



Gérard Depardieu

INNOCENT

TRANSLATED *by*
RAINER J. HANSHE

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Contra Mundum Press New York · London · Melbourne

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éditeur; translation © 2017
Rainer J. Hanshe

First Contra Mundum Press
Edition 2017.

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Library of Congress
Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
Depardieu, Gérard, 1948–
[*Innocent*. English.]

Innocent / Gérard Depardieu;
translated from the French by
Rainer J. Hanshe

—1st Contra Mundum Press
Edition
168 pp., 5 × 8 in.

ISBN 9781940625249

- I. Depardieu, Gérard.
- II. Title.
- III. Hanshe, Rainer J.
- IV. Translator.

2017947793

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FRIENDSHIP

Friendship is a question mark.

It exists perhaps only in childhood.

Friends are the people with whom we grow up. We go fishing together for the first time, we spend nights together outside, we steal cherries, we get caught red handed, we support each other. Friends are the people with whom we touch the willy too, we discover and develop ourselves, we live all of our first times together.

We believe a lot in friendship, then things deteriorate a bit. It's not the same thing anymore since time changes, lives change, even molecules change.

At fifteen we're not the same as when we're forty, still less that of a man of seventy.

So we can think of friendship as a flower: it grows, it fades, it disappears, then the following season, it can return like a peony that was believed lost but which suddenly reveals itself, splashing its most beautiful colors.

When you're my age, many of your friends have already left.

And since you know that you will no longer see those people who have disappeared, you remain with the idea of that past friendship.

In spite of everything, we still try to believe that other friendships are possible.

Even if the word friendship has become a bit obsolete. Even if we live in a society where friendship no longer exists. Even if we know that to be human is to always betray. To be human is to kill.

In spite of everything, we say that there are perhaps friends whom we don't know, people who love us from afar and who we could love. Still, it's necessary to make the first step ... and sometimes, it's tiring.

What most worried me when I left Châteauroux was not to have school buddies. Even if I had realized that mine were often morons or the children of morons. Because, in Berry, where the houses were narrow, where the doors were narrow, & where the people were often narrow, I was only defined by the place that I came from, the people who had raised me, & their reputation.

We were a family of Indians.

And I had often heard parents say to their children when pointing their fingers at me: "I don't want you to play with him! He's a thug!" I heard that, but it didn't bother me. I wasn't very affected by narrow mindedness back then.

But even to leave those buddies, it takes courage. Because we never know what we're going to find after.

Because maybe we'll find even worse.

So I wandered alone for a long time, telling myself that I would never find friends.

I was mourning my school playground.

It's a bit like a first love — you're in love with someone, and then there's a rupture. And it takes time to fall in love again. Except that there was no first love. I had life before me and I was curious about what was going to happen. Even if I had no real ambition. Just keep silent, smile, and look likeable enough to slip through the cracks.

It took one brief year: I had seen something else; I had invented something else. I had read Jean Giono's *The Song of the World*, which gave me the idea to leave, to hit the road. And then, on my way, I had met other people. People who had the same desire for life as me.

People like Marcel Dalio, like Pierre Brasseur, like Michel Simon.

With Marcel Dalio we both played Israël Horowitz at Gaité-Montparnasse. Him, *The Indian Wants the Bronx*, me, *Clair-Obscur*. I would wait for him at the exit of the theater and we would travel together under the stars. Marcel was always made up, by day as by night, acting or not acting. He was an extravagant character, the kind you don't see anymore nowadays. My Marcel, he was like my Jean Carmet, but I met him before. He was about the same size. He also had moments of intense despair because he was too lucid. But his immense culture and an incredible sense of derision used to help him carry on. Life had taught him to overcome his fear. He said to me: "Never say no, always say yes, *oui!*"

CINEMA, IT'S THAT, TOO

The young Pierre Niney, who received the César for best actor for his interpretation of Yves Saint Laurent, thanked the “profound benevolence” of the voters, “that benevolence so important to acting,” that “necessary benevolence.”

Since when should the cinema be benevolent?

The cinema is not benevolent; the cinema must above all not be benevolent.

The cinema must be full of dangers, of hellburners, of dynamite, of burning stones that one tries to juggle.

Art, whatever it may be, true art, has always been the opposite of benevolence.

To be of value, art must be dangerous.

Like the art of the young tightrope walker that I saw falling in front of his father’s eyes on Place Voltaire in Châteauroux when I was young.

Artists are all circus people.

And their art is a journey, a journey that begins with deep thinking, because we know that with all the things that we have to express, we have to take a dangerous path alone and face the consequences alone.

And if that process requires psychological understanding, its first concern is not benevolence. What motivates it above all is truth.

The cinema must be true, that is, *dangerous*.

The very great actors are everything but benevolent. I don't even believe in the so-called sensitivity of the actor. When they are real artists, actors are wild, they are cruel, their way of apprehending things is painful and violent.

And it's the same with directors.

When I think of Michelangelo Antonioni, when I think of Marco Ferreri, of Jean-Luc Godard, of Bertrand Blier, the first word that comes to my mind is not really benevolence. They are extraordinary people, not necessarily nice, and their primary concern was not to please or be likeable.

Chabrol, with his magnificent human qualities, dissected the bourgeois milieus, their neuroses, their perversities. He couldn't have done that with such lucidity if he'd regarded his contemporaries with benevolence.

And Buñuel, courtesy and manners wouldn't have helped him portray society or religion as he did.

All those great filmmakers weren't trying to please people or be considerate, they had their qualities and defects, but every one of them was fascinated by human nature and society, which they revealed with a certain perspective, neither sweet nor indulgent, but true.

And that's why cinema was a few years ahead of its time and was the pulse of the future society.

