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Felicity Chaplin. *La Parisienne in Cinema: Between Art and Life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017. 184 pp. Filmography, Bibliography, and index. £70.00 (hb.) ISBN 9781526109538.

Review by Dervila Cooke, Dublin City University.

In this well-researched and insightful monograph, Felicity Chaplin presents the figure of the Parisienne in cinema “between art and life”, concentrating on 1950s and 1960s French and Hollywood film. She covers approximately four films per chapter, over six main sections, using “Parisienne” as both a noun and an adjective, and writing of what she terms the “Parisienne-ness” of her subjects. The term “Parisienne” literally means “Parisian woman”, but Chaplin uses it to refer to what she sees as a multi-pronged construct. This somewhat paradoxical figure exists more in popular myth and in art (painting, literature, film) than in reality, and is surrounded by an aura of elusive mystique and feminine sexuality. The Parisienne is both a product of the fashion industry and an agent of her own creation. While she can be gamine and/or *garçonne*, she is also powerful and slightly dangerous. Two of Chaplin’s main aims are to define key elements of the Parisienne construct (who need not possess all elements at once) and to show how film has reinforced this iconological type.

Film is Chaplin’s main focus. Along with a good range of mid-twentieth-century film, she includes analysis of a 1920s silent film, poetic realism and film noir from the 1930s and 1940s, along with more recent films. Some of the contemporary films discussed are Baz Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), Raoul Ruiz’s *Klimt* (2006), Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris* (2011), and contemporary French productions such as François Ozon’s *8 Femmes* (2002) and films starring Charlotte Gainsbourg. Chaplin uses an “iconographical approach” (p.7) to discuss fixed and mutable aspects of the Parisienne, focusing on type as opposed to stereotype, following Erwin Panofsky’s 1930s work.[1]

The figure of the Parisienne as an iconic construct emerged in the nineteenth century during the development of capitalism in Paris, the city famously described by Walter Benjamin as “the capital of the nineteenth century” in his posthumously published 1930s exposé.[2] Paris and the Parisienne have been intimately connected since the nineteenth century. Chaplin’s detailed research emphasizes the major role of the nineteenth-century female consumer due to the democratization of fashion, especially during the Haussmann era of Second Empire Paris from the 1850s to 1870. The Second Empire saw the creation of boulevards facilitating shopping and strolling, increased public space (ideal for flaunting one’s fashionable appearance), and the creation of department stores. Industrialization meant increased and cheaper production of

commodities, while the development of the railway system after 1830 led to greater circulation of goods, along with easier movement of people to consume them. The images used in advertising (such as lithography and fashion plates) and the greater presence and impact of the printed press contributed greatly to the growth of consumerism. The new larger market of Parisian women became a considerable driving force in creating the image of the Parisienne through the consumption of accoutrements.

Chaplin notes that the concept of self-transformation was, and remains, a frequent aspect of the Parisienne. The increased availability of goods in nineteenth-century Paris, along with their lower price, gave women the power to self-invent, and to transform themselves in a kind of performance based on elegance and mystique. Chaplin terms this “self-fashioning” (p. 13). She draws on research by critics such as Debra Mancoff, Valerie Steele and Elizabeth Kolbinger Menon who have analysed the trope of the Parisienne in painting and fashion studies.^[3] In nineteenth-century Paris, working-class women gained the capacity to imitate the dress of the richer classes, just as rural women arriving by train from the French provinces could reinvent themselves with a Parisian sojourn. However Chaplin stresses that a stay in Paris was, and is, no guarantee of becoming a Parisienne, as an understanding of what is chic remains necessary.

