs, one that hasn’t received much attention from historians. In those banlieues that formed a dense ring around the city, there were clubs in Argenteuil, Asnieres, Bagnolet, Colombes, Corbeil, Gennevilliers, Neuilly, Saint-Ouen, Saint-Germain, Saint-Cloud, and elsewhere. Mostly, of course, there were clubs in Paris. By March 1949 there were at least a dozen or so affiliated clubs there (and perhaps many others, such as Francois Truffaut’s Cercle cinémanie, that were not connected to the federation). During the 1930s the ciné-clubs were concentrated in the more affluent sections of Paris, with many of them meeting at the Marignan cinema on the Champs-Élysées. After the war the clubs were scattered throughout the city. Two of them took their names from their
arrondissement, the Ciné-Club du 13ème on the rue Cantegrel and the Ciné-
Club du 11ème on the rue Basfroi. Three clubs met at the Musée de l’homme
in the sixteenth arrondissement, and two others—the Ciné-Club universita-
taire and also the Ciné-Club Vendredi, which dated from before the war—held
screenings and talks in the same place on the rue Yves-Toudic. The Ciné-Club
de la chambre noire met at the elegant Sevres-Pathé cinema in the seventh ar-
ondissement, and the Ciné-Club 46 screened films at the Delta cinema on
the boulevard Rochechouart in the ninth.66

New clubs formed frequently, sometimes with very specific audiences in
mind or with particular sponsorship agreements. December 1948 marked sev-
eral openings. The Ciné-Club volontaire catered to foreigners who had vol-
unteered for French military service, while the club D. W. Griffith, which met
at the Michodière cinema in the second arrondissement, had been formed
through an American and French consortium.67 All of the Parisian clubs met
from once a month to once a week, and a look at a random month of club
activity gives some sense of the screenings. In January 1949, the Ciné-Club
46 showed Roberto Rossellini’s Paisà (1946), René Clément’s Bataille du rail
(1946), and then an evening of films by G. W. Pabst. The Ciné-Club de l’APA
held only one screening that month—apparently outdoors, at a playground
in a boys’ school in the eighteenth arrondissement—Marcel Carné’s 1939 film
Le Jour se lève, and the Ciné-Club Renault showed Dreyer’s Jour de colère
(Vredens dag; 1943).68

There also seems to have been some movement of the same films between
the clubs. Two weeks before screening Jour de colère, for example, the Ciné-
Club Renault staged a one-night Buster Keaton retrospective. That same
retrospective played at the Cinéum ciné-club that month (as part of a three-
week film festival that also featured nights dedicated to Charlie Chaplin and
Harold Lloyd), and, indeed, Jour de colère also played in January at the Ciné-
Club de la chambre noire. René Clair’s Le Million played at two clubs that
month, the Ciné-Club du centre universitaire and the Ciné-Club Vendredi.69
In fact, there appears to have been a well-organized distribution system be-
tween French clubs in general. Still in that same month in 1949, Frank Capra’s
L’Extravagant Monsieur Deeds showed at the club in Bourges in central
France, and then quite probably the same print of the film traveled the 150
miles or so to the Parisian suburb Levallois-Perret for a screening two weeks
later, and then went back out again to the club in Le Havre for a screening on
January 26. Just one week later, on February 3, Deeds played at the Rialto cin-
ema for the club in Tourcoing in northern France, about two hundred miles
up the coast from Le Havre.70
While we can well appreciate today these incredible opportunities to see a range of films, some of the other events at the clubs seem even more tantalizing than the movies. Jacques Prévert and Jean Painlevé were tireless participants (the latter served as honorary president of the Fédération française des ciné-clubs) and gave constant talks at clubs throughout the country. Or with just the scant information provided in the periodical *Ciné-Club*, we can only wonder about the program for the conference on “Cinéma et télévision” at the Ciné-Club Jean Vigo in Fontainebleau, about an hour outside Paris, in June 1948. Of course, when we think of Paris and its status as one of the film capitals of the world, we think of the most extensive and well-financed film “club” of all at this time, the Cinémathèque française, which had reopened in 1944 and which apparently had no connection to the Fédération française. But while it might be more prosaic than Henri Langlois curating the extraordinary screenings at the famous Cinémathèque, or the young François Truffaut and Jean-Luc Godard watching Hitchcock films there, perhaps nothing better indicates a nationwide postwar culture of cinéphilia than the vast network, from Paris to Poissy, of urban, suburban, and provincial ciné-clubs.