When Chaplin released *The Dictator*, when Ferreri was making *La Grande Bouffe*, or Blier *Les Valseuses*, they showed the truth of their times.

The same goes with the great Italian directors: Vittorio De Sica, Dino Risi, Mario Monicelli, Luigi Comencini, or Bernardo Bertolucci for instance.

They depicted what was in front of their eyes, things that many people couldn't see because they were blinded by their good consciences.

It's become much more difficult today to be at the very heart of the era as they were. Not because there are fewer talents, but because the era is different. Society has evolved. Everything changes so swiftly now that it's become extremely difficult for fiction to capture & depict reality.

A reality that surpasses all fiction, including the most lucid and the most tragic fiction.

But everything is not however lost.

There are still authors and directors with, despite everything, a strong enough vision to identify that reality.

I think for example of Abderrahmane Sissako. With *Timbuktu*, he simply tells the story of a contemporary village in Mauritania. He shows us a truth.

Same thing with Jafar Panahi, who reveals the true Iran with his film *Taxi Tehran*.

Equally with Jacques Audiard. *Dheepan* depicted the fate of a migrant a few months before the plight of those refugees became a hot topic.

That's what the great auteurs of cinema have always done — they give their own vision of the world, with simplicity, strength, emotion, and great lucidity.

Since society has changed, the cinema itself also had to evolve.

Of course, the cinema was always commercially motivated, but for a long time the poets and artists had people with whom they could talk and make projects.

There were real producers who were willing to get money for them, like artists in search of patrons. I think for example of Serge Silberman or Jean-Pierre Rassam.

Then there were the big production houses, like Gaumont, which occupied the field. When they worked with other artists like Toscan du Plantier, it was still fine, there was culture and it produced cinema. Toscan took Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Joseph Losey, Satyajit Ray, Andrzej Wajda, & Ingmar Bergman under his wing.

Today, it's television that holds the power.

And when a poet has to confront a "decision-maker," he has very little chance of winning.

The decision makers are people whose main tasks involve building models, writing specifications, and making schedules. Their job isn't to encourage poets, but to

make products for their channels. Mastering the medium and the message, as Jean-Marie Messier said.

For them, film projects fall into three categories: what can be broadcast during prime time, what is vacuous and innocuous, and what may be broadcast only at midnight or what cannot be shown on TV.

And what cannot be shown is censored straightaway. Censored because it isn't mainstream.

It's the same as in communist countries during the Cold War.

The projects that those channels give the go-ahead to often lead to very bad films, because the creators are obliged to replicate the channels' standards, to respect that censorship if they want to work. There are more and more commissioned films, therefore fewer and fewer directors and auteurs. Because on a set, you need someone who leads with a vision, and when TV is in charge, the leader is no longer the director, TV is. For a private channel, TV leads; for a public channel, the government does.

Therefore, the movies they finance are less cinema than the TV movies released on the big screen.

I don't know who would support Buñuel or Ferreri today; they wouldn't find many people to listen to them, let alone to make their films.

Fortunately, there are still artists with strong personalities who won't let themselves be confined without a fight. Guillaume Nicloux, for instance, still happens to

A POLITICAL WORLD

Men of power fear nothing.
Or perhaps yes.
The sole thing that scares them is honesty.
It's what gives them that monstrous look.
Because they are forced to be monstrous.
And you can't bear power if you're not.
There's never much concord among those who love
power.

Just re-read Shakespeare. Or Peter Handke.
The madness of power, it's always existed.
Think of Gilles de Rais. Chevalier and Lord of
Champtoceaux-sur-Loire, Marshal of France at twenty-
four, national hero, fervent admirer of Joan of Arc, and
murderer of one hundred and forty innocent children.

Crazed by power.
There's a magnificent text by Hugo Claus, *Gilles et la
nuit*, which recounts that hell.

Even the most normal and honest guy in the world
can be driven mad by power.

I've never met an honest man of power, ever.
When I say man of power, I'm talking about those
who prevaricate, those who affirm that they're in charge

of our lives, who do things for our good, who lead us. All those who try to make us believe that horses don't fuck.

Power, that's what kills innocence.

Everywhere & since forever.

Just look at the history of France.

A history that isn't very glorious.

The story of so-called enlightened men of power who show innocent people the way.

Innocents who don't see evil and who become the martyrs of those who lead them to the front.

The French Republic is also that.

We have to keep in mind that that Republic began with the worst fundamentalists: Robespierre, Saint-Just, Fouquier-Tinville. Not religious fundamentalists, but political fundamentalists. Our great men. Three hundred years after the Inquisition, it was the politicians' turn to start burning people at the stake and cutting heads as pathways to the Republic.

After such a baptism of blood, the rest shouldn't surprise us.

With the way, for example, we've been behaving, we French, in the Maghreb or sub-Saharan Africa.

Who remembers the Voulet-Chanoine mission, those two French officers who, during the conquest of Chad, committed massacres so despicable that the army had to be sent to arrest them?

And Indochina? And Algeria?

After the Second World War, we found ourselves doing things as abominable as the Nazis made us endure.

It took twenty-seven thousand dead on the French side, and tens of thousands of young people who came back completely confused, before understanding that Algeria should be left to the Algerians.

I'm not even speaking about torture; André Mandouze spoke about that very well.

What the French government has done there is shameful.

We truly behaved like fucking bastards.

That's why I put Guy Mollet and others like René Coty in the same sack as Stalin or Hitler. The spirit was different but the result was not. Innocence sacrificed for the benefit of power.

Hypocrisy as well, as far as it concerns us.

A little specialty of ours, that hypocrisy, and very characteristic of our men of power.

It's enough to re-read Marcel Aymé, *Uranus* for example, to appreciate the smallness of character of those who have power.

