

Mistinguett

The Making of Modern Cinema

Mistinguett was born in 1875, three years after Bernhardt had begun to enjoy notoriety in her performance of *Ruy Blas* at the Odéon Theatre and the same year that Réjane was first mentioned as a comic actress in the English press. The youngest of my three case studies, Mistinguett points forward, to the postwar era of sound film, as well as toward the decades in which female performers staged revues around their spectacular renown (fig. 14). During these interwar decades of the twentieth century, when performers such as Josephine Baker, Florelle, and Jane Marnac joined Mistinguett as *meneuses de revue* (revue stars) at the Folies-Bergère and the Casino de Paris, Mistinguett enjoyed global notoriety as the “Queen of the Paris Music Hall,” “Queen of the Paris Night,” and “Music Hall Miss.”¹

This chapter focuses on the decades that preceded this tremendous interwar renown, when Mistinguett established her presence in the lively entertainment world of early twentieth-century Paris. Mistinguett’s theatrical celebrity was quite different from Bernhardt’s and Réjane’s. She did not rise through the elite theatrical training school of the Paris Conservatoire, nor did she generate critical attention performing in theatrical works by famous Parisian playwrights in the leading theaters of France. Rather, Mistinguett gradually gained renown before a broad mix of local and international audiences in short song-and-dance acts on the popular music-hall stages of Paris. She was celebrated for the freshness of her comic verve, for her joyous physicality and her extravagant use of costumes. Mistinguett’s performances were ephemeral, fast-changing responses to contemporary trends and interests. Her trailblazing performances introduced new styles of dress, movement, and behaviors to the revue. Later, Mistinguett also brought her athletic and comic performances to film. She was an extraordinarily versatile actress who made more forty films in the prewar period.

FIGURE 14.
Mistinguett
postcard, n.d.
Laurence Senelick
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private collection).



Beginning with a discussion of Mistinguett's debut as a teenager at the Casino de Paris in 1893, this chapter concludes in early 1914, before the start of World War I. My work is therefore focused on the early period of Mistinguett's life, which has been largely overlooked by scholars.² Just as Mistinguett's engaging verve, spectacular shows, and theatrical versatility helped expand her transnational audiences in the opening decades of the twentieth century, so, too, was she flexible and engaging in her embrace of silent film. She appeared across a range of film genres (drama, legitimate comedy, slapstick comedy, detective films, and action films) and across a range of film forms (the short, the serial, and the feature film). Through these varied works, she reached audiences in England and America. Later, in the 1920s

and 1930s, Mistinguett developed her skills exclusively on the Parisian music-hall stage, appearing in just one sound film (*Rigolboche*, Christian-Jaque, 1936). Film, in this subsequent interwar period, was therefore no longer central to her professional practice. Rather than disappearing altogether, she brought her experience and knowledge of film to live performance. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mistinguett was famous for her physical and verbal responsiveness to live audiences and for her extravagant costumes, as well as the use of colored lighting and appealing kick-lines. In my view, the Queen of the Paris Night had learned from her formative years of work onstage and onscreen and had perfected the art of engaging audience attention through the spectacle of a live show.

MISTINGUETT ON THE MARGINS

In my previous chapter, I discussed the work that went into modernizing the Théâtre Réjane. This theater, newly and luxuriously decorated, backed onto the Casino de Paris, in rue de Clichy, in the ninth arrondissement. The Casino de Paris was a well-known café-concert, one that required only a *consommation* (refreshment ticket) for entry but that staged spectacular and risqué music-hall style shows to international visitors and pleasure-seeking local audiences.³ An unknown young performer whose working-class origins were well-suited to the licentious tumult that characterized the casino's nightly shows, Mistinguett debuted here in the margins of Paris in December 1895.

Born in Enghein, a northern Parisian suburb, Mistinguett grew up in the northern province of Soisy-sous-Montmorency. As a performer, Mistinguett moved incrementally and peripatetically through Paris's music halls. She first gained notoriety in short variety sketches at the Eldorado, a luxurious fifteen-hundred-seat café-concert in the tenth arrondissement (on the large and newly built Boulevard de Strasbourg). These popular, rowdy, smoke-filled venues are mentioned in J. Brander Matthews's discussion of Parisian theaters under the telling title—"Other Places of Amusement."⁴ Among the venues in which Mistinguett appeared was the Moulin Rouge (at the end of rue Blanche), the Folies-Bergère, and the Olympia Theatre (newly opened in 1893). Mistinguett was eventually contracted to the Théâtre des Variétés in 1911; at this point, she enjoyed increasing attention as a respected and highly successful performer.

INITIATING TRANSNATIONAL FAME

Mistinguett first appeared on the variety stage in England in 1907, in a dance entitled the "Pi-Ouit." At this time, she was described in *The Era* as "a Parisian dancer and singer, who, with Miss Lawler, has scored a success in the Revue at the Moulin Rouge, and whose style is somewhat reminiscent of the entertainment presented some years ago by Anna Held."⁵ Held, a risqué performer from Poland, was at the time married to Florenz Ziegfeld Jr. and associated with the new

revue, the Ziegfeld Follies. This parallel between Mistinguett and Held suggested to knowing readers the style of Mistinguett's performance at the Palace Theatre in London: a willingness to display her legs, the risqué use of song, and youthful Parisian vivacity.

Significantly, the "Revue" that *The Era* briefly referenced for its English readers was *La Revue de la femme*. Written by Lucien Boyer and Henri Bataille, with sets designed by the celebrated Belgian scenographer Albert Dubosq and music specially composed by the famous composer Gustave Goublier (the pseudonym for Gustave Conin), *La Revue de la femme* was a "grand spectacle." Performed in a big show format, it consisted of two acts and eight *tableaux*, or scenes. Considered a resounding triumph, this was the most successful Parisian music-hall show that the Moulin Rouge had ever staged.⁶ As commentary in *Gil Blas* confirmed, "Never, since its foundation, has the Moulin Rouge experienced each evening the affluence that presses along Place Blanche to the opening of its doors; never, moreover, has the music-hall enjoyed such success as that which it now merits in *The Women's Revue*."⁷ The show earned 133,753 francs in just twenty performances, and reports foregrounded its all-female cast of performers, noting, in particular, "the exquisite [singer, Juliette] Méally, the frenzied Allems, the fanciful Mistinguett, [and] the pretty Lawler."⁸

While Mistinguett helped to showcase the importance of women on the Parisian popular stage, she also helped to secure the cultural reach of French film abroad. Making an estimated forty-five films between 1908 and 1917, she circulated before audiences who could not attend her live performances in Paris and who were not, therefore, part of the ferment that characterized theatergoing in Paris. Making many of her films for SCAGL (La Société cinématographique des auteurs et gens de lettres), a Pathé production company founded in 1908 with Albert Capellani as its head from 1909 onward, Mistinguett joined other music-hall artists who were entering film. As Kelley Conway explains, the engagement of well-known theatrical performers helped redefine early French cinema because it attracted a more bourgeois audience (including women) and lengthened films; this "slowly led to the standard practice of including a feature film among a company's releases." Unfortunately, not all of Mistinguett's silent short films survive. Nevertheless, across those works that still exist, we can see the way how her image as "a cheeky urban sprite" on the music-hall stage was later elaborated and developed in her work on film.⁹

Mistinguett gained her first taste of fame not through comic performance, however, but through popular song. Newspaper reports indicate that by 1907 (the same year that she performed in the London summer season), her songs were imitated and repeated by street hawkers, "singing, shouting [her songs] out loud, on the main [Paris] crossroads and the boulevards."¹⁰ Because Mistinguett also circulated through gramophones and phonographs, her fame reached provincial audiences as well as more distant audiences abroad.¹¹ Comparative to the way in

which Bernhardt moved very differently into the living rooms of the emerging middle-class home through the Edison and Pathé phonograph, Mistinguett was an identifiable revue actress within the publicity and products circulating in this new era of technological reproducibility. Following Musser's argument—that emerging forms of technology and publicity promoted Bernhardt as a leading global actress in the early twentieth century—we can recognize how the phonograph and other reproductive media helped spearhead Mistinguett's commercial versatility. As Conway explains, Mistinguett's renown as a popular singer reached its apotheosis in the music hall near the end of the war and throughout the 1920s, when she starred in the revues at the Casino of Paris, the Folies-Bergère, and the Moulin Rouge. Here, she “created her most famous numbers”: “J'en ai mairre” (I'm fed up) (1921), “En douce” (Quietly) (1922), “La Java” (1922), “Ça c'est Paris” (That's Paris) (1926), and “C'est vrai” (It's true) (1935).¹²

In addition to circulating through film and song, Mistinguett received regular attention in English and American newspapers. Her continued presence in the foreign press ensured that international news about French actresses was not confined to performers like Bernhardt and Réjane, appearing on the legitimate stage. Mistinguett was discussed across a range of comic, dramatic, and physical “action-hero” roles in trade journals such as *The Bioscope* and *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* in England, and *Moving Picture World* and *Motography* in America. As I explain below, these articles described her leaping onto and from moving cars, pushing criminals into the Seine, and athletically climbing down the facades of buildings. Mistinguett was also frequently discussed in English newspaper and trade press columns dedicated to events in Paris. Her music-hall performances appeared regularly in the London-based *American Register's* “Gossip from the Gay City,” *The Observer's* “The Week in Paris,” and Meg Villars's anonymous and lighthearted weekly letter to her “uncle,” entitled “Priscilla in Paris,” which was a dedicated feature of England's fashionable *The Tatler*.

