

Le Mepris / Contempt (1963) Jean-Luc Godard

P Michell, 2017

Famous film by French New Wave director Jean-Luc Godard. About the art of film making. Part of which is set in the famous fascist designed Cinecittà studios in Rome, where many films were filmed. The enigmatic German director of 'M' (1931, with Peter Lorre) - Fritz Lang is a wonderful first time actor, playing a film director of 'The Odyssey'.

A polyglot film spoken in French, Italian, German & English. Some have argued the reason being to stop interference after the film was completed.

Famous, as stated below, for the long argument scene. Amongst many other things, of course.

Wonderful restored cinemascope lush print.

Synopsis:

Paul Javal is a writer who is hired to make a script for a new movie about Ulysses more commercial, which is to be directed by Fritz Lang and produced by Jeremy Prokosch. But because he let his wife Camille drive with Prokosch and he is late, she believes, he uses her as a sort of present for Prokosch to get a better payment. So the relationship ends.

Le Mépris" aka "Contempt" is Godard's existentialist, provocative essay of the relationships between artistic and commercial cinema, man and woman/husband and wife ...

Starring: Brigitte Bardot, Michel Piccoli, Jack Palance, Giorgia Moll, Fritz Lang

Cinematography: Raoul Coutard

Film Editor: Agnès Guillemot

Original Music: Georges Delerue

Written by Alberto Moravia from his novel *Il Disprezzo*

Produced by Carlo Ponti, Georges de Beauregard, Joseph E. Levine

Directed by Jean-Luc Godard

Trivia:

According to *Sight & Sound* critic [Colin MacCabe](#), *Contempt* was "the greatest work of art produced in postwar Europe.

The argument which takes place between [Michel Piccoli](#) and his wife [Brigitte Bardot](#) lasts for 34 minutes. Note – much of it in long shot. Extremely unusual form of cinema.

The extended apartment sequence that occurs in the film, where Paul and Camille's marriage unfolds, has been praised by critics and scholars. In February 2012, *Interiors*, an online journal that is concerned with the relationship between architecture and film, released an issue that discussed how space is used in this scene. The issue highlights how Jean-Luc Godard uses this constricted space to explore Paul and Camille's declining relationship.

Godard called the film "the story of castaways of the Western world...who one day reach a mysterious island, whose mystery is the inexorable lack of mystery."

Contempt was filmed in and occurs entirely in Italy, with location shooting at the [Cinecittà](#) studios in Rome and the [Casa Malaparte](#) on [Capri](#) island. In a sequence, the characters played by Piccoli and Bardot wander through their apartment alternately arguing and reconciling. Godard filmed the scene as an extended series of [tracking shots](#), in natural light and in near real-time. The cinematographer, [Raoul Coutard](#), shot some films of the [Nouvelle Vague](#), including Godard's *Breathless*. According to [Jonathan Rosenbaum](#), Godard was also directly influenced by [Jean-Daniel Pollet](#) and [Volker Schlöndorff's](#) *Méditerranée*, released earlier the same year.

Godard admitted his tendency to get actors to improvise dialogue "during the peak moment of creation" often baffled them. "They often feel useless," he said. "Yet they bring me a lot... I need them, just as I need the pulse and colours of real settings for atmosphere and creation."

Godard was forced into shooting in CinemaScope.

The seventh most successful film in 1963 at the French box office - a disappointment for [Brigitte Bardot](#) but [Jean-Luc Godard's](#) biggest commercial success.

[Jean-Luc Godard](#) was very dismissive of the source material - [Alberto Moravia's](#) novel 'Il Disprezzo' - calling it "a nice vulgar read for a train journey".

Jeremy's unusual house on the island of Capri was designed by Italian architect Adalberto Libera, who is better known for his large civic buildings. It was built in the early 1940s.

Contrary to the myth that [Jean-Luc Godard](#) makes films without a screenplay, there was a script for *Contempt* (1963) and it ran to 132 pages.

Handwritten manuscript of "Le Mépris" was sold 29th May 2013 by Artcurial in Paris for 144,300 euros. The owner was Ghislain Dussart.

Reviews:

Totally, tenderly, tragically.