Everything is there.

In France, there are many people just like Marcel Aymé's characters.

The proof is that we never talk about Aymé.

The Frenchman is afraid of him because he is afraid of the image he reflects of them.

When today I hear that Algerians here or there aren't grateful enough to us, I find it shameful.

We have occupied that country for nearly a hundred and fifty years without ever taking care of educating or caring for its inhabitants.

We were kings, little kings devoid of grandeur.

I was criticized for my friendship with Castro, but Castro, at least, actually worked to feed his people, to give them hospitals, education, and culture. Which is nevertheless the basis, the minimum of human dignity. He also helped establish literacy in Africa, struggled for states to free themselves from their colonizers without falling under American influence.

We can hardly say the same thing about our French governments, who spent their time pillaging Africa.

When Mandela was released, his first trip was to Cuba. To thank Castro for funding his struggle, for training doctors, for helping African organizations fight against apartheid from the start.

So you can guess what I think of the moral lessons of our men of power ...

Power and the hypocrisy that goes with it is a fucking infamy.

And we're in the midst of dying from this scum.

France today, nobody talks about it anymore. I see it clearly when I'm abroad. It no longer resonates; it no longer exists.

If things go on like this, France will soon become a kind of great amusement park, a Disneyland for foreigners. We all risk ending up like morons with our berets; we'll make wine and stinky cheese right in front of the tourists; we'll let them pull our hair and mustaches; they'll come to inhale the smell of the French.

Of course French ideals have made their way around the world.

But if you take a second to look at them ... Liberty, it no longer exists. They take it away from us. People are manipulated and tracked and they have no secrets anymore.

Equality, I won't even talk about it, it's always been a utopia.

Brotherhood, I still believe in it a bit. I think it can exist because I believe that humans are fundamentally good.

Even if because of the political spirit humanity grows stupider & stupider every day.

I'm speaking about the masses, who end up creating fear, for they are being frightened all the time. But the individual, as always, remains faultless. And he has great merit when one becomes aware of the world in which he struggles.

In France I see almost nothing but exhausted people, trapped people.

In the city, mainly because in the countryside, the Frenchman has become very rare.

In the countryside, it's truly misery, and it's in people's heads, in their eyes, that misery. They can't even talk about it any more; they can only endure it.

Yet, they are honest people, people who believe in some values, but values that, alas, are disappearing.

When I go for a stroll, I look at the guys in the countryside who are harvesting, struggling in the heat, and I think to myself, when they perish, that land on which they worked to death growing vegetables, that land which they cultivated for their children or grandchildren, that land which their descendants could inherit, soon instead it'll be made into a supermarket parking lot. In other words, there'll be nothing left.

When I'm in the urban areas, I think of it, the land that was there before, those who took care of it. In Châteauroux, when I was born, there were fields around the town where people used to plow and harvest with horse carts like in the olden days. There were day laborers, people who would offer their help in exchange for room and board. All that no longer exists. That's normal, the world changes, and so much the better.

But even so, I'm happy when I arrive in an area where that spirit still lives, in China, for example, north of Sichuan, where there are still whole fields cultivated by men. For miles and miles you don't see a single tractor.

When shooting Benoît Delépine & Gustave Kervern's *Saint-Amour* with Benoît Poelvoorde, where I played the role of a peasant, I saw how things worked in France.

We started at the *Salon de l'agriculture* in Paris. And then we went to see the farmers at home, on their land, & it had nothing to do with all the bigwigs at the exposition, who for the most part know how to play the grant game.

There, in the countryside, I saw really lost people, people who, between Brussels, globalization, and agricultural mutuals, are truly at their wits' end.

There are more and more rules, more and more standards, more and more decisions coming from powerful men, and all those things prevent the farmers from doing what they know how to do healthily, healthily and honestly.

They don't know what to do with their land, their cattle.

During the shooting, I met a breeder who suffered from a terrible hernia. He had to be treated, he had to be operated on, otherwise, he was going to die. I asked him what he was waiting for, and he told me that he couldn't find anyone to whom to entrust his cattle to. I wrote to the farm fund to tell them what I thought of them, that they were collecting the money but that they were unable to take care of a guy who would probably die, unable to find someone who could be trusted to replace him.

But hey, an innocent who croaks, who cares? Certainly not the powerful. That isn't what will prevent the director of the fund from giving us moral lessons.

WHAT KEEPS ME ALIVE

I feel more & more like a vagabond. Nothing holds me anymore.

I can go anywhere. Whenever.

I always travel without a suitcase.

When I was young, I went from Châteauroux to Côte d'Azur, now I go from Paris to Vladivostok, but it's exactly the same thing, exactly the same need, the same curiosity.

When I left Châteauroux, it was to live. When I leave France, it's to live, to live more.

I've always traveled, I've always been a citizen of the world, I'm not someone who settles, I'm only a passenger.

When I stop, I see things too quickly, people, their discomforts, I feel them very deeply, I can't bear it, I prefer to leave.

Since forever, as soon as I arrive somewhere, I keep an eye on the emergency exit, I know that the moment will arrive when it'll be necessary to leave.

But wherever I am, I'm curious about everything.

When I arrive in a country, I breathe it, I'm interested in the people, how they eat, how they work the land,

where the products come from, how the animals are fed. It never ends.

In each country, everything tells me a story.

The landscapes tell me a story, a culture. Monuments, architecture, nature, food, everything speaks to me. I breathe in everything. Whether in a Mauritanian desert, at sea with Olivier de Kersauson, in the Amazon jungle, in a French province, everywhere I'm always on the lookout.

Always having the capacity to be amazed, that's what keeps me alive.

And what amazes me above all else, what always guides me, is other people.