Although Mistinguett's stage and screen performances in these prewar years were never promoted or publicized in the manner and to the degree that Bernhardt and Réjane enjoyed, the attention paid to her by Villars is significant. Villars was a young English author who was also a former actress; as such, she was well-placed to highlight the impact of Mistinguett's performances in Paris for English audiences. Making it clear that it was not only in high-class theaters that the world was witnessing “the age of the actress,” Villars described how Mistinguett overshadowed her male partners onstage. In her discussion, for example, of Maurice Hennequin and Pierre Veber's variety sketch *Tais-toi mon cœur*, performed at the Palais-Royal Theatre in Paris in April 1910, Villars's pseudonymous Priscilla gushed:

Mistinguett plays the leading rôle, and makes a big hit. I really can't tell you the plot; it is very gay, very French, and very amusing. Mistinguett has a gavroche [street urchin] part which suits her down to the ground, and [Adrien] le Gallo, the mere male man star, has a le Gallo part also. I like Mistinguett, so would you uncle; she isn't

very pretty but she has such nice light brown hair, all short and curly like that of Polaire and [Eve] Lavallière and Meg Villars and la Colette and a few other actresses in the Gay City. And oh! Such pretty legs, which she manages to show a great deal in the play. She dances awfully well; indeed, she created the Apache Dance with Max Dearly although people now say it was Polaire.¹³

I describe the Apache dance below and discuss its appearance in film as a feature of *The Red Hand* (*L'Empreinte ou La Main Rouge*, Le Film d'Art, 1908). Aptly, Villars wrote about Mistinguett with a light tone that mirrored the light humor that characterized Mistinguett's live performances. In her words, Mistinguett outshone the "mere male man star." Foreign readers were thus reminded of the cultural and social upheavals Mistinguett helped initiate as a female headline performer on the early twentieth-century French variety stage.

"LA REINE DU MUSIC HALL"
IN THE SALLE CHARRAS, 1908

Although there is ample evidence of Mistinguett circulating in newspaper reports, on the phonograph, and through film, existing scholarship does not explore her nascent fame. The most important and comprehensive study of Mistinguett's career—Martin Pénét's biography, *Mistinguett: La Reine du music hall*—is focused on the music-hall stage in Paris. As Pénét states, Mistinguett's life can be read across an excavation of the "splendid yet ephemeral existence" of this unique form of popular theater.¹⁴ When we learn that Mistinguett traveled abroad to London in 1903, 1907, 1914, and 1916, there is consequently scant detail provided about her transnational appeal. For example, when Pénét discusses Mistinguett's 1903 tour, he states that Mistinguett was engaged by "Dickson," "the director of the Alhambra theatre, [who was] passing through the Eldorado theatre."¹⁵ In 1903, however, the lessee of the Alhambra was Henry William Woodford. Whether Pénét was therefore referencing William Kennedy-Laurie Dickson, the Scottish inventor, cinematographer, and director who was (at least until 1902) resident at the Palace Theatre of Varieties, we do not know.¹⁶

Pénét's brief discussion of Mistinguett's involvement in early film indicates, however, that the music hall was finding new international audiences via film. When he discusses the Film d'Art's inaugural and famous "Visions d'Art" première on November 17, 1908, in the Salle Charras in Paris, Pénét highlights that the program included *L'Assassinat du duc de Guise* (1908), *Le Secret de Myrto* (1908), and *L'Empreinte / The Red Hand*, a film based on a pantomime entitled *Conscience*. As Pénét explains, *L'Empreinte* included a scene featuring Mistinguett's Apache dance with Max Dearly, named *La Valse chaloupée*. Stating that this dance section of the film is lost, Pénét argues that the film must have made an impression on its audience because within months, it "opened the doors of the Pathé studios to her [Mistinguett], where she would play comedy, drama and burlesque for some years."¹⁷

Pénet includes Mistinguett's significant presence in this joining of theater ("Art") with film when he states that after Mistinguett's involvement with Pathé, her apprenticeship as a celebrity actress in Paris was complete:

It is thanks to this creative restlessness that she became capable of facing any audience, no matter where and when. . . . Later, she would thus define [her talents]: "I sing, I dance, I make people cry, I am an acrobat, I play comedy. One could say that I am universal. There are no other women who do what I do. But it did not come of its own accord, nor all at once. It was because I wanted to break from my round of 'Café Concert' songs that I launched out into comedy. I found, thanks to my temperament, that the mix of these two ended up defining the music-hall."¹⁸

In Pénet's view, Mistinguett's creative restlessness facilitated and explained her work on film. Film was not a separate undertaking for Pénet but a marginal undertaking initiated at the beginning of an illustrious music-hall career.

ARRIVING IN ENGLAND

Mistinguett's presence on film followed the establishment of her international reputation as a music-hall actress who was known, above all, to English audiences. While she was first briefly mentioned in the French press in 1893, when she began to work at the Casino de Paris, in England she was first mentioned in 1895, when she was discussed in relation to an ardent fan's suicide. Under the heading "Another Typical Paris Tragedy," it was explained that Mistinguett, a "music hall star, of lesser magnitude, however than the 'Belle Otero' has, like her, been the innocent cause of a suicide."¹⁹ Cast as "typically" Parisian, Mistinguett was a star but of lesser importance than Otero. "La Belle Otero" (the beautiful Otero) was the stage name given to Caroline Otero, a dancer and performer noted for her exotic beauty and for being one of the *grandes horizontales* of the Belle Époque.²⁰ Seven years later, in July 1902, mention was again made of Mistinguett in the English press. In this instance, Mistinguett was impersonated by Robert Berin, the leading French impersonator of *divettes* (stars) on the Parisian stage. When he performed in the Oxford Music Hall in London, one reviewer explained that while the singer Yvette Guilbert and the Spanish dancer and singer La Tortajarda (Consuelo Tamayo Hernández) were "well known to Londoners," Mistinguett was not; therefore, Bertin's performance of her repertoire was "less understood."²¹ While music-hall goers could compare Bertin's impersonation of La Tortajarda to La Tortajarda herself—she was appearing in the London music hall the following week—Mistinguett was considered a performer specific to Paris, whose fame at that time was not easily translatable abroad.

The *American Register*—a newspaper published in London and Paris that focused on French and Anglo-American news—gave the titles and listings of Mistinguett's music-hall shows to readers in 1903 and 1904, but it was not until 1907 that Mistinguett garnered further attention in the English press as a dancer

and vocalist performing locally on the music-hall stage.²² Mistinguett debuted at the Palace Theatre of Varieties in London (under the direction of Alfred Butt) at the end of August and performed into the first week of September 1907. This was where audiences were introduced to Mistinguett's *Danse de pi-ouit*, a dance act excerpted from *La Revue de la Femme*.²³ Performed a week after the show's summer closure in Paris, *Pi-ouit* was fashionable, topical, and "*parisienne*."²⁴ Mistinguett was billed at the Palace Theatre alongside the local singers Louie and Courtice Pounds (performing the light musical sketch *Charles, His Friend*, by Keble Howard [John Keble Bell]). The two locals were famous for their work in musical comedies, notably with the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company. This program also featured the "droll American raconteur" Mr. Walter C. Kelly in *The Virginia Judge*, as well as Miss Lillian, the Palace Girls, and the bioscope showing "Motor Grand Prix," "Naval Review," "Cowes," "&c. &c."