From the evidence of the commercial cinemas during the late 1940s and even from the ciné-clubs, the temptation might be to conclude that the Parisian cinema immediately after the war was less varied, less cosmopolitan, than it had been just before, when there typically would be a far wider schedule of foreign films. The available evidence might be suggestive, but is just too incomplete to claim anything so definitive. Still, from just that one week’s worth of evidence in *L’Écran*, and from the information available in *Ciné-Club*, we might see the signs of a surprisingly vibrant exhibition industry in Paris if not the rest of France, a fleeting golden age of French film production, and the ongoing, and no doubt increasing, domination of Hollywood.

Indeed, in 1946 France signed the Blum-Byrnes agreements with the United States, agreements aimed at rebuilding all aspects of the French economy, and that specified the relation of American to domestic films in France’s cinematic marketplace, and always to the great advantage of the former. Many in the French film industry lobbied the government for protection against the reopening of the national market to foreign films, and especially those from Hollywood. The agreement, though, signed by Léon Blum, representing the French government, and US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, placed virtually no restrictions on the import of American films to France, and few, as well, on the exhibition of those films. Blum-Byrnes thus guaranteed that American movies would soon come to dominate Parisian cinemas and also those in the rest of the country. Of course, any agreement like Blum-Byrnes,
covering so many aspects of commerce between France and the United States, would be densely complex. In its defense, the French government pointed to the nationalization of large exhibition chains, which were freer than other cinemas to show French rather than American films. Nevertheless, about a year and a half after the agreement had been signed, more than half the films in circulation in France would come from Hollywood.73

Largely because of this, and at least in French popular understanding, the agreements guaranteed the decline of French cinema and the triumph of American cultural imperialism, the “légende noire,” in Jacques Portes’s terms, of postwar relations between France and the United States.74 These agreements and their effects over the next few years mark a fitting end to a study like this one, as much as the founding of Cahiers du cinéma in 1952, or the new filmmaking practices of the New Wave a few years later, or the government’s adoption of its new film financing program (“avance sur recettes”), indicate a significant break with the past. For typical filmgoers, however, who had been going to the movies for the last two decades or so, the cinematic geography of the city must have looked comfortingly familiar. There were still the great cinemas on the Champs-Élysées, as well as the Paramount, the Normandie, and the Rex as landmarks in different neighborhoods, and hundreds of cinémas des quartiers tucked away in the neighborhoods.

One example of film journalism from the period demonstrates this link between eras and the unaltered attitudes about film history and stardom. After the war, Air France, the official French airline carrier, published a monthly magazine, Terre et ciel (Earth and Sky), for its employees. The June 1947 issue, on the “Arts and Culture” page, ran a review of the great Mexican film María Candelaria (1944), which had played at the recent Cannes Film Festival, as if to emphasize the international scope of Air France as well as that of French film culture.75 On the same page there was an announcement of the new “ciné-club Air France,” aligned with the Fédération française des ciné-clubs and coming to cinemas in Paris and elsewhere.76 Along with this corporate endorsement of French cinephilia, there was, as well, a review of the new René Clair film, Le Silence est d’or, which referred to Clair as “le plus français de nos réalisateurs,” the most French of our directors.77 That sentiment echoed so much of the previous twenty years of French film journalism, with Clair typically emerging as the most important of the country’s filmmakers and one of the most significant subjects of critical scrutiny. Terre et ciel also ran a photograph from the film and of its star, Maurice Chevalier. Recently acquitted of all charges of wartime collaboration, stemming from his 1941 performance for French soldiers held at the Alten Grabow prisoner-of-war camp in Germany.78
Chevalier once again might signify the best of classic French cinema, providing an assurance of a connection to the past, to the coming of sound, to all of the film magazines that always extolled Chevalier’s career, to the star’s upbringing in the working-class twentieth arrondissement and his triumphs in the theatres and cinemas around the Champs-Élysées. For the cinéphile or even for an average movie fan walking through Paris in the 1930s, an encounter with Chevalier—his films or photos or stories about him—was practically unavoidable. Now, in the late 1940s, the commercial airline, a mode of movement not nearly so earthbound, might also present the great star to the film enthusiast, and provide some of the same pleasures of going to the movies in Paris from before the war.