By 1900, the interconnections between Paris and the Parisienne had become so strong that the Parisienne was the “official mascot of French commodities” at the World Fair in Paris that year (p. 176), appearing in different forms on advertising posters for the event. Fashion (usually elegantly simple) is the linking thread in all aspects of the type of the Parisienne discussed by Chaplin, whether sumptuous, effortlessly chic, or understatedly cool. Performance is another linking thread inscribed in many versions of the fin de siècle Parisienne, as in the iconic figure of can-can dancer Jane Avril, as painted by Toulouse-Lautrec, or Cléo de Mérode, the famous nineteenth-century glamour model, dancer and courtesan. Léa de Castro in Ruiz’s *Klimt* is loosely based on Cléo de Mérode, as analysed in Chaplin’s “Muse” chapter. Chaplin details many song and dance numbers in film and discusses real-life Parisienne chanteuses or cabaret artistes. Whether overt or more subtly inscribed, a self-performance of elegance and mystique underlies the Parisienne construct.

The elegance and mystery of the Parisienne derive from both high and low visual culture. Chaplin’s analysis of this mainly concerns paintings but also deals with advertising posters such as those by Toulouse-Lautrec, and the growth of the illustrated press in general (with brief mentions of photography, e.g. p. 6, p. 35). Chaplin notes the references to paintings by Renoir and Toulouse-Lautrec in the ballet sequence of *An American in Paris* (p. 182), and discusses James Tissot’s “L’Ambitieuse”, part of his 1880s series entitled “La Femme à Paris” (p. 130). For literature, Chaplin highlights Charles Baudelaire’s abominable women (poetic constructs who are both idealized and dangerous, in no small part due to the venereal disease they might carry) and Emile Zola’s *Nana*, who rose from streetwalker to performer and elegant courtesan towards the end of the Second Empire.

Chaplin highlights “the transatlantic cultural exchange between French and American cinema” in the 1950s (p. 16), drawing on Vanessa Schwartz’s 2007 study *It’s so French!*^[4] Following Schwartz, she argues that in order for the Parisienne to develop as a cinematic type, “a global or cosmopolitan perspective was necessary”, and that the 1950s and 1960s were a “culmination point” (p. 16). *An American in Paris* (1951), *Sabrina* (1954), *Funny Face* (1957), and *Gigi* (1958) constitute the American swathe, with a strong emphasis on self-performance and the elegance of Paris fashion. In the French films, the Parisiennes are always sartorially remarkable too, whether

dressed with careful simplicity or splendidly attired, but the main element foregrounded is often the femme fatale or courtesan.

Chaplin's six chapters are, in order, "Muse", "Cosmopolite", "Icon of Fashion", "Femme fatale", "Courtesan", and "Star". In all instances, her cinematic Parisiennes possess at least two of the above aspects, often more. For example, Anna Karina, born Hanne Karin Blarke Bayer in Denmark, is a cosmopolitan Parisienne who was also Jean-Luc Godard's muse (an active, self-fashioning one, argues Chaplin), and, like Audrey Hepburn, is known as much today as a fashion icon as for her cinematic roles. Jeanne Moreau could also have been the subject of almost any of the book's six chapters. In Moreau's case, her star quality reposed in large part on her femme fatale status, as well as on her understated chic. Catherine Deneuve's star appeal is infused with the "elegant courtesan" aspect of the Parisienne, and also with her "icon of fashion" status.

In the "Muse" chapter, the most striking analysis is of Jean Renoir's *Elena et les hommes* (1956). Chaplin uses the figure of Elena to emphasize the importance of "classlessness and cosmopolitanism" often associated with the figure of the Parisienne (p. 27), and to show that the men in Renoir's film achieve their ambitions with the help of the Parisienne muse. This film draws on the life of Misia Godebska, a bohemian Polish woman who became one of the leading muses of the literary and artistic world in Paris at the turn of the century. In Allen's *Midnight in Paris*, the figure of Adriana serves instead to highlight the difficulty of fully possessing the Parisienne. Adriana is elusive, and also represents what Chaplin terms the "active muse" aspect of the Parisienne type, closer to the exterior inspirational force in classical mythology than to what she sees as the more passive construction of the Romantic imagination.

