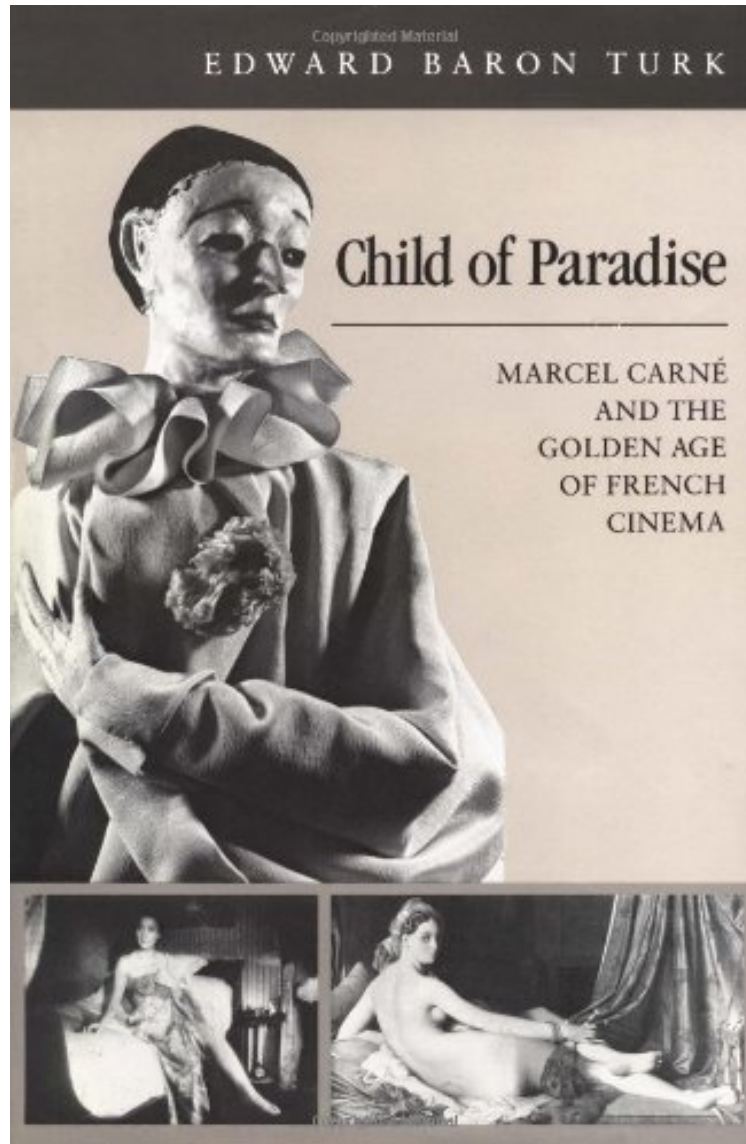


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Edward Turk

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Edward Turk : Child of Paradise: Marcel Carn and the Golden Age of French Cinema (Harvard Film Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Child of Paradise: Marcel Carn and the Golden Age of French Cinema (Harvard Film Studies):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Great Film Book For Those Interested In French CinemaBy Dave in