A jaded person is someone no longer observes other people.

I constantly observe people: their land, where they live, how they live.

There's never been a cultural barrier for me, no language barrier, no color barrier. It's the other's conviction, culture, life, and intelligence that continuously give me hope.

My sole strength is life; it's to look at people and to be with them.

I come without luggage and I learn.

There's nothing more important than knowing how to listen and observe.

Language was never an obstacle for me. When I'm in Russia, I always understand what's said to me. I don't

understand vocabulary or grammar, it's not what's interesting, but I understand people, their movements, their way of being, all that non-verbal communication, which is by far the richest and the most important. And the people understand me.

When we were in India, in 1983, Toscan was knocked on his ass because I spent hours with people without knowing their language. They would speak to me & I'd mimic them; we understood each other perfectly.

I'm free of the inhibition that people with a normal education often develop.

When I arrive in China, India, Russia, I arrive as I am.

As Cyrano says: "But there's nothing I walk with that doesn't shine, plumed with that honest freedom that is mine."

If ever I sense danger or aggression, I know how to escape. It was Dédé who taught me that: always a smile when you feel aggression, a smile & then you walk away.

But the fears that others may have, their apprehensions, I don't experience them until I've felt the danger myself.

In New York, in 1972, everyone said to me: "Whatever you do, don't even think about going to Central Park at night, it's terrible, it's full of drug addicts, there's violence, murders." It was others' fear, not mine, and I wanted to see what was really going on there. So I walked through Central Park at night, I saw people, I saw shadows moving away as soon as I approached, but nobody

called out to me. It's a bit like with a dog — if you're not afraid, it's not going to bite you. You just have to know not to be contaminated by others' fears or prejudices.

Well, after all, since I'm not as dumb as a wild boar, I won't put myself in danger. You have to know how far you can go.

I'm like St. Thomas, I only believe what I see; I only believe what I experience.

So I saw people considered to be the worst scoundrels on earth and, it's funny, I never spotted any of the flaws that they were said to have. Never.

They bore the fuck out of me with Putin, with Kadyrov, with Lukashenko, with all those people who disturb the sacrosanct consciences of the Parisian press. But my meeting with Russia has nothing to do with politics. It's above all a human & spiritual encounter.

I grew up with Russian writers; I learned to speak French through their literature, first with the *Stories of a Russian Pilgrim* when I was around twelve. It was a book that aroused my interest from the start because I saw that the author was anonymous and I was also anonymous. I liked that. And I considered myself a bit like a pilgrim, except that a pilgrim has a purpose, and I didn't know where I was going.

I loved that kind of literature far more than comics. *Tintin* for example always deeply bugged me. I thought he was a muckraker, a snitch, a copper. It doesn't surprise me that the Americans love him so much. I wasn't

interested in those comics at all. They were fucking stupid to me.

I preferred the *Stories of a Russian Pilgrim* by far. It's a book that has always accompanied me. Then, very quickly, I loved Dostoevsky, Pushkin. Long before I knew the country and its inhabitants, I was a fervent lover of Russian culture. It was the one that echoed more than anything the way I saw things, my agony. Tolstoy deeply moved me; Mayakovski deeply moved me. It was in Russian literature that I recognized human nature itself, as I perceive it, the fate of humanity. In Russian novels, people can't be good all the time, they can't be bad all the time, it's tiring. But they're Russian all the time. That is, they love ten times more intensely than anywhere else, they hate ten times more intensely too, and they say that they love or hate ten times more strongly than everywhere else.

It's a country in which there's no mountain to stop the wind that sweeps everything away, which allows every excess, including with faith, with love, with the love of life.

Every time that I encountered Russians, there was an immediate sympathy, a shared warmth. The Russians can be cunning, fickle, liars. I adore their madness, their violence, their paradoxes. They're a bit like me — they live the moment, but a moment that's immense. It's an abundance, and I love it. I find myself nowhere else but in the Russian spirit, in the temperament, fervor, and

faith of the Russians. Their relationship with religion, with spirituality, with all the drama that they put into it, it perfectly matches me. And they make me feel good; they feel my *muzhik* side, my way of seizing life. The Russians and I are as thick as thieves.

Even Bertolucci hired me at the time of 1900 because he was searching for a guy who looked Russian!

Then, in 1977, I met Vladimir Vysotsky, who was permitted to come to France to see his wife, Marina Vlady. It was the time when every night I played in Peter Handke's *Unreasonable People are Disappearing*, directed by Claude Régy at the Théâtre des Amandiers. It was a real crush. We spent fifteen days and fifteen nights together. His wife didn't see him very often and my family didn't see me very often. During those two weeks with him, I was really a Russian in Paris. He made me discover a lot of places. We spoke Russian, ate Russian, and especially drank Russian. I don't know how I managed to perform at night. I didn't know his work yet, I didn't know what a genius that immense poet was, but I had before me, with me, a magnificent Russian, a being of incredible humanity.

Yet, for a long time, I didn't want to go to Russia.

Stalinism and its offspring didn't interest me; I couldn't tolerate seeing people so humiliated in their daily lives.

I jumped at the chance to go when I heard the word *perestroika*.

I can say now that, when you really know Russia as I know it, you'll see how the Russian spirit reveals itself, expresses itself through its land, when you see those infinite spaces and the people who live in them, the great things built by the hands of those people, their strength, their presence, their energy, you'll understand why Putin is at the head of the country and why one needs someone of that temper there.

Putin, he's an old rogue, I've heard him talk to the oligarchs who are trying to suck the country dry — he doesn't have his tongue in his pocket. It's they who are afraid of him, not the other way around, as in so many other countries. And I see when I talk to the people over there how grateful they are to him for restoring their dignity in the eyes of other countries, which they had lost with that Elstine guy, who loved the drink and who collapsed in public before heads of state, like me with my scooter in front of the Parisian firefighters.

