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# La Terre

1921. France. Black and White. 97 minutes.

Directed by ..... André Antoine

Produced by ..... S.C.A.G.L.

Cinematography by ..... René Gaveau and René Guichard

Assistant Directors ..... Georges Denola and Julien Duvivier

From the novel by ..... Émile Zola

Adapted by ..... André Antoine

## Cast

Armand Bour ..... Père Fouan

René Alexandre ..... Jean

Germaine Rouer ..... Françoise

Jean Hervé ..... Louis, known as Buteau

Milo ..... Hyacinthe, known as Jésus-Christ

Berthe Bovy ..... Olympe, known as La Trouille

Jeanne Briey ..... Lise

Jeanne Grumbach ..... La Cognette

Emile Desjardins ..... The Shepherd

Max Charlier ..... Bécu

René Hieronimus ..... Nenesse

## Restoration Credits

Print supplied by ..... Photoplay Productions from copy held by Royal Belgian Film Archive and the Cinémathèque Française. From the sole surviving copy at Gosfilmofond, Moscow.

Score composed by ..... Adrian Johnston

Arranged and Conducted by ... Michael Bland

Leon King ..... viola

Alistair Parnell ..... soprano saxophone

Shaun Thompson ..... bass clarinet

Adrian Johnston ..... piano, percussion and accordion

Michael Bland ..... piano

Produced by ..... David Gill and Kevin Brownlow

Music Recording ..... Richard Bradford

Dubbing Editor ..... Mike Fairbairn

Videotape Editor ..... Bruno Mansi

Production Secretary ..... Lynne Wake

Production Assistant ..... Penny Small

Associate Producer ..... Patrick Stanbury

Special Thanks to Jacques Ledoux, Philippe Esnault and Vincent Pinel

A Thames Television Production for Channel Four

Presented by Photoplay Productions

## Background

Emile Zola's powerful novel of family greed, brutality and deceit is brilliantly brought to the screen by director André Antoine. Patriarch Père Fouan divides his land between his two useless and scheming sons. But his generosity is rewarded with treachery. When neighbor Françoise (played by famed actress Germaine Rouer) discovers the sons' plot against their father, she falls victim to their vicious revenge. The final scene of the family's tragic fate is one of cinema's most haunting achievements.

When theatrical genius Antoine started his film career as "a sixty-year-old beginner," he dared to break all the rules of cinema. Shooting on location, he created a neorealist approach to his literary subjects. Antoine's masterful visual compositions are expressive of the relationship between the farmer and the land and the battle of good against evil. The gripping power of *La Terre's* cinematography comes to full force in the crystal-clear images of this stunning restoration by Photoplay Productions, under the auspices of Kevin Brownlow, Patrick Stanbury and the late David Gill.

## La Terre

André Antoine first adapted Emile Zola's novel for the theatre. the play was premiered in the Théâtre Antoine in 1901 with Antoine himself in the role of pere Fouan. For his film, Antoine made a further adaptation based on both novel and play. In 1919 he took his team of actors from the Comédie française to the Cloyes region near Chartes, and with the local peasants film in the open air.

The suitability for cinema of Zola's novel about the brutality of peasant life in France was questioned by critics. Paul de la Borie wrote: "*To adapt La Terre for cinema! The undertaking is astonishing, even a little frightening — you may ask yourself would we see Françoise helping the bull to mount her cow?*" Antoine simplified the novel, concentrating on two concurrent themes. One centers on Jean, a stranger who comes to the region looking for work, who meets and marries Françoise, a peasant girl. The main theme, a "King Lear" story, is that of Old Fouan. Feeling his age, Fouan decides to share his land between his three hard-hearted children, causing bitter family disputes. the same critic congratulates him on the results: "*Antoine devoted to years to this adaptation. This is very evident. At every level the film is treated with the meticulous care of a painter who has given himself the double task of depicting the truth and the maximum expression. It is remarkable that Antoine never gives in to the pleasure of filming beautiful shots — each scene recorded has its own sense, significance, and weight. La terre is a great and beautiful French film.*"

## André Antoine

André Antoine was born in Limoges in 1857. he had a distinguished career as an actor and director working at l'Odéon and l'Academie française where he established the concept of Théâtre-Libre. Antoine was invited to set up the national theater and theater school for the Ottoman empire in Constantinople. On his return to Paris in 1914, he accepted an offer by Pierre Décourcelle of the Société Cinématographique des Auteurs et Gens de Lettres (a subsidiary of Pathé) to become a film director. He took up the offer describing himself as "*a sixty-year-old beginner.*"

Antoine's work in the film industry did much to break down the barrier that existed between theater and cinema in France. In 1914, cinema was considered an inferior form of entertainment and beneath artists of the legitimate theater. The critic, André Huezé commended this move saying "Bravo Antoine ... and thank you! You are taking the Odéon to the cinema." Paradoxically, for a man of the theater, Antoine proclaimed that the cinema had nothing to do with the scenic art. Contrary to the principles of filming at the time, he abandoned the studio and filmed mainly on location, liberating the camera and focusing on real life. *Les frères corse* (1915) was filmed in Corsica; *Le coupable* (1917) in the backstreets of Paris; *Les travailleurs de la mer* (1917) on the Brittany coast using sailors and fishermen; *L'Arlésienne* (1922) in the Carmargue and Provence; *L'hirondelle et la mésange* on the canal du Nord.