In her "Cosmopolite" chapter, Chaplin notes that the television advertisement for the 2009 Yves Saint-Laurent fragrance "Parisienne" stars Kate Moss, implying that one can live outside of Paris (and, like Moss, be of a different nationality) and still be Parisienne, as long as one has the requisite qualities and has spent time in Paris. Chaplin discusses this aspect in relation to Cécile/Lola, a Parisienne in America from Jacques Demy's *Model Shop* (1969), and to Mireille Balin's Algiers-based Gaby in *Pépé le Moko* (1937). Billy Wilder's *Sabrina* shows the power of Parisian fashion to transform the humble working-class American girl (Sabrina/Hepburn). Chaplin's later analysis of Stanley Donen's *Funny Face*, also starring Hepburn, highlights the transformative potential of the fashion industry--in Hepburn's case from "bookish intellectual from Greenwich village into a Parisian couture model" (p. 80).

A key image from the "Icon of Fashion" chapter is the opening scene of Vincente Minelli's *Gigi*, which shows a "parade" of fashionably dressed women in the Bois de Boulogne in early twentieth-century Paris. This scene acknowledges the important role played by Haussmann's new areas of public space. As Chaplin points out, his creation of the boulevards and parks allowed women an increased visibility outdoors (and therefore a gradually increasing freedom), while also assigning them the role of perpetuating consumerism through the fashions they paraded. Chaplin also stresses the close associations between many French and Hollywood Parisienne stars and couture: Hepburn with Givenchy, Deneuve with Yves Saint-Laurent, Moreau with Pierre Cardin, etc. (p. 77).

A French "Parisienne" film where clothing is of key importance is Ozon's *8 Femmes*, where icons of French cinema including Deneuve, Isabelle Huppert and Emmanuelle Béart enact motifs of French life and of Parisian femininity. These include "the ménage à trois, transformation, Sapphism, striptease, the *garçonnette*, the *belle et riche*" sophisticate, the scarlet woman, the mistress,

the prostitute” (p. 88), all roles and tropes highlighted by the clothes worn by the female characters. While the *ménage à trois* is mentioned several times by Chaplin, she does not analyse the trope in detail. I would have welcomed more focus on this as it is such a feature of French film. I would also have liked more analysis of the figure of the mistress in Parisian and French culture (the discussion of the courtesan covers only one aspect of this), and of the Sapphic Parisienne.

The “Femme fatale” chapter draws on work by Andrew Spicer, Jim Hillier and Alastair Phillips, emphasizing that the debts of film noir to poetic realism have been neglected or denied until relatively recently.[5] While pointing out Franco-American links, Chaplin distinguishes between the American “intentional” femme fatale and the French “unintentional” one in film noir (p. 96). Of the four films in this chapter, two are by Marcel Carné: *Le Quai des brumes* (1937) and *Le Jour se lève* (1939). Chaplin also looks at *Du rififi chez les hommes* from 1955, which had an American director, Julius (Jules) Dassin, and the New Wave example of Jean-Luc Godard’s *A bout de souffle* (1960). All were French productions. While Patricia (Jean Seberg) in Godard’s film is American, she is a relatively unintentional femme fatale, arguably because the film is by a French director, albeit one indebted to the American gangster movie tradition. These French films draw on a long cultural tradition of literary and artistic representations that portray the Parisienne as a dangerous figure, but one whose danger arises despite herself. Her nineteenth-century association with prostitution-borne disease filters through to the figure of the femme fatale, to create an aura of alluring menace inspiring fear and fascination.