I've always believed that the real dictators were those who starved their people, but I've never seen anyone starve in Russia.

I see Putin regularly, and most of the time we talk about geopolitics. Last August, for example, we spoke for hours about Crimea. That region has always been considered sacred land by the Russians, for it was at Chersonese, near Sebastopol, that Vladimir I, the great prince of the principality of Kiev, the cradle of the Russian Empire, was baptized in 988. It was at that time

I MISTRUST CIVILIZATIONS

I've always been fascinated by creation, never by destruction.

That's what I love in history, creation.

History fascinates me. It's the opposite of ignorance; it's the opposite of stupidity. I didn't learn it at school, but I imbibed it later. I felt the sixteenth century with *The Return of Martin Guerre*, the seventeenth with *Cyrano*, the Revolution with *Danton*, the Occupation with *The Last Metro*.

I even found myself one day at the Collège de France talking about how I embodied a Frenchman of the sixteenth century in *The Return of Martin Guerre*. I had just studied the paintings of Hieronymus Bosch and noticed that at that time the peasants were not quite upright, their expressions were still grimaces. I imagined shouts, screams made to scare others more than some structured language. They were halfway between beasts & men.

I've always been attentive to those realities, interested also in the origin of things.

I always wondered why a stone was there, how long it had existed.

When we were looking for oil with Gérard Bourgoïn, we were drilling at a distance of four thousand five hundred meters & taking out tiny stones, *falun*, sometimes with shells, sometimes with oil stains. The feeling of being in the center of the Earth, and I was there, at the very heart of the history of mankind, I loved that.

I experienced the same sensation with the arrowheads that I found in the Mauritanian desert, on the set of *Fort Saganne*.

I love landscapes and their history, but I prefer the history of people in the landscapes.

The pyramids of Teotihuacan, those of Egypt ... when we talk about the folly of men, it's that hybris which interests me.

When I'm in the Valley of Death, I am of course in awe of the landscapes; it's as fascinating as if we were on Mars, but I think especially of those people who, one hundred and fifty years ago, passed through that desert with horses, women, children. That strength, that will, that very hell is etched into all the paths, in all the stones that I looked at.

The history of people in the desert is fascinating. Just as much as in the dampness of the jungles, you can quickly become swine, or behave like swine, as much as in the desert you can become a saint. Because you cannot fight against 140 degrees, you can only try to live it, to bear it, & if you don't have an incredibly strong will, you can't escape.

Those initiatic paths fascinate me. Those trips, those quests are captivating, the story of those men who were looking for something, who wanted to create something else.

I'm thinking, for example, of the journey of the American Indians, who originally left a region at the crossroads of Russia, Mongolia, China, and Kazakhstan, which crossed Siberia, the Bering Strait, to find themselves in America. The ambition of those men was incredible, their madness too.

Just like the folly that sparked the cathedral builders.

Today we're witnessing the reverse of that ambition, that creative folly. When you think about, for example, the Taliban, who destroyed the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, which had been there for nearly twenty centuries, or the Islamists who blew up the ancient city of Palmyra in Syria.

They must destroy, destroy at all costs, but destroy to create what after?

If Hitler had won, how long would he have lasted? Destroy yes, but what would he have created afterwards? What was powerful enough behind his ideas to create again?

Extremism knows how to destroy, but it doesn't create anything.

It's like those Taliban, or any fundamentalist moron. What do they offer us then? You can't just destroy the world and wait to see what'll come next.

Because you think destroying leads to creation, you brute?

Never.

It's totally incompatible.

Destruction has always been deeply rooted in human nature. The sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham to begin with.

Although the most beautiful sacred texts, the Bible, the Koran, the Torah, have been conceived, there is always a moment when the instinct of destruction returns.

In all cleverness there's a bit of nastiness.

Just look at the beginnings of Catholicism. They converted with force, they accused people of witchcraft, the Inquisition did its work. They burned the heretics who thought, after Ptolemy, that the Earth was round. As early as the 4th century, the Christians dismembered and burned Hypatia, an Egyptian philosopher famous for her fabulous works on astronomy.

We had to wait for those creators to be navigators like Christopher Columbus, the cartographers, the explorers who, driven by their curiosity, left their countries to succeed in denying the Church.

Then it was the Crusades, St. Bartholomew, the bloody mess until Hitler with his mustache and his pencil dick.

And today, Israel & Palestine, September 11, Daesh ...

It's always the same story, just a handful of assholes to create fucking havoc.

It's exactly like in a classroom: there are always two or three little shits, no more, who make the thing unbearable for everyone else.

And there's no point in putting them in the hallway, you have to deal with them because it's a situation that you always have to cope with.

We must endure those things.

And everybody thinks that the problem comes from those sick people, like that rabid old cunt Le Pen with his red jacket, but perhaps it comes more from those who support him, who identify with him.

And they're not difficult to control; their very ignorance calls for manipulation. They're there to "swell the ranks."

Look at the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre.

It's extremely violent what happened.

Terrorists had killed some intelligent cartoonists — may they rest in peace — who were also philosophers. And friends of mine.

Charlie Hebdo, I've often made the cover, & always in the same manner: the asshole, the drunkard full of vodka falling from his scooter. It doesn't matter, because that too is part of me. That's what Putin likes about me, my hooligan side.

Caricature is something very healthy. Even if I think that discussing sacred books, resemblances and differences between religions, their way of coexisting or not, is far more interesting than caricature. If someone asks

me not to caricature his prophet, ok, I get it, why would I do that if it disturbs him that much? I'd rather speak with him about the taboo.

