

fresh film festival

Study Guide



Au Revoir Les Enfants
aka Goodbye Children

Louis Malle, France/Germany, 1987, 103 mins

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Watching the Film

Credits

Writer/Producer/Director

Louis Malle

Associate Producer

Christian Ferry

Cinematographer

Renato Berta

Art Director

Willy Holt

Costume Designer

Corinne Jorry

Sound

Jean Claude Laureux

Editor

Emmanuel Castro

Assistant Editor

Marie-France Poulizac

Continuity

France La Chapelle

Make-Up/Hair

Susan Robertson

Assistant Director

Yann Gilbert

Sound Mixer

Claude Villand

Sound Effects

Daniel Couteau

Production Manager

Gerard Molto

Assistant Production Manager

Jean-Yves Asselin

Casting

Jeanne Biras, Iris Carriere

Cast

Julien Quentin

Gaspard Manesse

Jean Bonnet

Raphael Fejto

Mme Quentin

Francine Racette

Francois Quentin

Stanilas Carre de Malberg

Father Jean

Phillipe Morier-Genoud

Father Michel

Francois Berleand

Joseph

Francois Negret

Sagard

Richard Leboeuf

Mlle Davenne

Irene Jacob

Negus/Lafarge

Arnaud Henriet

Cinematographer

Also known as the Director of Photography, the cinematographer is responsible for the filming of the shots. They must orchestrate the composition of the image, choose the camera, the relevant lens and filters for the shot and also dictate the lighting of the shot. Also relevant, is a maintenance of style, with regards lighting and colour from scene to scene. The Cinematographer is also concerned with the way the filmed image is printed in the laboratory i.e. whether the shot will need to be treated in any way to alter the contrast, tone, colour etc. of the image. More recently, the cinematographer has to take into account, while filming, any computer effects that may be included in post-production.

The Editor

The Editor is the person who chooses the arrangement or order of the shot sequence upon receiving the filmed material from the production. The editor's decisions are often made in consultation with the film's director. The editor may start work upon receiving the initial daily footage (the rushes) and begin to assemble the film at that point. When shooting is finished the editor may have assembled a full continuous film allied to the story-line in the script. This is known as the editor's cut. Following this, the editor and director may begin to work on a director's cut of the film i.e. the film would be re-edited to reflect the director's preferences of shot and the shot sequences in the film.

Au Revoir Les Enfants

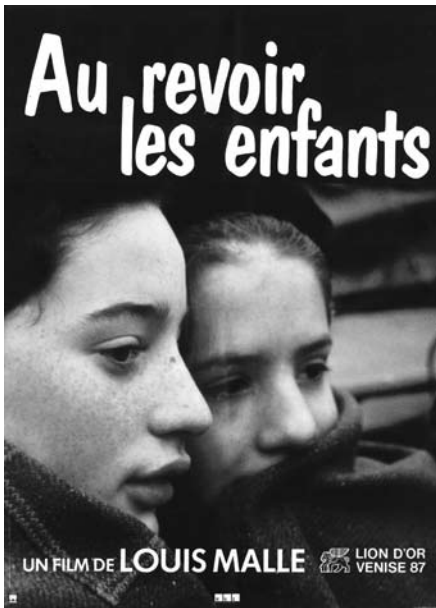
'Au Revoir Les Enfants' is inspired by a real life event from the childhood of the film's director Louis Malle. In 1944, he was studying at a Catholic boarding school outside Paris, when a new student joined the class. In a while they became friends, but this friendship was to be torn apart by influences outside their control. Louis Malle has said that the incident may have caused him to choose to be a film-maker and it is significant that he waited until he had made over 25 other fiction films and documentaries before he felt he could shape his childhood story into a film. The film was the most personal of his career and he believed that even though the events that occur in the film take place more than fifty years ago, adolescents today will still empathise with them.

Title

Au Revoir Les Enfants is the title chosen by the director to initially introduce the film to an audience. It may conjure up various expectations in our minds as to the content of the film.

- There is some suggestion that the film will deal with children
- There is also the suggestion of leave-taking on the part of one of the characters.
- The phrase is somewhat vague and leaves us with few clues as to the story that will be unfolded in the film.





Image

On the left is a poster for the film. The poster image also features on the cover of the video. The photograph features the two main characters in the film. This image adds more clues as to the content of the film. Adding the title of the film to the image, can you suggest what the story will be about?