FLWho invented the cinema? In some circles the answer to this question is still disputed, but the first instance of the film as we know it is generally considered to be Auguste and Louis Lumiere's 1895 short *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory* in Lyon (original title: *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumiere Lyon*). In the wake of this breakthrough effort, the Lumiere Brothers' home country of France has spawned a wealth of inspired cinema. To say the least. However, despite plenty of auspicious films pre-dating and following it, what film historians refer to fondly as *The Golden Age of French Cinema* lasted no more than 15 years from the start of the 1930s until, roughly, the end of World War II. Many cinephiles are likely to have their favorite relevant directors anyone from Jean Grmillon, to Julien Duvivier, to Jean Renoir, to Jacques Feyder, to Ren Clair, to Jean Vigo, to name a few. But its difficult to talk about this era at any length without bringing into consideration the films of Marcel Carn (1906-1996). By all accounts Carn's filmography was marred by unevenness. And during his life, most famously in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinma*, he was tarred and feathered as more of a craftsman or taskmaster-type director than a full-on artist or semi-autonomous auteur. And yet, despite his ups and downs, and despite falling in and out of favor with the critical establishment, few astute film buffs would deny the late Frenchmans best work. Carn first made waves in the 1930s taking cues from German Expressionists like F.W. Murnau and films like Josef von Sternbergs *The Docks of New York*, arranging tableaux that were often bathed in light and shadows, inscribed with a palpable sense of atmosphere that could be very foggy and damp. This brooding visual aesthetic was married with sharp dialogue and dazzling scenarios penned by expert-level screenwriter Jacques Prvert. Along with production design by Alexandre Trauner and the help of some of the most capable screen actors of the day, the Carn-Prvert partnership resulted in a series of cool moody classics often characterized by melancholic longing, engaging twists and turns, doomed love, and a uniquely French strain of fatalism. These films have been described by many as examples of poetic realism, though its to Carns credit that everything but his first film *Nogent, Eldorado du dimanche* was about as far removed from documentary film production values as can be. From the onset, Carns most celebrated film, *Children of Paradise* (original title: *Les Enfants du Paradis*), was destined to go down in history. Made during the Occupation, at times covertly, it was released just after the war and hailed as a pice de resistance of not only French cinema but French art in general. *Children of Paradise* adeptly mingled high and low culture by way of portraying 19th Century French theater, its performers and patrons, while homing in on an elusive seductress and four disparate suitors who vie for her affection. Though Carns career didnt end there, the near-universal appeal of the film was never quite repeated and his last popular success was 1958s *The Cheaters* (original title: *Les Tricheurs*), an excellent film that unfortunately has yet to receive a proper reissue in the English speaking world. Lamentably Carns fall from critical grace in the post-war era and eventual inability to get new projects off the ground made some declare him, in later years, Frances greatest living dead filmmaker. On the subject of Marcel Carn, his career, and the changing historical milieu in which it took place, theres little likelihood of finding a more worthy book than Edward Baron Turks *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carn and the Golden Age of French Cinema*. It might not be the final word when it comes to rating the films in question (if such a thing were to exist), but Turks book does stand as a doorway of sorts through which anyone interested in the subject should feel compelled to pass. There comes a point at which doing such a worthwhile era justice requires going beyond the received wisdom of ambient data and the readily available, pre-existing literature. In other words one has to dig much deeper, comb through lots of French-language ephemera, watch a lot of cinema hidden from public view, and interview the people who were there, including the director himself. Reading through *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carn and the Golden Age of French Cinema* its not hard to tell that Turk did just that. It should be noted that Turks evaluation of Carns life and oeuvre does sometimes seem more psychoanalytically inclined than I would normally care for. And at times he almost seems too critical of the better films discussed, most of which I tend to like in very broad, affirmative terms (having seen mountains of cinema that pales in comparison). But none of this matters. The great thing about reading *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carn and the Golden Age of French Cinema* is that even if the reader doesnt see eye to eye with Turk on his assessment of a given film, the writing is so informed and detailed that shell be learning new things at every page. On that score its an invaluable resource. To account for all of the material covered in the book would be difficult. But here are a few things I learned about and found interesting: how Carn got his break working as an assistant director for Jacques Feyder, whose wife Rosay treated the young protg like a surrogate son; how Carn fatefully met Jacques Prvert whose early screenplay *L'affaire best dans le sac* caused such an outrage, when it was filmed by his brother, that Path ordered all prints of it destroyed; how Carn was gay but unlike his peer Jean Cocteau he wasnt quite out and this lead to certain tensions, in his life and in his work; how 1946s *Gates of the Night* (original title: *Les Portes de la nuit*) my personal favorite of the Carn-Prvert films was a commercial flop upon release, due most likely to it being set during the Occupation, which French audiences were largely anxious to forget about; how Carns elaborate production aesthetic and careful methodology came to be regarded as outmoded and overly extravagant by the new guard of French filmmakers represented by *Cahiers du Cinma*, whose low-balling of Carns work at the time has affected its stature to this day; how Franois Truffaut, once one of the most vocal attackers of Carns work, in said publication, lived to regret this and eventually tried to make amends, keeping in touch with the filmmaker and his new output, and once famously declaring I would give up all my films to have directed *Children of Paradise*. As one might gather from the above (which only scratches the surface), Marcel Carns career had all of the