But now, with *Charlie Hebdo*, we're no longer only dealing with religion, we're far, very far from religion, we're in politics.

And the conflation between those two isn't new.

From the beginning, what religion was first composed of was set aside in favor of politics. One could say that organized religions were invented, or at least propagated, by and for politics.

We had corrupted a relationship with the Most High, a true faith, in order to build a social structure.

Even in St. Paul's times, it was more about power than mysticism. And it's the same for everyone who rewrites the texts in their own way (I was going to say for their own aims).

Not so long ago I heard a Jew and a Muslim debating the commandment "Thou shalt not kill." For them, indeed, one has no right to kill, since only God has that power, the power to stop life. And man cannot usurp God's prerogative. On the other hand, we have the right to murder. To murder the infidels. When you murder, you don't take the place of God when you're crusading. To kill is a divine act, to murder a human act. We cannot kill, but we can murder.

Who can understand that? I don't.

That kind of nuance, it's the entire doctrine of religion; that's the great dilemma with interpreting texts for the benefit of one or the other.

From the moment you begin to interpret, you can make texts say whatever you want, and the reverse of everything.

It's the open door to the most brilliant bullshit.

It's the same with wars.

In war, we don't kill, we defend our homeland.
Nuance!

And it's with that kind of bullshit that one is free to commit every monstrosity.

Power, once again, succeeds in corrupting innocence.

Whether it be for country, for honor, or for any ideology, power "justifies" the worst atrocities, the shittiest things. "I just obeyed orders!"

All that is lamentable.

And it's the same with every regime, especially with that very old and widespread regime: the use of religion for political purposes.

I see today that there are many Jews or Muslims who have lost their bearings, if I dare say so.

And yet, when you return to the texts, whether to the Torah or to the Koran, you have wonderful things, far more than in the Bible in my opinion.

Both have everything you need to live in perfect harmony, whether through the texts or through their deep understanding.

THE OPEN DOOR

I believe that we die when we no longer have the desire to live. Irrespective of the circumstances of death.

Many people that I knew and who have left didn't want to live anymore.

They left at the right moment, when they had to leave.
We can die of grief, which is a poison.

But we can also die of boredom.

That's what I saw in Jean Carmet. At the end, life bored Jean. On *Germinal* he kept saying that he was pissed off. And then he was going to turn seventy-four and he didn't want to be. He didn't want to grow old; he didn't want to any longer. In his last months, he had set up an answering machine, which however wasn't like him. It was his way of preparing people for his departure.

With Barbara, it was the same thing. She had voice problems, chronic bronchitis. That irritated her when she was with me because we laughed a lot together and it made her cough. But when she found herself alone with herself at the end, boredom deeply pervaded her, leaving the door open to death.

Even if you have no suicidal thoughts, there's a moment when you can't stand life anymore, when you leave that door open.

Barbara was however an incredible living force who would dedicate herself entirely to others. When we had played *Lily Passion* together, she was on stage at nine in the morning for the evening performance. She needed to be settled in herself. It was incredible what she was giving; there was never anything mechanical about her, never anything faked, everything was vibrant, always.

She put her whole life at stake.

Because you can't reach that level of emotion if you haven't lived intensely.

You can't acquire that kind of emotion just through technique. It's exclusively a quality of soul.

That's what life taught her and gave her, the very things that she had forgotten but which existed in her and which, unbeknownst to her, emerged with a song.

It's what we call humanity.

Every night, it was different, there was no recipe; you didn't know what moment of her life would arise to convey the emotion. She didn't know it herself.

Nothing was controlled because for her, things were totally uncontrollable.

And quite definitely exhausting.

But she couldn't do otherwise.

Even the audience left completely shattered.

In a world where everyone holds back, such a gift of self to that degree was necessarily exhausting. There is, I suppose, a moment when all that intensity became too heavy to bear.

She must have felt that she could no longer continue but she knew that she couldn't stop.

It's at those moments that one loses all of one's defenses, energy fades away, and boredom sets in.

I understand that; there are times when I feel empty, anesthetized of myself, where I can't stand anything anymore.

And when we can't stand ourselves anymore, diseases just catch us off guard.

But in spite of that, I've always found a strength in myself, the strength of life, my love of life & of others.

What truly matters is energy. And energy, it's simply not being afraid. It's to gaze into people's eyes with love.

Because the beauty of the soul is always found in the eyes. What speaks is the gaze. And no matter how imposing a gaze is, it must hold steady. There's nothing more beautiful and more exhilarating than looking at someone else's soul.

The people who age too quickly are often too self-consumed. But if one is more concerned about one's surroundings, one doesn't think about one's wrinkles or lack of energy.

Curiosity has always been strong enough in me to annihilate routine.

Routine is terrible, it's the thing that opens the door, or maybe no, rather, it closes the door; it's because of routine that boredom takes hold. And the worst, it's when you realize that routine is there; it's been there

for a long time. It's settled inside of you without you knowing it, without you realizing it. We don't know where it comes from, but one day, it's just there. And very much there.

Boredom is inertia. That moment when you can no longer move. That moment when routine has won, when your work, your responsibilities, your taxes, your wife, your family, your memories, everything that you carry on your shoulders paralyzes you. There's no danger anymore. Little by little, it's boredom that has taken over.

In such cases we must know how to put an end to regularity, we must have the strength to be reborn, to set down the road again.

The day when I lose the desire to discover, I know that death will follow closely behind.

When boredom takes over, there's not much to do anymore. And it's certainly not antidepressants that will get you out of it.

Antidepressants are crap. Me, I've stopped everything: all the antidepressants, all the medicine. I don't take anything anymore.

And it's true that it's better like that.