FilmSnobby from San Diego

2005

Contempt is a case study in Making The Most Of It. In 1963, Jean-Luc Godard was permitted a big budget financed by an international production, the use of a CinemaScope camera, Technicolor, a pair of icons (Brigitte Bardot and Fritz Lang as himself) to star in the film, and almost total creative autonomy. No auteur -- with the possible exception of Coppola in the Seventies -- was granted this power again. Godard doubtless realized that this would be a one-shot affair, and thus he directs every inch of *Contempt*. He may permit the actors to improvise, but their improvisations are constrained within a tight circle of elaborate choreography. And he denies himself his usual for-the-fun-of-it non-sequiturs: any New Wave mannerisms (and there are few, especially when compared to something like *Band of Outsiders*) are made to serve the various lines of meta-fictive commentary, philosophical inquiry, and more traditional narrative and character development within the film. One wishes that Godard had been forced to do "commercial" work like *Contempt* throughout his career. Big money appears to have disciplined him; to have honed his vision. This New Wave epic clocks in at a mere 104 minutes, making that other 1963 film about film-making, *8 1/2*, seem almost sloppy and bloated by comparison.

What's it about, anyway? Fritz Lang, as "Fritz Lang", is directing an adaptation of "The Odyssey" at Cinecitta Studios. Hovering over him is the fascistic American producer Prokosch (played with manic bewilderment by Jack Palance). Prokosch is unhappy, because Lang has deviated from the script that has turned Odysseus into a modern neurotic-type who is no longer loved by his wife Penelope. The famous director insists on the traditional view of the epic, and then irritates the producer even more by filming it in an over-stylized manner. Prokosch, realizing that this sort of thing will not put butts in the seats, hires a modern neurotic-type (Michel Piccoli as "Paul") to rewrite the screenplay. Paul, meanwhile, is having problems with his own wife, Camille (Bardot).

It's hard to pin down exactly why Camille has taken a contemptuous attitude towards her husband, though the most likely reason is that he has harbored no small measure of contempt for her all along. "I can't believe I married a typist!" is one of his typical exclamations. Or perhaps she despises him because he sells out to Prokosch and then whines about it. This bourgeois screenwriter, who says he needs the *Odyssey* money to pay off their flat in Rome, is also a card-carrying member of the Italian Communist Party. (And he's contemptuous of her typist job?!) He's the

sort of poseur that would drive any woman batty: the perfect modern anti-hero, in other words. Prokosch's ideal Odysseus.

The centerpiece of the movie is the 30-minute scene in the married couple's flat. It's the most sustained, minutely choreographed, rigorously blocked and written stretch in Godard's career. A similar, though much lighter, scene with Belmondo and Seberg in *Breathless* served as a mere warm-up for the display of petty acrimony in *Contempt*. A marriage dissolves before our eyes. Meanwhile, DP Raoul Coutard, doing some of the most brilliant work of his career, pokes unobtrusively around the couple, getting cozy with them in the bathroom while one of them sits on a toilet, shooting them from far across the room, catching Bardot and Piccoli at the extreme edges of the CinemaScope frame, slowly tracking the space between them as they murmur their little hatreds. But never getting too close: if Bardot slams the door on Piccoli, we're left stranded with Piccoli, and from a distance, too. It's intimacy without melodrama.

Contempt is chock-full of the multiplicity of ideas -- seamlessly reinforced by imagery and dialog -- that make cinephiles love Godard. I've barely scratched the surface and have already run out of space. But I do want to commend Godard on his courage for daring to acknowledge head-on his admiration of Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura*. Of course, it goes without saying that Godard can't help mocking Antonioni just a bit; but mocking and paying homage are inextricable within the Godard canon. In any case, today's audience may appreciate the economy with which the French director makes his points (*Contempt* is almost an hour shorter than *L'Avventura*), as well as the arguable pictorial superiority of this film to the other one. The scenes on Capri, at the famous Malaparte villa with its wedge-shaped stairs that lead to a barren deck, surrounded by crags that rise like jewels from the calm sea, are some of the most beautiful ever shot. If this was indeed Raoul Coutard's first work with the CinemaScope lens, one can only marvel at his precocious genius.