The “Courtesan” chapter emphasizes that things are not always as they seem with the Parisienne, and also highlights the venality and materialism often associated with the figure. Chaplin notes that prostitution was a key part of nineteenth-century cultural life in Paris and seeped naturally into French film. She focuses on the elegant version of the profession, noting that the role of courtesan differs from ordinary prostitution as it is “veiled by appearances” (p. 121). She writes of the fear of misrecognition that the elegant courtesan often created in male onlookers, who needed to interpret clothing in order to establish a woman’s respectability, and were often misled. In terms of venality and materialism, Chaplin notes the association in *Moulin rouge!* of Satine with Marilyn Monroe’s “Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Friend” and “Material Girl” by Madonna (p. 143). While Lucile in Alain Cavalier’s 1968 film *La Chamade* makes a choice to be a kept woman, Marie in Charles Chaplin’s *A Woman of Paris* (1923) ultimately abandons a life of conspicuous consumption and leaves Paris for the provinces. However, the author presents this decision as an exception. She notes that Cavalier’s Lucile (Deneuve) is “often shot behind glass” (pp. 139-140), in a technique that suggests her unattainability but also her association with consumerism, whether resembling a commodity in a shop window or as a consumer of commodities.

The “Star” chapter focuses on the “iconographical profile” of Bardot (the naughty, childlike sex-kitten), Karina (the gauche and gamine intellectual), Deneuve (the elegant woman with the mask-like face) Moreau (purveyor of a deadly female sexuality) and Charlotte Gainsbourg, who is slightly masculine and “*jolie laide*”, loosely translated by Chaplin as “ugly pretty” (p. 172). Chaplin rightly notes that female film stars rely more than their male counterparts on “extra-filmic” events such as guest-editing the Paris edition of *Vogue* magazine, or lending their name to luxury goods. In Gainsbourg’s case this extends to candles and a brand of tea.

This book is a valuable addition to film studies, fashion studies and general cultural studies. The style is engaging, and the research is wide-ranging and thought provoking. However, there is

some repetition of points between chapters, and at times the phrasing within chapters is also repetitive. I would also take issue with the statement that the Parisienne as *flâneuse* “often appears in cinema” (p. 27). Only one example is given (Cléo in Agnès Varda’s 1962 film *Cléo de 5 à 7*), and it is not clear what type of *flâneuse* is in question (shopping, observing, wandering at length, and for what purpose?), nor what the result of the *flânerie* might be.

I was also disappointed to see no illustrations in the book, although the presentation of scenes is always vivid. Fortunately, the cover image is very well chosen, and suggests a wealth of elements. It shows the waif-thin Hepburn in *Funny Face*, elegantly dressed in a simple red evening gown the colour of passion. Chaplin notes the slight tinge of masculinity or androgyny that often surrounds the Parisienne, and in this case Hepburn’s leanness serves this purpose, as does her *garçonne* haircut (which conceals a more feminine ponytail at the back). A red shawl billows behind her, creating the impression of movement and the ability to change. Here she is at once fashion icon, star, muse and cosmopolite, posing in a dramatic stance that both invites the gaze and proclaims her entrancing force.

I was struck by the different types of power surrounding the Parisienne, including power possessed by her and powers to which she is in thrall. The Parisienne has power to fascinate, whether suitors, lovers, or viewers in the case of film. In the case of her image in advertising or the fashion press, consumers are under her sway. Her discerning consumption of fashion allows her the freedom of self-invention and the ability to self-promote. Yet I was also struck by the enormous power of the fashion industry itself, to the extent that I wonder whether those aspiring to be Parisienne are more empowered by the industry or manipulated by it. The image of the discarded aging courtesan, eunuch-like because she is no longer thin and beautiful (p.132), is one manifestation of the strictures around this image. Principally however, Chaplin has convinced me of the power of the cinematic image of the Parisienne, with its debts to the pictorial and literary images of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

NOTES

[1] Panofsky, Erwin. *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939).

[2] Walter Benjamin, “Paris, die Hauptstadt des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts”, in *Illuminationen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955).

[3] Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History*. Revised edition (New York: Berg, 1998); Elizabeth Kolbinger Menon, *Evil by Design: The Creation and Marketing of the Femme Fatale* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Debra Mancoff, *Fashion in Impressionist Paris* (London: Merrell, 2012).

[4] Vanessa Schwartz, *It’s so French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[5] Andrew Spicer, ed. *European Film Noir* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007). Jim Hillier and Alastair Phillips, *100 Film noirs* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

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