Well, I shouldn't say better ... In any case, I'm no longer under their influence, I don't let drugs disrupt my path, I face my own shit directly.

There are times for depression. In general, it comes at nightfall: that's when people start drinking. It's not very

worrisome; it's almost normal. But when the morning comes ...

Me, I'm a morning person; I love the morning. But when you wake up in the morning and you don't have the urge to go on ... then, it's really the beginning of the end.

Of course, everyone has flaws. Flaws, they're always present; you never get rid of them and it's for the best. Flaws are vital, in the original sense of the word. Because as long as you have vitality, you do everything to keep flaws at bay. And the more flaws you have, the stronger you can be, because the more energy you need not to break your teeth on them.

It's exactly like cracks in a wall.

If you want to go on, if you're honest with yourself, you find your way around them, you don't remain at the foot of a wall like an idiot because it might knock you on your ass.

You can also go to a psychiatrist who doesn't give a fuck most of the time. If it can help you, alright, fine.

But it's not strong enough to free you from your flaws, to put you back on track.

Analysis is less pleasant than life.

And it's not very helpful to mull over your past to try to compensate for your flaws. You won't be able to fix your wall. Why do you give a fuck anyway? It's better to leave it behind.

INNOCENT

My thing is the present.

The past doesn't hold me back.

The future doesn't interest me.

I don't give a fuck about what's going to happen to me tomorrow.

When you grow up like me in a survival situation, the present is the only thing that counts.

It's not a matter of how you're going to make it through in six months, but of how you're going to make it through in the very minutes, in the very seconds to come.

You've no other choice but to be in the present, and even a few seconds before the present, you must anticipate it.

The most beautiful thing that this survival situation has brought me is the present.

I always come back to Peter Handke's phrase: "I know nothing about myself beforehand, my adventures happen when I recount them." I could say that my adventures actually happen the moment I encounter them.

The need to survive taught me to be attentive to everything, to be available to everything.

And being available is not being empty, on the contrary.

Being available is being full, full of desires.

Nobody raised me. I didn't receive an education. The school, Charlemagne, Jules Ferry, all that, no, I took a different path. What I learned, I learnt it all by myself. The only French administration that taught me a bit about things was not the National Education Department, but the *gendarmérie*. As much as the teachers and the priests didn't want me, it always went well with the *gendarmes*. It was they who, when they caught me red handed, gave me some basics of civic education. And I've always been grateful to them.

But it's life & nothing other than life that taught me about life.

Life made it so that I spontaneously approached things that were right for me, things that made me feel good.

When you're a kid, and you're alone in the middle of the night on a deserted road, the whole world lies before you. If you resist anything, if there's one thing that you refuse to consider, you can guarantee that a mile later, that particular thing will come crashing against your face.

To be available is to go with the flow, never against it.

I got out of the mud, made my way in a society that excludes — I'm the weed that resisted, but if I had been against society, I never would've survived.

Anyway, how could I have been against it?

You can't fight against it when you know nothing.

I was never aware of social differences; they never affected me. At home, we didn't feel poor because we had no idea what it felt like to be rich.

Dédé used to sell *L'Humanité*, which he pretended to read because he couldn't read. Sometimes, when there were no photos on the pages, I even handed him the newspaper upside down. He 'read' it like that; he didn't notice anything. He was selling *L'Humanité* because it was a thing about friends, comrades as they used to say, but communism, social claims, politics, none of that ever interested him, or me either.

What interested me was life, the mystery of life, the rhythm of nature.

That was my thing.

Truly.

I found that there was nothing more ordered than the cycle of nature and its seasons. That, at least, was concrete; it existed and it appealed to me.

My life was in that.

For a long time, I regretted not having been incarcerated in a reform school, I even had a complex, then I realized that, thanks to that, it made me rich far in advance, because I never had any of the inhibitions that education can impose on you.

I've never been conditioned.

In the end, if I didn't learn anything, I lived everything.

I lived everything because I had that availability, that monstrous curiosity about life and people.

I've always been a lover of people who flit through life; of life and of those who inhabit it. Impassioned people.

I never judge people. Except the people who show me their flaws. But whatever their religion, nationality, culture, my heart warms up at the sight of people with whom I want to share things.

That's also a survival reward. You have no choice, you have to be curious about the other, what he's like, what he may or may not do to you. You have to pay attention to everything. Even things that you may not understand. Especially what you don't understand.

Since I wasn't wanted by my parents, since they made sure I knew I was an accident in my mother's womb, that I had survived the knitting needles, I was always very happy to be there, I always lived as someone who wanted to be a gift to others.

I always lit the Christmas tree.

Even though I never knew where the electricity came from.

When I arrived, Dédé and Lilette had family problems. Their parents had ruined their love story. My mother's father slept with my father's mother. They learned it from Lilette's mother, who couldn't endure it.

Dédé didn't want to hear any of it. But Lilette, she wanted to go away, to leave everything. And it was then that she became pregnant with me.

The worst kind of situation for a child is that he has to live a lie; that the adults make him carry a secret. I've never had to endure that. Everything has always been very clear, even if it was difficult. They wanted to get rid of me by every means; I had always known it.

Then when I was born, they told me that finally they were glad that I was there, that they were glad not to have killed me.

I'm a bit like the cat that one wants to drown but which got out of the bag and found itself alone on a bank. I could've become a wild cat, but I took advantage of that infinite freedom to open my eyes wide & observe my surroundings.

Knowing how to look, to see things, that's really the ABCs of life.

My parents let me go so I could form my own opinion of the world.

My dos & don'ts, I instilled them in myself, I never had any prohibitions.

If I had had the weight of the father or the mother on my back, I certainly would've had problems.