- We can now say for definite that the film will feature children - young teenagers to be precise.
- the photograph also suggests a closeness between the two characters. This is portrayed by their physical closeness in the image. The photographer has framed the image in this way to suggest closeness.
- The photograph also indicates a certain element of fear. The two characters are huddled together. Their physical closeness is such that we might think that they are huddled together for protection.

Task

If you see this image during the film, try and remember the context it is in i.e. what is going on during the scene, what has happened during the previous scene and how does it affect our knowledge of the characters.

Finally, would the poster image make you interested enough to want to go and see the film? Can you give reasons for this? If your answer is no, What other information would you need to encourage you to go see the film?

Historical Context

Au Revoir Les Enfants is set in France in January, 1944, during the World War II.

France and Britain declared war on Germany following its invasion of Poland in 1939. There followed a period of calm known as the 'Phoney War'. In April 1940, Germany launched its 'lightening warfare' or blitzkrieg methods on the Netherlands, Belgium and France. British and French troops attempted to stem the advancing Germans by moving into Belgium but were trapped as German troops advanced across their rear. The British troops were forced to rescue almost 300,00 men trapped on the beaches at Dunkirk in Northern France. France surrendered on the 22nd of June, 1940.

The Germans established a new French government, under their control, in the town of Vichy. This government became known as the 'Vichy Regime'.

In the film, you will see both German soldiers who occupied the country and also the police force of the Vichy Regime (see: the restaurant scene). For the duration of the 'Occupation', the Germans were under constant threat of guerrilla attack by the 'Free French Forces', known popularly as the "Maquis", who are mentioned in passing during the film. The film depicts a certain amount of normality which existed in day-to-day France during the war, but suggests also the prevailing climate of fear.



The Director: Louis Malle



Louis Malle was born in 1932 in Thumieres, near Lille in Northern France. Malle's family were heirs to the Beghin sugar fortune. In 1940, they moved to Paris, with Louis and his three brothers being sent to a Jesuit boarding school near Fontainebleau. Malle's experiences there make up some of what occurs in 'Au Revoir...'

Leaving school after World War II, Louis went to study politics at the University of Paris, but switched over to study film in 1952. In 1953, however, Malle was engaged as assistant to underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau on his ship 'The Calypso'. There, Malle worked on the film 'Le Monde Du Silence' (World Of Silence), which won an Oscar for the best documentary film in 1956.

Malle became regarded as a member of the new French cinema movement 'Le Nouvelle Vague' -The New Wave which espoused a critical understanding of cinema. Malle's work came into it's own in the late 1960's and '70's with films such as *Zazie dans la Metro* - 1970. He left France in 1963 to film a series of documentaries in India. He returned to France, making three more films before going to America for films such as 'Pretty Baby' and 'Atlantic City'.

While living in Los Angeles, Malle felt it was time to tackle the childhood story that eventually became 'Au Revoir Les Enfants'. He filmed it in France and upon release it garnered huge critical acclaim and the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. Three other films followed before Malle succumbed to cancer in 1995, dying in his Los Angeles home.

The Nouvelle Vague - French New Wave

The French New Wave was a movement in French Cinema that initially centred on the respected film magazine *Cahiers Du Cinema*. A host of critics, writing for the magazine began to make their own films in the late 1950's, utilising their own critical views of cinema to develop a fresh and innovative approach to film-making. Dedicated film-goers, the new film-makers were noted for their understanding of traditional cinema concepts and using this knowledge to subvert existing views of cinema. Their work tended to be irreverent, and have ambiguous plot structures, avoiding traditional story-telling methods. Some of the films tended to alter space and time, changing the structure of the normal story time-line through editing and placement of scenes in the film's timeline. Technically, the New Wave were aided by the introduction of smaller, more portable cameras, which allowed them to move more freely on location and give a more realistic sense to their films. Major works from the French New Wave include 'Les Quatre Cents Coups' (The 400 Blows), Francois Trauffaut, 1959; 'Hiroshima Mon Amour' (Hiroshima, My Love), Alain Resnais, 1959; and 'Á Bout De Souffle' (Breathless), Jean Luc-Godard, 1959.

An Outline

An Outline is a synopsis of the plot of a film. It gives a brief account of the story and characters and is used as a guide as to whether the prospective film will be made. It is usually about 500 words long. A production company can option a treatment or screenplay from this source.

The Outline stage is followed by a Treatment, in which the story is fleshed out to about 10 - 40 pages and includes the full action of the film - scene by scene.