Analysis from Criterion Collection re-release of the DVD:

<https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/240-contempt-the-story-of-a-marriage>

The Coolest Movie of All Time - Godard's *Contempt*, 50 years old this week.

By Troy Patterson (2013)

For a nuanced critical consideration of Jean-Luc Godard's **Contempt**, see **the Phillip Lopate essay** (See Criterion link above) in which he describes the director striking "his deepest human chords" therein. For a view that reads this adaptation of an Alberto Moravia novel in the context of its production and the director's career, see Richard Brody's book **Everything Is Cinema**. For kicks, contemplate its substance—its story of a writer (Michel Piccoli) whoring out himself and perhaps his wife (Brigitte Bardot) to a wolfish movie producer (Jack Palance)—as a superlative

statement of hep ethics and aesthetics. For your consideration: *Contempt*—released as *Le Mepris* in Godard's France and ***Il Disprezzo*** in Moravia's Italy, where it debuted to the world 50 years ago this week—ranks as the coolest movie of all time.

Is this point debatable? *Mais oui*. There are several cases to be made that it is not even the coolest movie made in France in the 1960s. You could put in a word for ***Jules et Jim***, but I would observe that François Truffaut's sentimentalism is a softer and squishier thing than Godard's brilliant cynicism; *Contempt*'s alienated hero somehow makes alienation itself look heroic. Or you might nominate ***Last Year at Marienbad*** instead, in which case I'll say that you're privileging obscurantist avant-garde chic over the clarity and classicism of a film about a film remake of the *Odyssey*. If you were to argue that ***Le Samouraï***, Jean-Pierre Melville's lean-bodied hit-man procedural, beats *Contempt* for surface tension and deep sangfroid, I would say you might have a point there. And yet you would concede that Godard's early features constitute film's greatest sustained achievement in attractive detachment, raffish charisma, and **photographing bangs**.

Inventing the jump cut, choreographing the Madison, costuming Eddie Constantine in a trench coat—these are obvious in their coolness, but obviousness is not cool (obviously). *Contempt*'s comparatively nonchalant attitude toward innovation—the relative subtlety of its freshness—thus earns special distinction. A typical Godard film of that period, only averagely supercool, would situate Anna Karina as an understated sex symbol in a brashly just-ahead-of-the-moment scenario. Here, compelled by his producers to exploit the form of unsubtle Bardot, **he anatomizes her curves and analyzes our gaze**, eating his cheesecake and having it too. *Contempt* is the most conventional film of Godard's New Wave period and the least overt in its poses—except when Piccoli, putting his thinking cap on, **very literally poses as Dean Martin in *Some Came Running***, a bit of mimicry figuring in a grand scheme of movie love and the unforced analysis of it.

Which brings us to Fritz Lang, who plays himself as the director of the film within the film. Both **Samuel Fuller** and **Woody Allen** will tell you that Godard is a great director of directors, and from Lang he here elicits some weathered drolleries, a spirit of calm control, and the easy dignity of old grandeur. In **a recent piece on *Contempt***, Brody mentioned Lang's **pinstriped suit** in connection with the idea that the charm of Godard's own personal style manifests in his characters' "reserved expressiveness"—"a steadiness that is non-theatrical but in no way natural." That is one definition of cool, and Lang's **sense of self-possession is another**.

Piccoli's hero is moving in pursuit of this quality. He also wants money and integrity and renown, but to look at him looking at Lang is to know that the old man's crisp serenity of style is the grand prize. He won't win it, however, no matter how much he fusses with his hat, and we might see why by extending a Godard remark about film into the spiritual dimension. "To me," the director once said, "style is just the outside of content, and content the inside of style, like the outside and the inside of the human body." This is the transcendental school of cool, and *Contempt* is its

central text.

Troy Patterson is **Slate**'s writer at large and a contributing writer at the New York Times Magazine.

For cinematic connections –

<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/webpages4/filmnotes/fns01n4.html>

Glenn Erickson for DVD Savant Review on Criterion DVD release in 2002.

<http://www.dvdtalk.com/dvdsavant/s688contempt.html>