These acts indicate that the Palace program publicized Mistinguett as a French attraction in the English variety show. As we have seen in relation to the later music-hall programming of Bernhardt at the Coliseum and Réjane at the Hippodrome, film was the concluding attraction in a program that joined international stars and famous local performers. Mistinguett appeared in the program without the publicity and fanfare, however, that her famous contemporaries attracted: she was a topical French dance act given the same attention as, for example, the Palace Girls (and this group, in contrast to Mistinguett as a single attraction, was a Tiller chorus who performed disciplined yet revealing kicklines).²⁵ As reports reveal, Mistinguett's dance was considered unusual. An "active, vivacious Parisienne," she sat down on the stage "at intervals in her gyration." Regarded as "neither a remarkably attractive nor a specially 'alluring' exercise in the terpsichorean art," Mistinguett's performance was nevertheless spectacular. As one reviewer stated, her dance was "sensational."²⁶

In her second and final week at the Palace, the program changed. Mistinguett and Louie and Courtice Pound appeared alongside the Scottish Jean Alwyn from the Gaiety Theatre; the popular comedienne Simeta Marsden; "Mr. Coleman's collection of performing dogs, cats, and birds"; and the entertainer and female impersonator Malcolm Scott as Nell Gwynne (the mistress of Charles II), who presented "novel sidelights" and "furious laughter" on topics drawn from English history. The bioscope completed the program with "exciting pictures of a recent motor race, [which] sustained interest to the very end."²⁷ In this changed program, Mistinguett was therefore joined with Alwyn—a legitimate actress experimenting with her first appearance in the variety theater—as well as to a comic cross-dresser, an animal act, musical comedy, and film.²⁸ Although Mistinguett was not the headline act of the Palace show, she was noted. In this second week, it was explained, for example, that in addition to her "Pi-Ouit" dance, Mistinguett "also sings two songs, one in broken English and the other in her native French."²⁹ Did Mistinguett sing in broken English for comic effect? Or did she want to engage local audiences

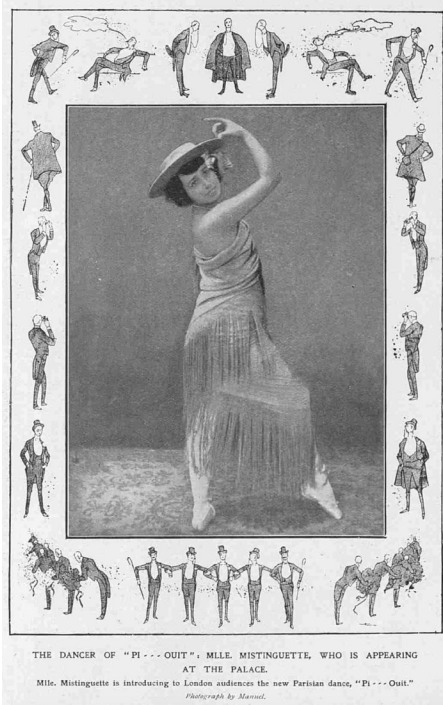


FIGURE 15. First picture of Mistinguett in the English press. Sept. 4, 1907, *The Sketch*. © Illustrated London News / Mary Evans Picture Library.

in the meaning of her words? We do not know. But while she incorporated song into her act, it was dance that defined her initial English fame.

Evidence of the centrality of dance to Mistinguett's performance at the Palace can be seen in the way in which her "Pi . . . Ouit" dance was referenced in a photograph by the Parisian photographer Henri Manuel in *The Sketch*. This image—the first that I found of Mistinguett in the English press—showed her wearing ballet shoes, a tasseled wrap (exposing her back, arms, shoulders, and stockinged legs), and a hat cocked jauntily upward (fig. 15). Standing sideways on a patterned carpet, and turning her head with its short, dark hair bobbing out beneath a flat-rimmed hat toward us, Mistinguett provided the focus of the image and stood out against an otherwise flat and plain backdrop. The indoor plants, elaborate jewelry, heavily detailed costume, and busy domestic interiors (so familiar to us in Bernhardt's and Réjane's photographed images) were here stripped away. Described simply as "the dancer appearing at the Palace," Mistinguett was framed in the context of introducing a "new Parisian dance" to London.³⁰ Clearly, Mistinguett's appearance at the Palace placed her at the forefront of recent trends. These included the foregrounding of contemporary dance as a new form of spectacular show, as well as the headlining of women in excerpts from legitimate plays and popular stage acts on the music-hall stage. Because of the inclusion of bioscope

views into the music-hall program, we can also speak of the expanded modernity of the variety playbill. Indeed, when Mistinguett appeared in the Palace program at the end of August 1907, the bill concluded with a film of “a recent motor race.” Representing speed, industry, and a widening definition of what popular theater might include (an international car race, a film, a local variety program), this race was probably a record of the French Grand Prix, which had taken place a month earlier, on July 2, 1907.

EMBRACING THE ENGLISH IN PARIS

Mistinguett did not return to London until March 1916, when she accompanied Raphaël Beretta, the director of the Olympia Theatre and the Folies-Bergère, on a tour of the music halls of London.³¹ At this point, she traveled in a managerial capacity and did not perform for local audiences. In 1918, she made a third trip to London, reportedly to purchase hard-to-find cloth and leather for costumes to be presented at the Casino de Paris. Unlike Bernhardt and Réjane, Mistinguett did not boast a theatrical tour to London to confirm her music-hall renown.³² Instead, hers was a fame built at a distance from Paris. Much of this distance was bridged by the English press that reported on her performances in Paris. In 1908 we learn in *The Sporting Times*, for example, that the highlight of *La Grande Revue du Moulin* (a two-act and twelve-*tableaux* revue, playing between July and August in 1908 at the Moulin Rouge)³³ was a dance by Parisian actor Max Dearly with Mistinguett. As readers were told: “The ‘clou’ of the Revue is a dance by Max Dearly, as an Apache in black, and Mlle. Mistinguett, as his girl, also in black, with a rose, Spanish fashion, held in her teeth. It is very clever and very brutal.”³⁴

As I stated earlier, a film of this dance was included in one of the films that helped to launch the Film d'Art in Paris in 1908. Known as *La Main Rouge*, it was first billed in English as *The Impression* and then *The Red Hand*.³⁵ Before we trace the significant emergence of Mistinguett as a “kinema star” in England, however, we need to understand that the prewar period saw a fertile theatrical exchange between England and Paris. An actress like Mistinguett need not leave the city; she could perform in the popular theaters of Paris and effectively have London come to her. Indeed, in 1912, one English reviewer recommended that the Variétés management in Paris “run excursion trains at special rates from London to the Boulevard Montmartre. All London will be coming over to see [Mistinguett in her] naughty little play.”³⁶ A year later, *The Sketch* noted the new six and a half hours that it would soon take to get from London to Paris by train and therefore from London to a performance by Mistinguett: “Verily now Paris is next door to London. People go over for week-ends. . . . Women went to shop, men to do business; between these two excursions travellers need the English press to tell them ‘whether there is an Autumn Salon or not, or where he will find that incomparable droll, Mistinguett.’”³⁷

While Mistinguett was a lure for tourists traveling to Paris, this period (the opening decade of the 1900s) also saw “the triumph of the English girl in Paris.”³⁸ Indeed, it was announced in the *Sporting Times* that Mistinguett was the only Parisian performer who danced as well as her English contemporaries on the variety stage. Hence, while a decade earlier the English girl was “drawn in the French comic papers as a thing with rabbit’s teeth and a straw hat,” French theatergoers were now learning that English girls “could laugh and kick.”³⁹ Moreover, in a new trend ignited by the Tiller Girls, theater audiences understood that Mistinguett was unique in Paris precisely because she combined the capacity to act and dance on the variety stage. As English readers were told, Parisians knew “the British musical comedy actress has a freshness all her own; that she is good looking and jolly; can sing quite sufficiently well, and dances excellently. That an actress should dance was quite a surprise. Mistinguett is about the only Parisian actress who really dances well. The divette of the Revues is only expected to wear charmingly the scraps of clothing which form her costume; to smile beautifully, and to make the best of a tiny singing voice.”⁴⁰ This celebration of the English musical comedy actress came at a time when the Parisian music-hall stage was newly populated by English performers. In the Folies-Bergère’s *Vieux Marcher* revue, for example, it was reported that three of the principals were English and that there was a troupe of “Flip-flap Girls” who hailed from Manchester (from where the Tiller Girls emerged and were trained). Moreover, “with two exceptions, all the actresses in the Revue wear wigs ranging from flaxen to chestnut to give them the admired British appearance. As a compliment to England, no doubt, the authors of the Revue have introduced a black and white Pierrot moonlight scene similar to the one in ‘Our Miss Gibbs.’”⁴¹

In this context—where the reception of the English actress on the Parisian stage was shifting—*La Grande Revue du Moulin* included not only Mistinguett and Dearly’s “Apache dance” but also a dance that featured Fred Wright Jr. and Mistinguett (fig. 16), as well as a host of English music-hall performers. Wright, listed as the “celebrated English comedian” (who, with Max Dearly, “topped the bill”), was also joined on the program by an English song-and-dance troupe called “The 12 Manchester Babies.”⁴² At the end of 1911, in Mistinguett’s debut at the Folies Bergère, forty Tiller Girls also formed part of the *Revue*.⁴³