The Treatment is followed by a Screenplay which includes location, action, dialogue, sound and some details regarding shooting the film.

The following is a suggested outline for Au Revoir Les Enfants:

Au Revoir Les Enfants - Outline

At the Gare De Lyon Station in Paris, January 3rd 1944, Julien Quentin tearfully releases himself from his mother and climbs aboard the train to return to boarding school. From the train window, Julien sadly watches the French countryside go by, as his schoolmates play behind him.

On a small provincial street in the Ile De France we meet Julien again, now amongst his schoolmates, singing a song as they walk down the road in uniform. German soldiers idly watch them as they pass by.

That night as the boys prepare to go to bed in their dormitory, Father Jean, the head monk of the school brings in a new classmate. He introduces him as Jean Bonnet. Julien is intrigued by Bonnet's books which include 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes'.

The boys' schoolday commences with mass and this is followed by classes in various subjects - including Latin, French etc. The schoolday is often interrupted by air -raid warnings, at which the boys must continue their studies in the cellar. At breaktime, the boys pair off into teams to fight each other on stilts. Julien is knocked to the ground, hurt. The competition descends into a private fight between the coloured boy, Lafarge whom the boys have nicknamed Negus, and another.

At the infirmary, Julien meets up with the school's illegal trader, a lame boy named Joseph who works in the kitchen. Julien agrees to sell some jam to Joseph. At lunch, Father Jean, encourages the boys to share the food their parents have sent them. Some do so willingly, others grudgingly.

Julien is intrigued by Bonnet; he is an excellent piano player, he reads strange books and one day when soldiers come to the school, the monks hustle Bonnet away to a hidden room. Topping it all, one night when everyone is asleep, Julien watches Jean Bonnet pray. Julien cannot understand a word he says. His prayers are unlike anything he has ever heard.



Later in the week, the boys separate into two teams in the woods and must follow a trail set by the other team. Julien and Jean are on the same team. They are suddenly surrounded by the opposing team and must make a break for it deep into the woods. Julien, separated from the rest comes upon the final link in the trail, and declares to the empty forest that his team have won. Dusk begins to fall and Julien begins to be afraid. He comes upon Jean, who is also lost in the forest. The boys make it to a roadway. Headlights blind them on the road. It is a truck full of German soldiers. Jean instantly makes a break for it with Julien behind him. The soldiers laughingly catch them and take them back to the school.

Julien figures out that Jean is covering up his identity, when he snoops around in his locker and finds a book with the name Jean Kippelstein on it. He confronts Jean but Jean rebuffs him angrily, but the fact is accepted by them both. Jean is Jewish.

On parent's day, Julien attends mass with his mother and the other parents. Father Jean's sermon touches a nerve among the affluent Catholic adults who are living well while many of their fellow citizens suffer. Julien asks his mother, if he can bring Jean to dinner with them. Jean's parents have not attended parents day. At the restaurant, a scene occurs in which an elderly Jewish man is accosted by the local militia for eating in a forbidden area. Only the intervention of German officer, prevents an incident.

Back at school, Joseph is caught dealing in the blackmarket. A group of boys are implicated including Julien. Father Jean points out that dealing in the black market is deprives others and fosters a selfish mentality. Joseph is suspended, but complains to Father Jean that he is taking all the blame for the incident.

Next day, school is interrupted. A Gestapo officer comes into the class. He curtly announces that he is looking for Jean Kippelstein. Julien freezes. Nobody says a word. The teacher says that there is no boy of that name in the class. Julien glances at Jean behind him. From the corner of his eye, the Gestapo officer spots him and following the glance, is lead to Jean. Jean stands up slowly, realising that his secret has been uncovered. The officer announces that the school will be closed and takes Jean away.

The boys pack up their belongings, with another monk explaining that Father Jean has been arrested for harbouring Jean and some other Jewish boys in the school. The Germans diligently search the school uncovering another Jewish boy in the infirmary. Julien meets with Jean as he packs up and Jeans gives him his books.

Outside, Julien runs into Joseph who accompanies a German soldier. Julien realises that Joseph has informed on Father Jean at the school. Joseph points out to a shocked Julien that 'it's no big deal. They're just Jews'

The whole school is forced to line up in the yard. The Gestapo officer trails Father Jean out of the school. The boys shout their goodbyes and he returns them. The Jewish boys are taken next. Julien watches as Jean is taken away. He raises his hand in goodbye to Jean as the school gates close behind him.