From the moment when you grow up in a family, there's so much shit to face: the mother's hysteria, the father's cowardice, etc.

Me, I've always been free of all that, free to educate myself.

I was always made to follow life, to go with a certain peace of mind wherever it would lead me.

I've always been curious about everything, even curious about the air that I breathe and which moves me, curious about everything in my surroundings.

I'm always on the lookout, constantly facing urges.

The urge to live, to know, to do. I move through the present & the present moves through me.

That's when I come face to face with Saint Augustine again: "What is time? If no one asks, I know. But if someone asks me & I want to explain it, I don't know anymore."

To me the present has always been eternity, the only eternity.

I'm often asked how I can live at this rhythm, to always be on the way out, always elsewhere. But that rhythm suits me; it's mine. I'm on a shoot for three days, then I cross through half the world to see vines, the other half to take care of a house, I come back — all that hustle & bustle makes me feel good. One moment follows the other. It's a different tiredness each time.

They say that I'm an actor, but I'm not. I never wanted to do theater or cinema. Life itself led me into those waters.

I could have also spent my life stealing cars, opening restaurants, or making business.

Even if I have nothing, but really nothing of a businessman. Otherwise I'd be like a trader, I'd have a humdrum life.

I'm just curious about life, & sometimes it leads me to share enthusiasms, to do things with people. I try to find some kind of companionship in everything I do. I don't make business, I make encounters.

And I won't break up businesses to make money as a hobby, like most businessmen. I'm not a vulture.

The dough, I don't give a fuck, it's not an end in itself, it's just a way to satisfy an enthusiasm.

It took me a long time to understand why I was doing this work.

Then I realized that it was for pleasure, for the love of words, of others, & of life.

And above all, doing theater or cinema, it was a good escape from work.

My vocation comes from that.

I didn't want to work, I wanted to live.

And with cinema I was given the opportunity to live in an environment where I could meet a lot of very lively people whom I wanted to watch. That's what I've always loved in that milieu, the abundance that can be found there, the excesses of life, enthusiasm, once again.

I never worked; I only lived, lived, lived.

Cinema in itself, I never gave a fuck about it.

I don't need it in order to be.



COLOPHON

INNOCENT

was handset in InDesign CC.

The text & page numbers are set in *Adobe Jenson Pro*.

The titles are set in *Didonesque Display*.

Book design & typesetting: Alessandro Segalini

Cover design: Contra Mundum Press

Cover image: —

INNOCENT

is published by Contra Mundum Press.

Its printer has received Chain of Custody certification from:

The Forest Stewardship Council,

The Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification,

& The Sustainable Forestry Initiative.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G rard DEPARDIEU has performed in nearly 200 films since 1967, many of them being with the world's most acclaimed directors, including Jean-Luc Godard, Bernardo Bertolucci, Marguerite Duras, Bertrand Blier, Alain Resnais, Marco Ferreri, Peter Handke, Francois Truffaut, Andrez Wajda & others. He is the recipient of the C sar Award for Best Actor (1981; 1991), the Venice Film Festival Award for Best Actor (1985), the Cannes Film Festival Award for Best Actor (1990), and a Stanislavsky Award (2006) from the Moscow Film Festival for outstanding achievement in the career of acting, amongst others. Depardieu is also a Chevalier of the Ordre national du M rite & a Chevalier of the L gion d'honneur. In addition to being an actor & entrepreneur, Depardieu is the author of several books, including *Lettres vol es* (1988), *Uivant!* (2004), *Ma cuisine* (2005), * a s'est fait comme  a* (2014), and *Innocent* (2015).

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Rainer J. HANSHE is a writer. He is the author of two novels, *The Acolytes* (2010) and *The Abdication* (2012), and a hybrid text created in collaboration with Federico Gori, *Shattering the Muses* (2017). His second novel, *The Abdication*, has been translated into Slovakian (2015), Italian (2016), and Turkish (2017). He is the editor of Richard Foreman's *Plays with Films* (2013) and Wordsworth's *Fragments* (2014), and the translator of Baudelaire's *My Heart Laid Bare & Other Texts* (2017), Joseph Kessel's *Army of Shadows* (2017), & Gérard Depardieu's *Innocent* (2017). Hanshe has also written numerous essays on Nietzsche, principally concerning synesthesia, incubation, & agonism. He is the founder of Contra Mundum Press and *Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics*. Other work of his has appeared in *Sinn und Form*, *Jelenkor*, *Asymptote*, *Quarterly Conversation*, *ChrisMarker.org*, *Black Sun Lit*, and elsewhere. Hanshe is currently working on two novels, *Humanimality* and *Now, Wonder*, and *In Praise of Dogs*, a photojournalism project with filmmaker & photographer Harald Hutter.



In his proto-memoir *Innocent*, world-renowned actor Gérard Depardieu reflects on his life as if from afar, like a bird surveying a wide horizon, presenting fervent observations on friendship, cinema, religion, politics, & more.

From his early days in the theater and his friendships with Jean Gabin and others to his rise in the cinema, this light, vibrant, but searching book offers us an intimate entry into the thinking process of one of cinema's most mercurial & impassioned actors. Depardieu also touches upon controversial topics such as his relationship with Putin & issues that have led to skirmishes with the press and public.

At bottom, *Innocent* is less a memoir & more the account of a man in search of faith, the faith that is of an innocent mystic, and includes passages about Depardieu's explorations of Islam, Buddhism, and other religions.

Esponsing a notion of innocence that calls us to move beyond dogma and ideology, Depardieu urges us to engage with others with respect, receptivity, and mindfulness. In these combative and divisive times, we believe this is a vital if not necessary book, one that could continue and extend dialogues about questions of faith, politics, & religion.

