

Poil de Carotte

("Carrot Top")

France : 1932 : dir. Julien Duvivier : Vandal & Delluc

: 94 min

prod: : scr: Jules Renard : dir.ph.: Thirard Monniot

[Robert Lynen](#) [d]

Harry Baur; Catherine Fontenay; Christiane Dor; Colette Segall; Simone Aubry;

Louis Gauthier; Maxime Fromiot; Marthe Marty; Christiane Dor

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	8	≠	M	💀	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3147a	4.5	7	6	2,178	-	-	-	-	-	No	unseen



Robert Lynen strikes his Maid of Orleans pose

Source: The Moving Picture Boy

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"'Carrot-top', third son of a farming family, suffers from an unloving mother who also dominates her husband. A suicide bid by the boy compels the father to break the silence he has kept in the interests of a peaceful life, so that he can make his son understand he's no different from or worse than other children. This film from Jules Renard's novel manages to avoid being diverted by sentimentality and remains undiminished in its power to move thanks to the performances of Lynen and Bauer as the boy and his father. Filmed again forty years later. *** "

Halliwell's Film Guide review:

"A small boy is picked on by his ageing mother to the point where he attempts suicide. Country melodrama which made its director's name but seems a little faded now despite bravura sequences. * "

"Looks like the best chance ever for a French film to get American distribution on the grand scale." – **Variety**

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion note:

"...Julien Duvivier, who had also directed a silent version of the same story in 1925, made his international reputation with this sensitive, grim story of an unwanted boy being driven to the brink of suicide. It shows a French countryside quite different from Pagnol's: sunlit but bleak and inhospitable. Jules Renard's screenplay and Thirard Monniot's photography enhanced the performances of Harry Bauer as the father and Robert Lynen – who was later killed in the Maquis – as the boy. "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Give 'em someone to hate and someone to identify with: the one to hate is mother (Catherine Fonteney) and the one to love is her youngest son (Robert Lynen), whose nickname gives the film its title. Her treatment of him is cruel, and she is particularly anxious to create enmity between him and his father (Harry Bauer), who is either absent or unobservant. His is the key role and Bauer's realisation of what is

happening is very moving. Because of him, this is the best-loved version of Jules Renard's novel; Duvivier had already directed one in 1925 and there was another in 1973. *** "

The Virgin Film Guide review:

"Julien Duvivier's second attempt to film the popular stories of Jules Renard, which he first brought to the screen in a 1925 silent, is a lyrical story of the unhappy childhood of the preadolescent Francois (Robert Lynen). Better known as "Poil de Carotte", the red-headed Francois is a victim of the hatred between his mother (Catherine Fontenay) and her husband (Harry Bauer) – a marriage that exists only for appearance sake. Francois is actually his mother's illegitimate child, the result of an affair with a man who has the same glowing red hair as the boy. The mother treats her son with spite and cruelty, blaming him for her isolation; the step-father, for the most part, treats Francois with indifference, but through the course of the film the two develop a close friendship based on mutual respect.

One of the prolific Duvivier's most memorable films – he made 19 in the 1930s alone – "**POIL DE CAROTTE**" succeeds chiefly because of the characterisation of Francois, who is a victim of other people's inconsiderateness, but is never idealised or treated as a saint. Rather, he is a normal child – at times irrational, at times loving, and often mischievous. Much credit goes to young Lynen, who was encountered by Duvivier while walking along a street. After appearing in a number of films in the 1930s, Lynen was killed by the Nazis for his involvement in the French underground. **** "

Source indeterminate:

"This is not an "important" classic. To state this, I know, is to invite the question: "Then why is it here?" No film is here without a reason which I think important to the interests of culture and to filmic potentialities as well as realizations. As with minor literary classics, a film may hang in the memory for an episode, a scene, an actor, or a rare, unpretentious style. Yet I think such isolated elements would not be remembered if they had appeared in stupid and irrelevant contexts.

Nothing brilliant in the indisputably large sense in **"POIL DE CAROTTE"** (Redhead), though it is directed by the notable Julien Duvivier with exemplary taste. The whole is suffused with a fine humane poetry, the sort of poetry we associate with France, with a society starved for its instinctive tolerance for human frailty, human vices. "Immoral"? The French have earned a world reputation for being immoral, but that reputation has been so salted and sweetened, served up in so many beguiling dishes, that it is blended with the time-stream we know as Culture.

I choose **"POIL DE CAROTTE"** as an example of Culture with quite specifiable beauties emerging from a situation which is sordid in its tragicomedy and yet ends on a very tender note of harmony, the sort of revelation of human grace that marks the "sad story with a happy ending". Again we find French sentiment proving itself unsentimentally. This national trait comes through an ordeal of agony without the emotional fireworks of the Germans (see **"MAEDCHEN IN UNIFORM"** or **"METROPOLIS"**) or the moral self-consciousness of the English (consider, for example, **"PYGMALION"**). The French film says there is a strong, very simple, lyric spirit in life: never slight it, for it is part of the backbone of all culture.

The little hero is first seen martyred to an "immoral" situation between his ostensible parents, a corrosive situation that might spoil the future of any very young individual. The community is small, rustic, ingrown with the usual bourgeois prejudices. He is illegitimate, his mother's offspring by her adultery, and has lived since birth in the midst of a feud between the lady and her husband, who have kept respectable appearances only by remaining together upon rigidly estranged terms; she might be the housekeeper of a taciturn recluse. When the film opens, the lady tries to break the ice in sheer yearning for human companionship, but to no avail.