In addition to English music-hall performers becoming a recognized part of Mistinguett’s Parisian revues and “English” hair motivating the fashion for lighter-colored wigs in French popular theaters, reports also attributed Mistinguett’s decision to play in the comic (and legitimate) Gymnase Theatre in Paris, which evidenced an English theatrical influence. Hence, readers of *The Sporting Times* were told that Mistinguett “has followed the example of our English heroines of musical plays by deserting to the comedy stage, and she is making a big success in ‘L’Ane de Burindan’ [*sic*] at the Gymnase.”⁴⁴ The following year, when Mistinguett appeared in *Tais-toi mon cœur* at the Palais-Royal Theatre, she was

FIGURE 16. Mistinguett and English performer Fred Wright. Laurence Senelick Collection (copy held in author's private collection).



described as a star of the *café-concert* moving into a *théâtre classé* (a legitimate theater).⁴⁵ Mistinguett was not unique in moving onto the legitimate stage. As *The Observer* argued, this was a regular occurrence in Paris: Polaire had moved from the café concert to the Vaudeville, Dranem from the music hall to the Odéon, and in 1911 Mistinguett had newly signed with the Variétés theater. What separated Mistinguett from these performers, however, was her physical traits: her short hair, show of ankles and legs, and incessant high spirits. Mistinguett, we are told, was called “Miss” “because she looked so English”; this signpost of Englishness was incorporated into her name.⁴⁶

Mistinguett’s peripatetic skill in moving among theaters, audiences, and genres of theatrical comedy explained, at this early point in her career, her idiosyncratic celebrity. As Nozière enthused in *Gil Blas* in December 1908, “One must follow attentively the performances of Mlle Mistinguett. At the Moulin Rouge she recently made us thrill, dancing *La Valse Chaloupée* with the admirable Max Dearly. Aux Bouffes [Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens], in the [*Aux Bouffes on pouffe*] *Revue*, she was, last year, a tragic young woman whose ugliness keeps the satyrs away. [In 1907, s]he launched herself with a rascal spirit, through a song that became popular called *le Petit Frère à Fernand*. Effortlessly, she moves between buffoonery and drama. Mlle Mistinguett is an artist.”⁴⁷

Some of Mistinguett’s buffoonery in the Paris music hall incorporated her comic impersonation of English characters and stars. In her enormously successful 1909 performance at the Comédie-Royale entitled *Chauffeur . . . rue Caumartin*, for example, she played the role of an English suffragette teaching the *valse chaloupée* to students. As a reviewer stated: “She sings, she dances, and, dancing and singing, makes the crowd hysterical.”⁴⁸ The following year, in *La Revue de Marigny*, Mistinguett’s parody of the English comedian George Grossmith Jr. was considered “the best number in the revue.” As we can see in a photograph that appeared in *The Tatler*, she was dressed “in clothes reminiscent of George Grossmith, jun.” (fig. 17). Her costume consisted of a light-colored bowler hat; a light-colored,



FIGURE 17. Image showing Mistinguett parodying English comedian George Grossmith in *The Tatler*, Jan. 4, 1911. © Illustrated London News / Mary Evans Picture Library.

tailored, pin-striped jacket that fell in a relaxed way over her hips; dark riding pants with a black rim running down the sides; and shiny leather black, knee-length riding boots in this role.⁴⁹ The program was criticized for reaching out to English-speaking audiences since it was “*Translated Into Careful English* for the benefit of visitors who know no French.” The gesture, reviewers contended, was not particularly helpful since “the third tableau, ‘L’Avenue du Bois,’ is rendered ‘The Avenue du Bois de Boulogne,’ ‘Le Chanson et La Danse’ is translated ‘The Songs and Dances,’ and ‘La Jaconde’ is rendered ‘The Jaconde,’ which tells you all about it, doesn’t it?”⁵⁰

We can see in these music-hall programs a fertile exchange between London and Paris, English and French, the music hall and the legitimate stage. In this context, the early transnational appeal of Mistinguett was attached firmly to her location in Paris and in relation to what she could achieve from within this city. Unlike Bernhardt and Réjane, who arrived in London as theatrical stars and subsequently moved onto the music-hall stage and into film, Mistinguett was a performer who negotiated—even enabled—the intersection of popular theater and mass audiences in the fecund performance culture of early twentieth-century Paris. Mistinguett’s films were a successful and important part of this culture. Accessible and varied, they provide the record of an actress who did not ask foreign audiences to first understand the French national theater, the meaning of French conservatoire training, the status of a given playwright, or even the narrative arc of famous French novels in order to understand contemporary Parisian theater and popular entertainment.

TOUTE MA VIE: ABSENCE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Mistinguett’s autobiography, *Toute ma vie* (1954), was published just before Mistinguett’s death, in 1956. It includes mention of early film, as well as reflections on Bernhardt and Réjane’s entrance into silent film. Mistinguett writes: “The cinema was beginning to work its havoc and many actresses, Réjane and Bernhardt among them, made films of unbelievable imbecility. The veterans of the theater would only condescend to film for very substantial salaries and could not see that the cinema was something other than photographed theater. Film technique was as yet rudimentary, and they were pained and indignant to find themselves disfigured on the screen. When Sarah Bernhardt saw herself in ‘The Lady of the Camellias’ she fainted.”⁵¹ Writing from a reflective distance of some decades, Mistinguett was careful to distinguish herself from Bernhardt and Réjane. When she discussed her own engagement with the film industry, her views were different. Lamenting the loss of a live audience, Mistinguett stated, for example: “I do not like films very much. I do not know how to act for the camera, for a machine that will not let itself be won.”⁵² A loss of agency, a forced detachment from the audience, and an inability to project into the live, spatial environment of an auditorium were all aspects of live stage performance that Mistinguett missed on film.

In *Toute ma vie*, Mistinguett described her involvement in the cinema anecdotally. When she discussed her entrance into the cinema, it was in very general terms drawn from a hazy memory: “My beginnings in the cinema go back to 1913, when I made six or seven films, most of them melodramas, with such titles as ‘Pavement Lily,’ ‘The Eyesore,’ ‘The Lawyer’s Mistake’ and ‘The Trap.’”⁵³ Below, I explore several of these and other titles, explaining that Mistinguett appeared in works by pioneering film directors such as Georges Monca, Albert Capellani, and Georges Denola. I have mentioned above the range of genres and forms of films she made and have given some indication that her work was important for the development of global cinema. If we return to Mistinguett’s inclusion in the Film d’Art and its first public showing in Paris, we can appreciate this significance, particularly if we reflect on the Film d’Art as an initial step toward the international spread and popularity of “art films.” In other words, Mistinguett’s autobiography might very well have underplayed, elided, or even rewritten the extent of her involvement in film. Yet *L’Empreinte* was part of Pathé’s inaugural push to promote film as a socially acceptable and culturally endorsed global French product. Her debut in that film provides confirmation of the appeal Mistinguett enjoyed as both a music-hall spectacle and a confident, border-crossing performer capable of launching herself into a new medium.

HER FIRST FOREIGN FILMS: MISTINGUETT ARRIVES IN LONDON

After appearing at the Palace Theatre in 1907, Mistinguett did not return to perform in London until forty years later, in 1947. Between 1908 (when she first appeared in *The Red Hand*) and 1917 (when she starred as an English detective in *Mistinguett détective I and II* [Films Succès, 1917]), her transnational fame was largely enabled through film. In this context, however, we should not lose sight of Mistinguett’s ongoing performance on the music-hall stage and her growing celebrity across Paris. These are two related frameworks through which we can view much of her work in film. For example, English reports of her 1907 Apache dance (cited above) preceded her appearance in this same dance the following year in *The Red Hand*. Similarly, her 1916 film *Fleur de Paris* contains a poignant scene in which Mistinguett enters a theater as a star performer and is misidentified by a woman outside the theater as her daughter. Contemporary viewers would have been aware of the comic overlap between this moment on film and a much-reported and similar occurrence a few years earlier, when a provincial woman watching Mistinguett on film similarly identified her as her long-lost daughter. The woman filed a judicial claim for financial support, and papers in England discussed the event under striking headlines: “Case of Mistaken Identity,” “Actress’s Two ‘Mothers’: Comedy of Rival Claimants.”⁵⁴ Even Mistinguett’s dog—making frequent appearances in her later film *Chignon d’or* (1916)—was known as the “notorious mutt,” widely reported as accompanying Mistinguett to the Variétés theater in 1912.⁵⁵