From 1915 to 1922, Antoine made nine films which were criticized by film purists. His work was at odds with the direction of French cinema at the time. he felt that the subject of a film should be the most important factor, so he based most of his films on works of French literature. He also felt that the cinema in France had been reduced to the craft of photography and that "Photography has become the enemy of film. We've ended up taking the means for the end." His work had none of the stylized aestheticism of the films of l'Herbier or Delluc, nor the dynamic romanticism of Abel Gance. However, in retrospect, his ideas can be seen later in the work of the Italian neo-realist cinema of the 1940's and the nouvelle-vague cinema of France in the 1960's.

Antoine became a drama critic in 1921 and gave up his film career in 1922. At the time he wrote "If I were 20 years younger, instead of talking about it, I'd make Cinema-Libre, free of the routines that have left cinema in the rut into which it has fallen."

Ironically, one of silent cinema's earliest-born directors, he was also one of it's last. *L'hirondelle et la mésange* was filmed in 1922 but was refused by it's producer, Pathé. The unedited footage was finally rediscovered at the Cinematheque Française, assembled by the famed Henri Colpi, and premiered in 1982 to great acclaim.

### Filmography

<i>Les Frères corses</i> (1915)	<i>Quatre-vingt-treize</i> (1920) with Albert Capellani.
<i>Le Coupable</i> (1917)	<i>La Terre</i> (1921)
<i>Les Travailleurs de la mer</i> (1917)	<i>L'Hirondelle et la mésange</i> (1922/1982)
<i>Israël</i> (1918)	<i>L'Arlésienne</i> (1922)
<i>Mademoiselle de la Seiglière</i> (1920)	

### Adrian Johnston, Composer

Adrian Johnston has composed scores over 50 silent films for performance, as solo works or for his ensemble. His work for theater includes commissions by the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Glasgow Citizen's Theatre. His film scores include *Enter Achilles* and *Strange Fish* (Prix Italia – Music and Arts 1993) for DV8 Physical Theatre and has written the scores for *Jude* and *Welcome to Sarajevo*, feature films directed by Michael Winterbottom.

Germaine Rouer interview with Kevin Brownlow

Paris. July 19, 1991.

Edited January 2003.

Kevin Brownlow: Let's talk of *La flamme* which you've seen again recently.

Germaine Rouer: Yes, and I thought it was very well made, because Monsieur Leroy dealt with *La flamme*, he prepared it and it's very good. Very good. Obviously, they changed a lot of things: in the first version I filmed, one did not see the seducer.

KB: Had you seen the film when it first came out?

GR: No, I hadn't seen the film when it came out, I was in the United States, but I read the papers, I read rave reviews, really very good. And the film too. So I don't know if it will have the same success now, because it's a rather sentimental subject, and the time is past for that.

KB: Besides the sentimental side, did you feel it was a good film?

GR: I felt it was a good film for its time, yes. But, before, I had filmed *La Terre*. I was eighteen years old when I filmed *La Terre*. And that's a very good film.

KB: Absolutely. When was *La Terre* filmed exactly?

GR: *La Terre* was filmed in 1918, immediately after the Liberation. I had left Paris with my family. I had gone to the Beauce. And it was perfect, because it was precisely the place where it was filmed.

KB: Can you tell us something about the director?

GR: It was Monsieur Antoine who was a great figure, a great figure in the theatre, and also in the cinema. I had been called by a man called Monquin, to do a small part in a film, and there were several offices at the time. And from one office out came a man and everyone got up. So I got up too, and it was Antoine. He was looking for the character and suddenly he turned to me and said: "What are you doing, little one?" I said: "I'm at the Conservatoire and I hope to be the first prize winner and to graduate this year." He said: "I don't know if you will, but I'm hiring you for *La Terre*." It was wonderful for me, because until then I hadn't done much in the theatre, and it went very, very well. He was nice, but strict. And I was very excited because I was playing with Mauville, who was very big at the Comédie Française, and with Alexandre. Being very young, I was overawed. Then I graduated and I joined the Odéon. I stayed quite a long time. If I had joined the Comédie Française immediately, I wouldn't have been able to take time off, whereas at the Odéon it was much easier. And as I was much in demand, I preferred staying there for a time and it enabled me to do many things at the Cour Saint-martin, at the Gymnase — to create roles and also to play in—"L'Aiglon" and "Chanteclair." To do many things which I couldn't have done

if I had joined the Comédie. Because with the Comédie they bring you up slowly, very slowly. And you lose years.