Both adults regard the boy as symbol of their marriage's failure and a community shame. The truth has been guessed by the village because the boy has inherited his red hair from a memorable fellow-countryman. The famous Harry Baur, as the cuckold, is somewhat "heavy" and un-

French but so forceful an actor that he builds up conviction out of his inherent powers. Robert Lynen as Redhead has an eloquent personality whose only proper description is poetic. The boy is infinitely saddened by living a hollow, embittering life as "son" of this household; his status is half a lie and holds nothing but inhumanity; his strategies to escape it, to bring fertility and pleasure into living, have the genius of poetry. The five-year-old girl who dogs his steps becomes partner in a beautiful idea. For why, one spring day, shouldn't they be ceremoniously married to each other? A child's game becomes an exquisite ritual of serious meaning when Redhead decks himself and his little friend with flower garlands and they parade through the fields. Many besides myself must treasure this episode because of the lyric simplicity with which it is acted and photographed. But daily despair reasserts its grip on Redhead as he grows increasingly aware of his home's cruel aridity; in a burst of childish grief, hopelessly deprived of love, he decides to hang himself.

His supposed father, notified just in time while drinking at an inn, races back home and cuts him down from a rafter in the attic..Their reconciliation creates the glow essential to all "magic" reversals of feeling."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Lynen:

"Though both Robert's parents were artistic, neither was of the cinema: his father was a painter, his mother a former singer of American extraction. The boy was a strange selection, on the face of it, to portray "Carrots", the tragically misunderstood hero of Jules Renard's story, in its first sound version in 1932. (The director, Duvivier, had already made a successful silent one seven years earlier.) He had no previous acting experience, and his dreamy, poetic air didn't suggest the mischievousness that was a necessary part of **"POIL DE CAROTTE"**'s make-up. But, with the scenario tailored to fit his very different temperament, and Alexandre Tansman's music to create a haunting atmosphere. the frail, skinny Lynen, peering through a mist of freckles, is unforgettable.

Overnight, Robert became France's favourite child. The public longed to see

him rescued from rural misery: very well then, he should become a boy king ("**LE PETIT ROI**"), and have royalty thrust on him again a few years later ("**L'ÉDUCATION DU PRINCE**"). But he should also continue from time to time to embrace poverty ("**SANS FAMILLE**", "**LE PETIT CHOSE**"). Lynen really was a star. He was neither good-looking, nor cute, nor funny, nor even particularly boyish. On the contrary, he was a pale, delicate creature (without benefit of freckles) with a soft, rather feminine profile. But there was sweetness and intelligence and a kind of gallantry about him that touched all hearts.

Of his remaining eight films, one was Duvivier's famous "**UN CARNET DE BAL**" (37), and there were to be two more star roles in 1938, in "**L'ÉDUCATION DU PRINCE**" and "**LE PETIT CHOSE**". He was also featured in "**MOLLENARD**" (37), "**LE FRAUDEUR**" (37) and "**LA VIE EST MAGNIFIQUE**" (38). But the shadows were gathering around Robert Lynen. In 1937 his unstable father had killed himself by jumping from a fifth-floor window; and in September 1939 France went to war.

Lynen was in two more films: "**ÉSPOIRS**" (40) and "**CAP DU LARGE**" (42). The latter had been filmed in the Zone Libre,

and on February 7 1943, soon after its completion, he was arrested by German security agents and charged with being a resistance fighter. He was imprisoned at Marseilles, then moved to Fresnes and finally across the border to Karlsruhe, where he was executed on April Fool's Day, 1944. Heroes don't always look like heroes. A year earlier, as it happened, Robert's father in "**POIL DE CAROTTE**", the great Harry Baur, had died after being arrested and tortured by the Germans."

[no listing in "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Cinema Book", "Classics of the Foreign Film", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The International Encyclopedia of Film", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "World Cinema, a Short History"]

No further information currently available. See the same director's debut 1925 silent version and the 1973 remake. Lynen was 11. Among other titles in his brief career not already noted by Holmstrom were "**SON AUTRE AMOUR**" (35), "**LA BELLE ÉQUIPE**" (36), "**L'HOMME DU JOUR**" (36) and "**LA VIE EST MAGNIFIQUE**" (38). But it is in titles like this and "**LE PETIT ROI**" that he'll be seen to best effect. It is not, incidentally, quite clear from the above notes whether Lynen was indeed working with the Maquis, as the Gestapo suspected. No doubt the Germans detained and shot many Frenchmen on suspicion alone. In either case, a bitter and senseless end to such a talented life.

In our own time, when "child abuse" is the potato to our current affairs cuisine, we hear strangely little of sons being systematically maltreated by their mothers, of the *woman as abuser*. When generations of nuns have brutally maltreated the inmates of some children's home, this somehow merits far fewer column inches than when a single pædophile headmaster or boarding school teacher is ritually unmasked. It conflicts too much with the received wisdom of the woman as nurturer and co-victim. Reality is less conveniently clear-cut. And despite the tabloids having fashioned Myra Hindley into the living embodiment of Evil, there is little evidence from the cinema or television of matriarchal sadism, and when – as in "**MOMMIE DEAREST**" – freak instances do occur, the characterisation of the woman is never so uncompromising as the endlessly repeated portrait of the "predatory man". Visual culture plays to our prevailing prejudices – just as the news media do – and validates those prejudices in the process. "**POIL DE CAROTTE**" at least is a minor corrective to such simplistic (not to say sexist) political dualism.

See subject index under **CRUELTY / MALTREATMENT, DEATH, FARMS & FARMING** and **STEPMOTHERS / STEPFATHERS**. Also, see under **FAME'S VICTIMS** for other child actors who met premature or unnatural ends.