While we can trace Mistinguett's appearance in *The Red Hand* to her music-hall partnership with Max Dearly in Paris, the film was built largely around the work of Parisian music-hall actor Gaston Séverin and his fame in F. Duret's play *Conscience*. A four-act "mimo-drame" with original music by Colo-Bonnet that debuted at the Olympia Theatre in 1902, *Conscience* was first presented in the theater as the ninth and final act in a variety show comprising dance, comic acts, animal acts, magic, and film.⁵⁶ In 1907, Séverin brought *Conscience* to the Palace Theatre in London. Described in the English press as "a famous pantomimist" presenting a "wordless play,"⁵⁷ the press proclaimed that Séverin's pantomimic acting "is a magnificent example of acting speaking louder than words."⁵⁸ In this context, the play was accessible as a piece of French drama to audiences in the Palace Theatre and already implicated in a variety format. When the Film d'Art included *The Red Hand* in its opening program at the Salle Charras on November 16, 1908, it programmed Mistinguett's dance within its original variety stage format.⁵⁹

We can learn how (or whether) *Conscience* was adapted or changed for film by exploring reports of Séverin's stage show. As these recount, the play featured Séverin as a "Parisian loafer" blackmailing a murderer only to save the innocent and appropriately named working-class man "Travail" from wrongful conviction. When *Conscience* was performed in London, it required "much judicious cutting, particularly the murder and blackmail scenes."⁶⁰ While we have no details about these changes, we do know that when it was adapted to film, *Conscience* was once more changed. As *The Observer* commented:

At a "private exhibition," yesterday afternoon, Messrs. Pathé Frères, in conjunction with the management, showed on the cinematograph three wordless plays from Paris. The first was a much fuller and slightly different version of the gruesome little story of murder and blackmail which M. Severin acted at the Palace not long ago. On the cinematograph we saw not only the murder, and the blackmailing scene in which humour strove so hard with horror, but glimpses of the life of the cafés, grand and humble, the confrontation of the guilty parties, the reconstruction of the murder, and all sorts of other thrilling things, including a *danse d'Apache* by Mlle. Mistinguette [*sic*] and a man. All these, of course, not in the flesh but on film, while the orchestra played M. [Fernande] de Borne's music. Next came a version of *L'Arlésienne*, which is to go into the evening bill on Monday, and finally *The Murder of the Duke of Guise*, a play specially composed for this kind of performance.⁶¹

This screening of *The Red Hand* in London was seen not as an attempt to develop Séverin's pantomimic mastery of film but as part of a broader initiative to develop public acceptance of the new medium. This included engaging known and legitimate actors as headline acts. Here, film also showcased, to foreign audiences, the cultural diversity of France.

Citing *The Red Hand* as an example of the breadth of material available to exhibitors, *The Westminster Gazette* joined Mistinguett to Bernhardt and Réjane in its discussion of the development in contemporary French film:

The most ambitious attempt that has yet been made at “living picture” display has taken the form of the reproduction of several French dramatic performances. In France a special theater has been built and equipped for the purpose of obtaining “films,” and authors and actors—Bernhardt, Réjane, [Charles] Le Bargy, [Benoît-Constant] Coquelin, and [Gaston] Severin, among others—have combined to assist in the work. Some wonderfully fine series of pictures have thus been prepared; and Pathé Frères and the Alhambra management have arranged to stage them for the delectation of a London audience.

When the pictures made their début the other day, a wide range of subjects was chosen. What is frankly described as a “morbid drama,” entitled “The Red Hand,” showed modern Paris at its lowest, with Severin, Max Dearly, and Mistinguette [*sic*] as its most interesting inhabitants; and the “reconstitution” of a murder and a vivid, fascinating reproduction by Mistinguette of an Apache dance were the most noteworthy features of the play.⁶²

It is telling that the Alhambra Theatre of Varieties partnered with Pathé Frères just four days after the Film d'Art was given its official launch in Paris. Indeed, the reciprocal exchange I traced above between the music hall in Paris and the dramatic sketch in London, as well as the variety format of film's early emergence on the music-hall stage, is here repeated in the cinema. Moreover, the program was given in a “private showing” to a select audience in much the same way that Réjane and Bernhardt's double-feature bill subsequently premiered before respectable audiences in a legitimate theater in New York. *The Era* accordingly listed “the privileged audience” of ladies and gentlemen, representing “household words in literary, artistic, theatrical, and society circles” in its page-long discussion of this event.⁶³

In parallel to theatrical practice, particularly that of the legitimate theaters in Paris, the press and critics were given a preview on which they could publicly comment. Consequently, *The Observer* explained to its readers that one of the “wordless plays from Paris” (*L'Arlésienne*) will be “in the evening bill on Monday.”⁶⁴ Because *L'Arlésienne* was the first film directed by Capellani for the SCAGL in 1908 (it debuted on October 1, more than a month before the Film d'Art's showcase at the Salle Charras),⁶⁵ we can determine that the Alhambra showcase of French film was a national showcase of creative talent in London. It announced French artistic leadership through film. Indeed—and as *The Era* reported—*L'Arlésienne* was drawn from Alphonse Daudet's eponymous play and performed by actors from the Odéon Theatre.⁶⁶

The films featured in the Alhambra program also exhibited novel (theatrical) prestige through their use of accompanying music. Reviews of the event state that the Alhambra orchestra (directed by the theater's musical director, George W. Byng) played Georges Bizet's incidental music during the screening of *L'Arlésienne*; this was a theatrical score composed originally for Alphonse Daudet's 1872 play, when it debuted at the Vaudeville theater in Paris.⁶⁷ In contrast, *The Red Hand*—like *L'Assassinat du Duc de Guise*, with its famous accompaniment written by

Camille Saint-Saëns—featured a score written by Fernande Le Borne expressly for the purposes of theatrical exhibition.⁶⁸ The actors performed onscreen as they would in the theater (to live music, authored by a named and identifiable French composer), their movements and gestures synchronized to sound. This accompaniment developed (and even enabled) the film's narrative, aesthetic, and spectacular appeal. As Laurent Guido explains, Le Borne isolated the dance tableaux of *The Red Hand* (that is, the "Valse Apache" tableaux, four of the film's eleven tableaux) as scenes to be projected to the public at a slower speed. Guido states that the precision of Le Borne's written indications on his published manuscript evidences that he was writing to images already shot and that he was thinking of the technical needs for the projection of the film itself. As Guido adds, Le Borne was "concerned for precise synchronism between the music and the gestures represented on the screen, not only on the semantic level, but also on that of the rhythm." The score begins with a "note for the performance" which insists on the necessary establishment of an isochronous temporal flow: "The Cinematograph will have to turn at 120 revolutions per minute, except for the Valse Apache where it is necessary to shoot a little slower, around 100 revolutions per minute."⁶⁹

The impact of this decelerated image, where dance, accompanied by a live orchestra, could be watched as a separable filmic attraction, was palpable. As *The Observer* reported, Mistinguett's dance was one of the "thrilling things" of *The Red Hand*. Moreover, it was Mistinguett, a star performer, who drove comment about this tableau. In contrast, Dearly was anonymously implicated simply as "the man" (fig. 18).

The attention that English observers gave Mistinguett's dance in *The Red Hand* highlights the fundamental relationship between music and silent film. The expressive complicity between film and music was also visualized in this scene. On film, we see a man playing an accordion, his leg casually swung across a ticket-collector's table. Standing directly behind Mistinguett and Dearly as they dance, this musician swings his head in time to his playing while the rhythmic sway of his accordion visibly traces a record of the sound onscreen. We are indoors, in a simple, enclosed space. There is no decoration or mirrors on the walls, no windows, and only a low archway behind the spectators on the left of the image, indicating the modesty of the working-class venue. The couple dance on a bare floor, watched by a diversity of Parisians. There are men of the lower classes, marked by their caps, loose jackets, wide belts, and cigarettes. There is a man in a bowler hat, accompanied by a woman wearing the white apron of a city salesgirl. Finally, on the right of the screen, there are also men in shiny black top hats and monocles, sporting dinner jackets, white shirts, walking canes, and pocket handkerchiefs; beside them, we see a woman in evening dress, wearing an elaborate hat and carrying a hand-muff. The latter provide the image of the French aristocracy or upper classes. As one English review stated: "This is a popular view of Parisian 'slumming.'"⁷⁰ Clearly, the Apache dance was a spectacle that might have taken place in a working-class venue, but



FIGURE 18. The Apache dance presented by Mistinguett and Max Dearly, Paris 1908. © Jazz Age Club / Mary Evans Picture Library.

(like the cinema and the music hall itself) attracted an appreciative audience of men and women from varying social classes.