KB: Had you seen any of Antoine's work when he picked you? Did you know him by reputation?

GR: I knew him by reputation, but I had never worked with him and I had never seen anything he'd done.

KB: What was his position in the French theatre?

GR: In the French theatre, he was highly respected. He had managed the Odéon for years, admirably, and he represented a whole period.

KB: How was it working for him, during filming?

GR: We had a bit of freedom, because it took place in the countryside. It went smoothly, and always with a lot of respect on our part for him, and kindness on his part for us. Sometimes he scolded me, but always very gently, because I had never done anything before, I was very clumsy, so he used to say: "I want you to have the hands of a peasant girl!" And I'd say "But I can't." "Try to have the hands of a peasant girl." That's the kind of thing he used to say to me. At that point, I would throw myself on the ground, and scratch at the earth, so everyone would laugh. I don't know what to tell you about Antoine. Afterwards, I never saw him again.

KB: Did the other actors help out? Where did you live?

GR: I didn't know them before then. Alexandre was an important member of the Comédie Française, but he was very pleasant and very kind. There was a good atmosphere, everybody got on very well together. And there was Madame Mauville too. But she went bird spotting. So, it was different.

KB: Did you live in a hotel?

GR: I rented privately and I had invited my family. So I lived with my family and met up with friends to go out to eat. There weren't many restaurants around, you know. But we always managed to eat, there were omelets, many omelets.

KB: was it a large team or a small team. Where there many people in the crew, cameramen?

GR: Yes, there was a large crew, and they mixed with the actors, you know. And everything went very well. So I was very pleased to go and see *La Terre* when they showed it at the theatre, what was it called?

KB: At the Musée d'Orsay.

GR: At the Musée d'Orsay, I was with friends. The people were very kind, and some even recognized me. They came to talk to me very kindly. And the show was perfect and was a great, a great success. The audience was really very good. They listened reverently, and afterwards the applause was very generous.

KB: Had you read Zola's novel when you made the film?

GR: Yes, of course.

KB: Did you think there were changes? Were you surprised by the way it was dealt with?

GR: Yes. There was the same intensity, the desire to show the difference between the generations.

KB: Did Antoine try to get you to act in a more natural or more theatrical way?

GR: You know, I played it as I felt it, because I had never worked before — I had worked with a teacher, but I had never been on the stage, so everything was new to me and I acted naturally. And, my goodness, it was good. He gave us no direction, he let us be natural. Sometimes he just told me: "Try to look like a peasant girl, go on, look like a peasant girl." So I did all I could to look like a peasant girl.

KB: Do you remember where it was filmed in the Beauce?

GR: At Dreux, I think.

KB: Do you remember if there were two shoots. It appears there were two shoots and he went back the year after.

GR: No, I'm not aware of it.

KB: I suppose it took place during the holidays.

GR: It was during the summer, during the holidays at the Conservatoire. In fact, it was filmed in August.

KB: And there was nothing in Paris, you didn't shoot in the studio?

GR: No, I didn't do anything in the studio. Nothing.

KB: Do you remember another actor called Jean Hervè?

GR: Yes, Jean Hervè was there too. He was a mate I later met again at the Odéon.

KB: Did you do other films with him?

GR: Yes, I did. *Les deux soldats*.

KB: He played the role of Butaud in *La Terre* and then he made films which, like Antoine's, were naturalistic films. Do you remember that Antoine's assistant on that film was Julien Duvivier? Who later made films, and with whom you later worked?

GR: Who was the assistant?

KB: Duvivier.

GR: Ah yes, but I didn't work with Duvivier.

KB: Didn't you have a part in *Au bonheur des dames*?

GR: Yes, indeed, that could be him, yes. *Au bonheur des dames*. I couldn't have had much of a role in it.

KB: So, at the time, you were away. You didn't see the film when it came out. *La Terre*?

GR: When it came out I didn't see it. I only saw it when they showed it there.

KB: At the Musée d'Orsay? And why? Was it usual for actors not to go and see the films they made?

GR: Oh no, not at all, it was according to their means. Or sometimes, you shoot a film and not to be informed that the film is being released. So, the result is that I didn't go and see it. But, you know, my career was more directed towards the theatre than the cinema.

KB: What did the cinema mean to a French actor, to someone graduating from the Conservatoire? Were you interested in it, was it another means of expression?