makings of a compelling rise and fall type narrative arc. Reading about his later years when the director had outlived most of his contemporaries, but couldn't get funding to make a new film, despite being highly honored for past achievements it would be easy to conclude that said arc is emblematic of a minor kind of tragedy. However, reading about the exciting fashion in which many of Carn's films were made, and then watching the better films themselves, the more dominant narrative that emerges is one of triumph over adversity, a case of finding dignity and poetry in uncertain times. For mapping out this terrain, in matter-of-fact detail, it's hard not to find *Child of Paradise: Marcel Carné and the Golden Age of French Cinema* an essential film book. 6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Fine study of Carné, though perhaps a touch dated now. By G.C. For those interested in the films of Marcel Carné, this makes a fine introduction, with quite detailed analysis of political and sexual subtexts, rather a bit heavy on Freudian-style psychoanalytic film theory to my own non-film scholarly POV. "Les enfants du paradis", being Carné's most famous and greatest film, gets the lion's share of the book space, with Turk devoting multiple chapters to it. The coverage of his films post-"Les enfants du paradis" gets pretty short shrift, perhaps reflecting the variable quality of those films (generally accepted to be a steep decline post-1945). The earlier films definitely get greater discussion, from "Drole de Drame" through "Les enfants du paradis", again reflecting their status in French cultural history. As a bit of a side note, and regarding the "dated" comment in the header, at the time of publication of this book, both Carné and Roland Lesaffre were still alive. For all of Turk's discussion of gay issues in the films and how Carné couldn't be forthright about his homosexuality in the climate of the times, the book sidesteps the full nature of the relationship between Carné and Lesaffre, where it is now more open that the two of them weren't just artistic collaborators, but were more to each other in real life off the movie set. They are now both buried in the same plot. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fine study of Carné, though perhaps a touch dated now. By G.C. For those interested in the films of Marcel Carné, this makes a fine introduction, with quite detailed analysis of political and sexual subtexts, rather a bit heavy on Freudian-style psychoanalytic film theory to my own non-film scholarly POV. "Les enfants du paradis", being Carné's most famous and greatest film, gets the lion's share of the book space, with Turk devoting multiple chapters to it. The coverage of his films post-"Les enfants du paradis" gets pretty short shrift, perhaps reflecting the variable quality of those films (generally accepted to be a steep decline post-1945). The earlier films definitely get greater discussion, from "Drole de Drame" through "Les enfants du paradis", again reflecting their status in French cultural history. As a bit of a side note, and regarding the "dated" comment in the header, at the time of publication of this book, both Carné and Roland Lesaffre were still alive. For all of Turk's discussion of gay issues in the films and how Carné couldn't be forthright about his homosexuality in the climate of the times, the book sidesteps the full nature of the relationship between Carné and Lesaffre, where it is now more open that the two of them weren't just artistic collaborators, but were more to each other in real life off the movie set. They are now both buried in the same plot.

Marcel Carné symbolizes the period, approximately 1930-1945, when French cinema recaptured the creative vitality and prestige it had relinquished almost completely to the American film industry. The first critical biography of this director of classic films, including the epic historical romance *Les Enfants du paradis* (*Children of Paradise*), relates the saga of Carné's meteoric rise in the 1930s and his decline from critical grace after the war. Between 1937 and 1945 Carné directed a number of works that are now part of France's cultural patrimony, most notably *Le Quai des Brumes* (1938), *Le Jour se lève* (1939), *Les Visiteurs du soir* (1942), and the best known, *Les Enfants du paradis* (1945). The artistic merit of these films is widely acknowledged; their significance, however, is not solely aesthetic. To know Carné and his films is to know how cinematic art responded to social and political events to the period of French history that witnessed the Popular Front, the Front's demise, the fall of France, and the Occupation. Edward Baron Turk discloses the incongruities between the director's aesthetic of poetic realism and his professed leftist sympathies; he situates Carné's questionable stance and activities during the Occupation within the broader context of an artist's ethical responsibilities in times of war; and he examines the ramifications of Carné's censure during the postwar purges for the director's subsequent fortunes. Turk's use of the psychoanalytic concepts of androgyny, masochism, fetishism, and primal scene allows us to understand more clearly how Carné thought and worked. Turk also addresses the representations and maskings of homosexuality in Carné's films and the extent to which they have colored film history's often ambivalent assessments of the director. The centerpiece of the book is an extended analysis of what is arguably the most famous and beloved of all French films, *Les Enfants du paradis*, scripted by the poet-screenwriter Jacques Prévert. The book draws on unpublished correspondence from, among others, Jean Cocteau, François Truffaut, and Simone Signoret, and on interviews by the author with Arletty, Jean-Louis Barrault, Mme. Jacques Prévert, Pierre Prévert, Claude Renoir, Alexander Trauner, Truffaut, and Carné himself. This portrait of Carné thus becomes the portrait of an age, a great age in the history of French cinema, albeit a tragic age in the history of France.

About the Author Edward Baron Turk teaches French language, literature, and film at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is the author of *Baroque Fiction-making*, a book about the adventure novel in seventeenth-century

France.