Presented as a spectacular attraction in *The Red Hand*, the Apache dance was considered a Parisian spectacle, an exotic representation of Parisian lower life. When Dearly brought the Apache dance to London's Empire Theatre of Varieties in January 1909, the dance was accordingly described as one "that no Englishman could have invented, and no Englishman could dance."⁷¹ On film, however, commentators described Mistinguett and Dearly's dance as a "weird evolution of the terpsichorean art."⁷² We see in their twisting and turning movements, at times closely pulled together and at others flung wildly apart, an erotic yet violent exchange between Mistinguett, as an anonymous *gigolette* or prostitute, and Dearly, her pimp and local gangster.⁷³ Mistinguett—in a simple, low-cut, shiny black dress that exposes her arms, shoulders, and some of her back—is the only woman whose flesh can be seen onscreen. Her exposed limbs and torso, as well as the whiteness of her skin, contrasts with the completeness with which Dearly is covered: he wears a dark hat, jacket, and scarf, and we see only his angry, staring face and his clenching and clasping hands as he directs Mistinguett violently across the floor. The dance unwinds eclectically and spectacularly, each phrase of movement a revolving expression of violent masculine control over a lithe (and equally athletic) responsive female body. We see Mistinguett pushed backward and then forward in a tight, arching embrace; Dearly then clutches her to his side

as they theatrically promenade slowly forward. Dearly spins Mistinguett furiously away, only to grab her again in a tight, possessive hold. He locks onto her hair, pulling and pushing her into a weaving, painful embrace. After a series of staccato turns, Dearly propels Mistinguett through a single, straight-armed clasp that locks itself ominously around her bared neck. The dance ends with an abrupt release: Mistinguett is suddenly (and unexpectedly) shoved violently forward. Her fall breaks the proprietorial hold—at once erotic and violent—that Dearly has over her gyrating, supple body.

The Red Hand was screened at the Alhambra in its December program, debuting on Boxing Day 1908. It was the third of three films that Pathé and the Alhambra management negotiated to present to English music-hall audiences. Shown as “a morbid drama of Montmartre,” it sat alongside dancers (in “The Two Flags,” Lenora Ewer in “Nacisse,” and the Alhambra’s newly appointed “premiere danseuse,” the Danish ballerina Britta Petersen in “Paquita”), as well as the Max Wessely Troupe of jugglers, the Ten Ji Japanese magicians, and an African American vocal quartet known as “The Four Black Diamonds.”⁷⁴

When *The Red Hand* was first exhibited outside this variety format at the Alhambra, it was presented as a “new Kursaal development” at the famous amusement park in Southend-on-Sea, Essex. One of the world’s first purpose-built amusement parks, opened in 1901, the Kursaal started on January 18, 1909, to show “cinematinees” comprising “light subjects for children” followed by “Entire Plays by Great Actors in Bioscope Pictures.”⁷⁵ With Pathé’s Alhambra initiative now presented within the context of the British bioscope—and with new audiences sought in this changed exhibition context—it is not surprising to find Filson Young’s recently published novel, *Sands of Pleasure* (1905), now referenced as the “great moral story” revealed in *The Red Hand*. This association of popular, racy English literature with contemporary French film emerging from Parisian music halls was far from obvious. Young’s novel traces the adventures of an unwitting civil engineer (a lighthouse-builder) traveling from Cornwall to Paris to learn about lenses but then innocently falls in love with a demimondaine. This narrative seems far removed from a film about bribery, murder, and the capacity of man’s conscience to correct criminal wrongs. Young’s descriptions of respectable men consorting with women in the Latin Quarter of Paris, however, can be paralleled to the Apache dance scene of *The Red Hand*, where the French upper classes are implicated in the seedy world of the demimondaine.⁷⁶ In both contexts, Paris is presented through a heady mix of realism and romanticism. As the anonymous journalist discussing the Kursaal’s bioscope initiative remarked, Mistinguett “of the Ville Lumiere” appeared “in the realistic dance called the ‘Apache Dance,’ in which all the tenderness and brutality of the population of the Barrières is shown in a very impressive manner. This is one of the most sensational things ever done.”⁷⁷

Promoted within the context of an English author (Young), and implicated in developments in popular English culture (the bioscope, the Kursaal), *The Red*

Hand was also seen as an entertainment of brutal realism and violent passion that was “by no means a music hall item.”⁷⁸ In this assertion, made in May 1909, we can begin to trace the gradual separation of film from its popular theatrical histories and, ironically, Mistinguett from the very Paris she was meant to represent.

MISTINGUETT AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ENGLISH MOTION PICTURE POPULARITY

Newspapers such as *The Tatler*, *Sporting Times*, the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Sketch* continued to report Mistinguett’s music-hall celebrity in Paris to English readers from 1908 onward. As mentioned above, topics of focus included Mistinguett’s parody of English comic George Grossmith Jr. in *La Revue de Marigny* (this was still being discussed in 1911),⁷⁹ the performance of her first major comic role in a legitimate theater (as a *midinette*—an “apprentice,” “swotcher,” or “small hand”—in *Les Midinettes* in the Variétés theater in 1911), and the legal action she took this same year against the Marigny Theatre for breach of contract when Dearly was billed in larger type than herself.⁸⁰ Reports also included Mistinguett’s capacity to disguise and change her appearance on the stage and gossip about a possible marriage to singer and comic performer Félix Mayol.⁸¹

It was through film, and not through these sporadic discussions of English performance culture, music-hall success, or defensive legal actions, however, that Mistinguett’s transnational fame was developed in England. In February 1912, for example, *The Bioscope* stated that Mistinguett “is probably known to more people on the screen than on the ‘boards.’”⁸² In 1913, *The Globe* made no mention of Mistinguett’s status as a music-hall and theater actress when it referred to her as a “Cinema Actress” in a headline title.⁸³ Why and how did Mistinguett become so famous onscreen? While I cannot discuss all the films Mistinguett made in the decade between her “Apache dance” and the beginning of the First World War in 1914, there are a few films that we can access today that reveal her comic humor, physical agility, and performance versatility. If we look across these roles, we can appreciate that a woman who was associated with the spectacular music hall of the interwar years was, at least at this midpoint of her career, very much a cinema star in England. Indeed, in a 1914 discussion of the war being waged between the legitimate theater and cinemas for audiences in France, *Kinematograph and Lantern Weekly* associated Mistinguett with the cinema, naming her “a very popular kinema artiste.”⁸⁴

Mistinguett’s popularity as a “kinema artiste” in the early years of her involvement in film can be associated with the successful weekly Rigadin film series, produced by Pathé Frères and directed by Georges Monca. Starring Charles Prince (or Prince Rigadin, the pseudonym for the French celebrity comic vaudeville actor Charles Petitemange), this comic series circulated from 1909 to 1914 and was translated as “Wiffles” in Britain and the United States. The films in this series

consisted of short comedies (around five hundred to eight hundred feet) that made lighthearted fun of traditional bourgeois drama, contemporary social concerns, and class mores. Mistinguett's ability to physically partner with other comic actors on the popular stage can help explain why she was enlisted to join Prince in some of the series' first films. For example, in the earliest surviving Rigadin film, *Les Timidités de Rigadin* (*A Shy Youth*, SCAGL, 1910), Mistinguett is cast as an enterprising housemaid who initiates havoc in her household when her employers, the Flumkins, go out one evening. Encouraging the group of domestic staff to join her in dressing up and performing the mannerisms of their mistress and master relishing festivities at home, Mistinguett gleefully transforms a bourgeoisie parlor into a theater of absurdity. Servants bow and curtsy with exaggerated grace, ludicrous headdresses decorate the couture of the female staff, and the male staff (now dressed in suits and bow ties) circulate alcohol and howl with glee at their activity. In this bustle of movement, Mistinguett is the ever-engaged hostess, seating guests and constantly introducing one to another. Their fun is interrupted by the unexpected arrival of a timid Rigadin, who bears a formal letter of introduction, a large bunch of flowers, and the belief that Mistinguett is the wealthy daughter he intends to court. Mistinguett invites her coworkers back into the parlor, and festivities continue. In the scene with Rigadin, Mistinguett characteristically makes visual play of her famous legs, repeatedly resting her exposed ankles across his lap. Mistinguett, also characteristically, performs a comic dance, gleefully and determinedly turning, kicking, and flapping her arms in what appears to be a parody of a ragtime waltz.

The film concludes when Mistinguett decides that her guest will perform the Knight in Richard Wagner's popular opera *Lohengrin*. Retreating to the kitchen to creatively dress a now-inebriated Rigadin for his performance, Mistinguett adorns him with a funnel (for a helmet), cheese graters and a stove pipe (for armor), and a skewer and lid (for his sword and shield). They return to the parlor and, with Mistinguett busily conducting, Rigadin joyfully bellows his tune. His show is interrupted by the sudden return of the Flumkins. Rigadin is now alone, dressed in his tin-pot attire, and innocently presents his letter of introduction—only to be booted out of the house by an indignant Mr. Flumkins. It is Mistinguett who triumphs in the film: unlike the now-morose Rigadin, she remains a quick-witted, vivacious, working-class housemaid. Mistinguett is not only the party ringleader, hostess, musical conductor, and director of the parlor "play" but also has outwitted both Rigadin and the Flumkins and kept her job while orchestrating an enjoyable evening at home.