In a voiceover, a man's voice tells us of the boys who were killed in concentration camps and of Father Jean who suffered a similar fate. The man says that he will remember every second of that January morning for the rest of his life.

Theme

A theme is a unifying concept or message that runs through a film (or book etc.) that gives both a focus for the film-maker making the film and, as a by-product, provides the audience with a core message to take from the film. Many works of art may exist on various levels and provide both a core theme and also different sub-themes within the same work of art. This reflects both the fragmentary nature of all our individual viewpoints and provides for a deeper experience when watching a film or play.

What do you think is the theme of “Au Revoir...”. How does Louis Malle introduce the theme and then develop it.

Pointers

Fr. Jean's sermon on parent's day may give some light on a general theme in the film. He repeats a powerful statement from an epistle by Saint Paul:

“Brethren, do not think you are all knowing. Do not return harm for harm. If your enemy is hungry, give him food. If he is thirsty, give him drink.”

and continues

“We shall pray for those who are suffering, those who are hungry, those who are being persecuted. We shall pray for the victims, and for their tormentors as well”

Fr. Jean's words reflect his Christian beliefs which he lives out in deed by his protection of the Jean and the other Jewish boys. Although the boys are of a different religious faith, Fr. Jean believes that they should not be persecuted. He deems that their protection is of such importance that he is willing to endanger the safety of the school.

The voiceover at the end of the film, is spoken by an older man. The last words in the film are spoken by him:

“Over forty years have passed, but I will remember every second of that January morning until the day I die.”

This suggests to us that the events depicted in the film had a profound influence on the man. They may have opened his eyes to the brutality of the adult world and may have caused him to grow up more quickly

Looking at the film

Style

Style relates to 'the look' of a film. Style refers to the form and characteristics of a film or to a group of films that have a similar characteristics. We have already mentioned The French New Wave Cinema movement which included films of similar stylistic conventions. Style often relates to the appearance of a film, but this can rarely separated from the content of a film i.e. they can only properly understood in relation to one another. Stylistic considerations operate together; one can look at the choices made by the director in relation to colour, lighting, music, acting methods, the films' pace etc. to judge the style of a film.

"In Au Revoir Les Enfants' there is no technique; no composition; no montage - only life."

The above quote was made by film director Mike Nichols and refers to the style or choices Louis Malle made when directing the film. These choices directly affect how the viewer relates to the film or how their mood is influenced.

Task

Can you detect the choices regarding style which the Director has made in making "Au Revoir Les Enfants". Is the film a realistic portrayal of young people or is it sentimental? How is music used in the film? Does the director attempt to develop a sense of drama or does he underplay the events in the story.?



Points of view

In watching a film, we are often shown the story from the point of view of a main character or protagonist. In other words, all the events of the film and the storyline are dictated by the actions of the main character and how events or other characters' actions relate to him or her.

"Au Revoir..." s main character is Julien Quentin, and the storyline concentrates on him. This is relevant as the Julien character is based on the film's director Louis malle, as he was in teenage years. Thus the protagonist is Louis Malle as a youth.

To gain a fuller appreciation of the film, it is interesting to look at the other characters' in the film and how their actions intersect with Julien's storyline.

Task

Create a storyline for 'Au Revoir...' which would have a different protagonist such as:

- (1) Muller - The Gestapo Agent
- (2) Joseph - The School marketeer
- (3) Fr. Jean - The Principal

Remember to use the time-frame of the film and also include any scenes that intersect with the events in the film.



Film As Autobiography

Louis Malle at various stages during his career had discussed the story of “Au Revoir...” and that he someday hoped to make a film based on the events. He has also detailed that:

- (1). “three-quarters of the film, in terms of character , action and detail is fictional”.
- (2) “Julien’s relationship with Bonnet is infinitely more interesting than my relationship with the real-life Bonnet was”
- (3). “I had no interest in making a film that was merely an accurate historical account”

Although this information doesn’t negate any of the qualities of the film, it does tell us that Malle in writing his screenplay had to exaggerate events and relationships in order to develop a better structured story or one which would have more appeal to an audience.

Task

Think of a dramatic event, that happened to you or a member of your family. Write an outline of the story, and develop events and characters in order to develop a satisfying story for an audience.

Bibliography

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“Projections 9” - ed. John Boorman and Walter Donahue, Faber and Faber, 1999.

Video

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