GR: It was something of tremendous importance, when we were asked to make a film, we were very happy. And for me it was always something new, although the press used to write: "It is time for Germaine Rouer to tell us whether she wants to become a great actress or a great star." So you see, I became neither.

KB: Maybe you did. Was it a challenge?

GR: Those two films back to back, had thrown me a little into the cinema, but I was at the Odéon, and then I joined the Comédie Française. So there I had fewer chances and there are things I was offered, but did not do. But I was very sorry each time, because the cinema is very interesting and very agreeable.

KB: What was interesting to an actor, to work without a text, with gestures? The silent cinema was quite the opposite of theatre.

GR: If I'd had to choose — I didn't have to choose — I was all set for the theatre, particularly the classical theatre. I loved playing Bèrènice, I loved playing Phèdre, I loved playing all those characters, and also modern plays. But when sometimes I was asked to do a film, I did all I could to be allowed to do it, and I was given leave.

KB: Let's talk about your work with Feuillade.

GR: At the time I wanted to go into the theatre and my parents were not totally in agreement, so I tried to earn a little money. So the moment there was a chance to do some work as an extra, I applied and I filmed for Feuillade. He had a weekly schedule, a number of scenes weekly. So the film went on for a long time like this. That one was a party and there was — what's the name of the woman who played the role — who was very good indeed?

KB: Musidora?

GR: Musidora. So Musidora stood there and Monsieur Feuillade said: "Little one, over there, will you be able to say — don't eat, it's poisoned?" So I told him "Of course I'll be able to say it." So I said, "Don't eat, it's poisoned." And he liked me and extended my role. So I earned quite a bit of money, because I stayed at least five weeks filming for him. And he told everyone: "I'm the one who discovered Germaine Rouer." In fact, it was both Antoine and him. Both of them. So I became a fortune-teller, a clairvoyant, a concierge, and at the end of the film I married Lèveque, you know the actor. So I was very happy. And afterwards I never saw him again — he had forgotten me. Those are the two things I made at the beginning of my career that just happened like that.

KB: What was the silent cinema for an actor, for you?

GR: I only knew the silent cinema and I thought it very pleasant to film like that, because you could shape your character, by thinking about it — by expressing it through gestures. You had to get right into the part, and that all the actors who made silent movies found that not having a script helped them. You could put more of yourself into the part. When I filmed *La Flamme*, really I became that poor girl and I think I had some good scenes.

KB: Does what you've see of *La terre* correspond to your memory of it?

GR: Yes, *La terre*, that was very good, very very good. Everything they did.

KB: Did you have a script there, had you read something before?

GR: I'd read Zola's novel, but he hadn't given me a script. When I saw it recently, I thought it was remarkable. I fell over a sickle, because Alexandre was running after me and he tried to rape me. I think at the time it was too daring so I remembered simply falling from the cart by accident and hurting myself, but there was no scene like that.

KB: Did you know the films you appeared in were seen abroad?

GR: I was never aware of it. As far as I was concerned, they stayed in France. They weren't great films. They were significant films, but not great films. So I didn't think they went to England or elsewhere. So I'm really very proud to say to myself that I'll be known a little in England.

KB: And in America.

GR: And in America. But it's a little too late for me to receive offers. I can tell you that when I go the only thing — I'll regret many things — but the only thing I'll be sorry about will be not to be able to act any longer. There it is.

#### GERMAINE ROUER — FILMOGRAPHY

- 1910 LES DEUX ORPHELINES (Albert Capellani)
- 1921 LA TERRE (André Antoine)
- 1926 LA FLAMME (René Hervil)
- 1926 LA GLU (Henri Fescourt)
- 1927 LA COUSINE BETTE (Max de Rieux)
- 1929 AU BONHEUR DES DAMES (Julien Duvivier)
- 1930 DEUX FOIS VINGT ANS (Charles-Felix Tavano)
- 1932 ROGER LA HONTE (Gaston Roudes)
- 1934 LE SECRET D'UNE NUIT (Félix Gandéra)
- 1935 BOURRASQUE (Pierre Billon)
- 1936 LES DEUX GOSSES (Fernand Rivers)
- 1936 LA POCHARDE (Jean Kemm)
- 1937 LIBERTE (Jean Kemm)
- 1937 LE CHEMIN DE LUMIERE (Paul Mesnier)
- 1937 LA FEMME DU BOUT DU MONDE (Jean Epstein)
- 1947 LE DOLMEN TRAGIQUE (Léon Mathot)
- 1950 L'ENFANT DES NEIGES (Albert Guyot)
- 1954 SI VERSAILLES M'ETAIT CONTE (Sacha Guitry)
- 1996 CINEMA EUROPE: THE OTHER HOLLYWOOD (Kevin Brownlow)