When *A Shy Youth* was released in England, in September 1910, there was no mention of Prince or Mistinguett's name in advertisements or discussion of the film. Rather, the film's comic plot was outlined in a brief paragraph in *The Bioscope*, with commentary focusing on Wiffles (the only named character).⁸⁵ Mistinguett's name, however, followed Prince's on the opening title card of the film; they were

the only two performers mentioned as actors in the “comic play.” Evidence also suggests that this Rigadin film continued to circulate in the 1910s and that Mistinguett went on to become a familiar female foil to Wiffles’s innocent antics in the Rigadin series.⁸⁶ Indeed, in the subsequent Rigadin film, *La Doctoresse* (*The Lady Doctor*, SCAGL, 1910), Mistinguett is again listed alone as an “artiste” in the title card with Prince and once more plays comic complement to him. Her efficient professionalism contrasts with Rigadin’s innocent incapacity to balance books or organize household affairs. We see Mistinguett examine her patients with efficient speed and farcical confidence and then watch, in contrast, Rigadin’s childish petulance and then his physical foolishness when he amuses himself at the circus. Dropping a weight on his foot, he is injured; when Mistinguett arrives as the doctor to treat him, she comically faints when she sees his injury. Agreeing that she now must forgo her career, she drops to her knees to exaggeratedly beseech him. While the comedy of this film appears to be driven by the denigration of contemporary suffragist aims, its resolution is emphatically farcical. The film ends not with a scene of marital bliss but with Mistinguett instructing Rigadin toward the office door as she grabs a large marble bust of Pasteur and dashes it to the floor.⁸⁷

The Lady Doctor was released by Powers England in February 1911. Advertised as “one of our Special Powers’ comedies,” the French film was localized as a short amusement that would appeal to regular, pleasure-seeking patrons. It had the “right” acting that “goes with a swing and secures all the laughs.”⁸⁸ At the same time that Mistinguett circulated on film in England as a lighthearted complement to Prince, she also drove action and intrigue on film. In this way, film developed Mistinguett’s physically comic character while also identifying her as a youthful daring, action heroine. Paris became, in films that localized Mistinguett in the city, a capital teeming with dangerous criminals and violent intrigue, as well as a global center of theater, fashion, industry, technology, and political activity.

In *L'Épouvante* (*Terror Stricken*, Pathé Frères, 1911) we see, for example, Capelani’s fluid, outdoor camera, his capacity to use dramatic deep focus, and his succinct and clever framing of robust physical action. The film begins on the pavement outside a theater, watching Mistinguett—self-referentially performing as a theater star—exit a theater and slip into a car; she arrives in her bourgeoisie upper-floor townhouse apartment with a maid in attendance and enters her bedroom with a balcony overlooking the city; a team of policemen arrive to chase a burglar who has frightened her and who then clambers back into the bedroom for safety. Throughout, it is Mistinguett who defines action, invites police participation, and motivates camera movement. Hence, in the famous bed scene, in which Capelani reveals to us that Mistinguett is aware that a man is hidden beneath her bed, we first see Mistinguett smoking (fig. 19). A modern and urbane woman, she is dressed in the long, flowing white nightdress of a theatrical heroine while she rests alone in her bed. In behavior that reveals a comic refusal to inhabit the performance traditions of this gendered role, however, she abruptly tosses her reading to



FIGURE 19. Mistinguett smoking in her bed in *L'Épouvante* (1911). Screen shot courtesy of EYE Filmmuseum.

the floor, pulls her hands (and not a brush) through her short hair, and lights a cigarette, nonchalantly tossing the match to the floor. Our view is from Mistinguett's perspective, framed from above. In other words, we join Mistinguett in watching a man's hand reach out, from under the bed, to extinguish the flame on the rug; we are then the onlooker, when she turns her face toward us, to register her horror. This complicity between her gaze and our own implicates us in the drama's unfolding. It is not only Capellani who cleverly invites us to look through windows, across rooftops, or into the streets of Paris but Mistinguett who signals to us that she knows that we know that she is acting.

In this film, we see Mistinguett with new technologies and expensive props: she is transported in a large new car from the theater; her maid turns off an electric light in the kitchen before lighting a candle for the evening; and in her bedroom, Mistinguett draws a cigarette from a box (which is possibly the new *Gitanes* cigarette brand, launched in 1910). Fashionably exiting the theater, Mistinguett carries a special matching bag within which her dog sits, his head peering comically out as she readies, on the pavement, to enter her waiting car. Later, at home, Mistinguett prominently carries her dog into her lounge, attended by a friend and maid. Kissing the dog, she sits him on a chair to watch her take off her coat and hat. As a comment in *The Bioscope* later reported, "Mistinguett has a great fondness for dogs and her pet, 'Auguste,' frequently appears with her on the screen."⁸⁹ This scene allows audiences to engage in a familiar motif in her films; it brings warm light-heartedness to a moment where we are then shown Mistinguett parading in a new Parisian fashion. Standing to face us, as though in a fashion show, and displaying a dress to an audience, Mistinguett releases her elegant cloak, its thick white fur lapels and shiny silk lining visible as her maid collects it from her. As her couture hat is passed to the maid, we are reminded that Mistinguett famously decked herself in new hats, both onstage and off. Viewers might have known that she annually participated in a fashionable hat competition organized by the popular magazine *Madame et Monsieur* and held in theaters across Paris.⁹⁰

In *L'Épouvante*, we also see how Mistinguett was circulated by popular media through the Parisian streets. The film depicts, for instance, Mistinguett with her



FIGURE 20. Mistinguett poster, Daniel de Loursques, 1911. <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b90162145?rk>.

famous short hair in a dress that has the same high waistline, deep open neck, three-quarter length sleeves, hanging tassel, and long, straight hemmed skirtline that we see in the famous Daniel de Loursques poster of 1911 (fig. 20). In this poster, where Mistinguett is holding a rose behind her, in a field with a single house, chimney, and smoke rising in the background, her shoes are also identical to those we see in the film: there are the same black stockings, elegantly tapered heels, and the shine of two simple, rectangular buckles. Headed with the simple title, “Mistinguett,” the revue which Loursques’s poster promoted, was familiar to local Parisians. As *Gil Blas* indicated in January 1912, “For some days now the streets of Paris are adorned by a new poster that has made a sensation in front of which onlookers station themselves. It is thanks to the pencil of the talented de Losques [*sic*], and represents Mistinguett in her ebullient creation, *Woman of Paris*, in the Folies-Bergère Revue.”⁹¹

Another detail of *L'Épouvante* that might also have been familiar to audiences in Britain is the comic inconsequentiality of the French officials depicted. When

four officials burst into her room, we see that two are dressed in the identifiable cloak and hats of French policemen and that another wears the bowler hat and loose jacket of a detective. Failing to open (or even notice) the windows onto the balcony, the officials uselessly run around the bed, look under it, and then busily depart. When they return, they follow each other along the tight balcony; turning back, they bump into each other. Subsequently on the rooftop, there is a final choreography of classic slapstick comedy as they rush to look below, one man almost slipping over, all parodying an earnestness of official intent (rather than professional ability) in their pursuit of the burglar. It is Mistinguet, still dressed in a white nightdress, who will have her jewelry returned and then, unlike the troupe of incapable policemen, grant the burglar his freedom. Alone in her room, Mistinguet hears his distressed cries. Showing the wherewithal (and social conscience) to drape a curtain over the balcony railing to rescue him, Mistinguet dramatically saves a life while comically restaging a familiar maiden-in-the-tower fairy tale.

In the final act, we remain in Mistinguet's bedroom. It is the thief—not Mistinguet, the distressed heroine—whom we see reaching for a white handkerchief and wiping his brow in a state of disheveled distress. Seeing her jewels fall out of his pocket, he places them back on the small side table where he found them. Throughout this scene, Mistinguet is fearful yet never meek: she clasps a fist and then both hands to her face; she maintains a careful physical distance from the intruder; she responds to their conversation; and she visibly directs him to leave. Her modern woman is a self-sufficient, wage-earning professional who is fashionable, quick-thinking, and capable of defending herself from urban dangers. In contrast, men are comic interlopers, unable to complete a given task.

