

MOVIES

Jeanne Moreau, Femme Fatale of French New Wave, Is Dead at 89

By ANITA GATES JULY 31, 2017

Jeanne Moreau, the sensual, gravel-voiced actress who became the face of the New Wave, France's iconoclastic mid-20th-century film movement, most notably in François Truffaut's 1962 film "Jules and Jim," died on Monday at home in Paris. She was 89.

Her death was confirmed by the office of President Emmanuel Macron.

Ms. Moreau, whom journalists liked to call the thinking moviegoer's femme fatale, first came to American audiences' attention in Louis Malle's 1958 drama "The Lovers." The film included a lengthy love scene in which Ms. Moreau, playing a bored housewife having an affair, enacted a clearly orgasmic moment, considered scandalous at the time. It was four years later, in "Jules and Jim," that she became a full-fledged international star, playing Catherine, the capricious, destructive object of Oskar Werner and Henri Serre's desire in a doomed ménage à trois.

A successful stage actress in Paris, Ms. Moreau had a pouty, downturned mouth and circles under her eyes, and she was not generally considered photogenic. Making a score of mostly forgettable films from 1949 to 1957, she received the standard starlet treatment by makeup artists. It was Malle who, casting her in his first feature film, "Elevator to the Gallows," shot her in natural light without heavy makeup, letting her hauntingly expressive face work its magic.

Ms. Moreau went on to particularly memorable roles as Marcello Mastroianni's lonely wife in Michelangelo Antonioni's classic "The Night" (1961), a controlling servant in Luis Buñuel's "Diary of a Chambermaid" (1964), a coldhearted seducer in "Eva" (1962) and a vengeful newly wed-newly widowed in "The Bride Wore Black" (1968).

Her awards came for lesser-known films. In 1960, she shared the Cannes Film Festival's best actress prize for her role as a murder witness in Peter Brook's psychological drama "Moderato Cantabile." She received the 1967 Bafta for best foreign actress, for her role as Brigitte Bardot's

striptease partner in "Viva Maria!" And she finally won a best actress César, France's equivalent of the Oscar, in 1992, for playing a con woman in the comedy "The Old Lady Who Walked in the Sea."

Ms. Moreau spent little time in Hollywood. She starred in John Frankenheimer's war drama "The Train" (1964) opposite Burt Lancaster, played an aging European star in "The Last Tycoon" (1976) and did a cameo as an elderly descendant of Cinderella in "Ever After" (1998). Although she was directed by Orson Welles at least four times, the films were European productions.

She continued to perform into her 80s, including in a French television series in 2013 and "Le Talent de Mes Amis" in 2015. She acted onstage, winning the Molière award in France for her performance in "Le Récit de la Servante Zerline," in 1988, and had a singing career, releasing several albums. She directed three films, including a 1983 documentary about the silent-screen star Lillian Gish.

Ms. Moreau was made an officer of the Legion of Honor and was the first woman inducted into the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

Mr. Macron, the French president, said in a statement on Monday: "We could say about Jeanne Moreau that a part of cinema legend is gone. But her whole work was precisely about never freezing her art into a mythology, and never locking herself into the respectable status of the 'great actress.' She had in her eye a sparkle that deflected deference and inspired insolence, freedom, the turbulence of life that she liked so much and that she will long make us like."

Jeanne Moreau was born in Paris on Jan. 23, 1928, the daughter of the owner of a Montmartre hotel and restaurant and his British-born wife, a dancer at the Folies Bergère. When Ms. Moreau was 15, she saw her first play, "Antigone," and decided to become an actress. When she told her father about her ambition, he slapped her.

His opposition was an advantage, in her eyes. "It forces you toward excellence," she told a reporter for the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in 2001. "All my life I wanted to prove to my father that I was right."

She studied at the Conservatoire National d'Art Dramatique and, at 20, became the youngest-ever full-time member of the Comédie-Française, making her debut in Turgenev's drama "A Month in the Country." She later joined the Théâtre National Populaire. In 1953, she distinguished herself in a production of "L'Heure Éblouissante," when the other leading lady became ill and Ms. Moreau managed to play both the wife and the mistress. Fortunately, the two characters had no scenes together.

Louis Malle cast her after seeing her in Peter Brook's 1956 Paris production of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof." Ms. Moreau believed in surrendering to her directors, requiring what she called "a complete, unquestioning rapport."

The respect was usually mutual. In 1965, Truffaut told a reporter for *Time* magazine, "She has all the qualities one expects in a woman, plus all those one expects in a man — without the inconveniences of either."

Ms. Moreau was romantically linked with Truffaut and Malle, and had highly publicized romances with the fashion designer Pierre Cardin, the director Tony Richardson and the actor Lee Marvin.

In 1949, she married Jean-Louis Richard, a French actor and screenwriter with whom she had a son (born the day after their wedding). That marriage lasted two years, as did her second (1977-79), to the American director William Friedkin.

She is survived by her son, Jérôme Richard, an artist.

In a 2001 interview with Alan Riding of The New York Times, Ms. Moreau described her view of the human experience. “The cliché is that life is a mountain,” she said. “You go up, reach the top and then go down. To me, life is going up until you are burned by flames.”

Benoît Morenne contributed reporting.