LES MISÉRABLES: EXPORTING FRENCH HERITAGE TO ENGLAND

In the early teens, Mistinguet was also implicated in a collective showcase of French literary and theatrical culture through her realistic, if very brief, appearance as Éponine in Capellani's *Les Misérables* (SCAGL, 1912). The significance of Mistinguet's involvement in this long, episodic film (presented in four episodes and running, at thirty-five hundred meters, for nearly four hours) was the unprecedented length of the work, the representative breadth of its cast drawn from across Parisian theaters, and the fact that this was the first time Victor Hugo's 1862 novel was adapted for film. Richard Abel argues that *Les Misérables* is the "culmination of the French historical film," revealing Capellani's representational flexibility while exploiting "the cultural capital of the French literary heritage in a highly exportable commodity on the world cinema market."⁹²

When *Les Misérables* was first discussed in *The Bioscope*, in October 1912, four pages were given over to the outline of the film's narrative content. This discussion, entitled "Les Misérables, Mssrs. Pathes Gigantic Production," gave authorship to

Pathé (there was no mention made of Capellani as director). A list of fourteen actors preceded discussion of the film's narrative, each associated with his or her role and Parisian theater of "origin." In a practice that mimicked a theatrical bill, actors were listed ahead of actresses, with their theatrical association noted beneath their name. Henri Krauss from the Sarah Bernhardt Theatre headed this playbill in the central role of Jean Valjean. Krauss was followed by Henri Étievant, from the Porte St. Martin, as Javert; Léon Bernard, from the Comédie-Française, as Bishop Myriel; and so on. Nine actors were highlighted, followed by five actresses: Marie Ventura, from the Odéon, playing Fantine; Mistinguett, from the Variétés, playing Éponine; Delphine Renot, from the Ambigu, playing Mssr. Thenardier; and Maria Fromet, from the Réjane Theatre, and Marialise, from the Michel Theatre (sharing the role of Cosette). Here, Mistinguett was neither a music-hall actress nor a cinema star but a member of the respected Théâtre des Variétés.

The narrative of *Les Misérables*—introduced in this first *Bioscope* article as "the greatest epic and dramatic work of fiction ever created or conceived"—highlighted its proletarian inclusiveness. As readers were reminded, the tale involved men, women, and a child; it was a narrative driven by the concern for (what Hugo termed) "social suffocation."⁹³ Relayed to English audiences, Hugo's novel became a serialized adventure relevant to all people, exploring the themes of brotherhood and redemption. Yet only a single paragraph, at the article's conclusion, mentioned the film. Described as a "colossal work" of twelve thousand feet, it was commended as being "on a remarkably high level," its photography, stage-management, and attention to detail acclaimed as "difficult to improve upon."⁹⁴

Les Misérables was first screened in London on January 16, 1913. Presented at the New Gallery Kinema on Regent Street, the event was an important affair. The Kinema itself, newly opened on January 13 by the famous actor-manager Sir George Alexander and his wife, Lady Alexander, was unique in having a Crown license for refreshments, tea rooms as well as a brasserie, and exclusive rights for the exhibition of *Les Misérables* in London. A supporter of the cinema, Sir Alexander did not regard film as competing with the stage but rather as "creating a new clientele" for drama.⁹⁵ This new clientele was created by positioning the film and its screening theatrically. Therefore, the event was billed as an "Exclusive West-End" performance. Presented as a matinee (held at 2:30 p.m. daily), the film was scheduled and exhibited through the language of legitimate theatrical exhibition. Again, comparable to the theater, attendance prices varied (ten shillings, sixpence for a private box [holding four people]; two shillings for a balcony stall; one shilling, sixpence or one shilling for a stall; or sixpence for a front stall). Seats, similarly, could be booked in advance by telephone, in libraries, or at the theater itself.⁹⁶

Significantly, when the *Westminster Gazette* discussed the New Gallery Kinema's inaugural presentation of *Les Misérables*, it referenced Mistinguett as an example of a renowned Parisian actor and noted that the labor involved in the production of the film was equal to that of a respected West-End theater. Readers



FIGURE 21. New Gallery Kinema program for *Les Misérables*, 1913. Courtesy of the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, Exeter University.

were informed that “the acting is perfect, and the artists who have posed for the films are the best that the dramatic world of Paris is able to supply. In substantiation of this assertion it is only necessary to mention that Mlle. Mistinguett, who commanded a salary of £100 per week when performing at the Palace, posed for the character of Éponine; whilst the film, which is declared to be the longest yet to be presented to the public, has cost fully £5 000 to prepare.”⁹⁷

Given this effort to promote *Les Misérables* as a legitimate theatrical event, it is not surprising that audiences could buy for two pence a special, commemorative program booklet that they could take home as a keepsake (fig. 21). At the New Gallery Kinema, this booklet was printed on thick cream paper held together by a royal purple tassel. With England’s royal coat of arms printed (in black and white) on the cover of the program, surrounded by a framing wreath of royal purple, the national and legitimating aspirations of the New Gallery Kinema are symbolically visible. Inside this booklet (and again in royal purple text), we read that “Every Evening at 8.30 The Management present Victor Hugo’s ‘Les Miserables’

Drama in Four Acts.” With the “Cast” listed (again, male preceding female and, alongside, their Parisian theatrical affiliation), we are also told that “the music for this production [is] especially selected, arranged, and composed by Mr. Geo. Pritchard.” This attention to the conditions of theatrical exhibition was supported, on a second page, by a six-line “Summary” of Hugo’s novel. Readers were told that the “essential theme of ‘Les Misérables’ is the power of kindness and brotherhood” and that the struggle between Valjean and Javert was “the keynote to the whole work.” Concluding with the reminder that this first adaptation of *Les Misérables* “has been produced by the special consent of Victor Hugo’s executors, with the object of presenting to the public the author’s immortal work in a memorable form,” English audiences were implicated in the effort to record, remember, and celebrate French cultural achievement as their own.⁹⁸

Les Misérables was extensively promoted and presented at venues across England in early 1913. Reports discuss the use of special orchestras accompanying the film’s screenings, as well as the ongoing national awareness of Mistinguett as one of the star actresses on the bill.⁹⁹ There is also evidence that other theater managers took the initiative to print special commemorative booklets and programs for the film. At the Academy Picture Palace in Brighton, for example, *Les Misérables* was screened three times a day as “A Film Play in nine parts,” with a sixteen-page booklet available to the public. Including a summative introduction, a list of the cast and their theatrical affiliations, a character description of Valjean and Javert, as well as a synopsis of each Epoch interspersed by photographs of key moments in the film, this material reveals that the New Gallery Kinema was not alone in bringing theatrical practices and promotional methods into film.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, at the Vaudeville Electric theater in Reading, a twenty-three-page booklet was offered to patrons for one penny as “A Screen Play.” On the frontispiece, we read:

“Les Misérables”
VICTOR HUGO
SCREEN PLAY
PATHÉ FRÈRES CINEMA LIMITED
By arrangement Mssrs. Jury’s Imperial Pictures, Ltd.
(Sole owners of the Exclusive Rights for the United Kingdom)
BATH:
HARDING & CURTIS, LTD., SOMERSET STREET.

This translation of Hugo’s literary work into an accessible, locally published and distributed English “Screen Play” was enabled by a partnership between Pathé and Jury’s Films (as we have seen, Britain’s leading renter and distributor of films). Mistinguett, a member of a large and respected cast, was no longer a sensational dancer from the music halls of Paris nor a celebrity actress, capable of transformation, as in an earlier comedy of male error and incapacity. Instead, she was a dramatic actress from a legitimate theater, realistically performing the nuanced

role of a rough, street-smart young woman, capable of cruel criminal acts but also of dying valiantly to protect the man she loves.

LA GLU ARRIVES IN ENGLAND: REFERENCING RÉJANE AND BERNHARDT THROUGH FILM

The year after Mistinguett was celebrated as a cast member of *Les Misérables*, *La Glu* was distributed to cinemas in England. Written by the poet, novelist, and dramatist Jean Richepin in 1881, this popular roman-feuilleton was adapted into a theatrical drama comprising five acts and six *tableaux* in 1883. Following the same pattern as *Les Misérables*, Mistinguett was once more involved with adapting nineteenth-century French literature to film. As her first feature-length film (with a length of nineteen hundred meters), this work gives us some insight into Mistinguett's reception as a Parisian screen actress abroad.

Importantly, *La Glu* connected Mistinguett to the performance history of both Réjane and Bernhardt. Réjane first performed *La Glu* at the Ambigu Theatre on January 27, 1883 (the play's debut). Commentators explained that the play and Réjane, a courtesan "of the most poisonous species," achieved a triumph in this "new school of theater." As *Le Gaulois* stated, Réjane "accomplished a *coup d'Etat* or, if you prefer, a personal revolution. We only knew her very appreciable qualities, of which the drama or the comedy could make good use. Now here she is, a great actress." Comparing Réjane to Bernhardt, who was at the same time performing Sardou's *Fédora*, the reviewer told his readers that it was difficult to judge who was the better actress, since Réjane "delivered with as much power as truth the nuance of this figure of the courtesan, cold and supple like a snake, who finishes being crushed under the sturdy heel of the peasant woman."¹⁰¹

Réjane demonstrated that she was a great actress in *La Glu*. Interestingly, she came to this success in a theater managed by Bernhardt.¹⁰² As commentators wrote, Bernhardt also trained Réjane in this role. Therefore, *The Friend of India* reported, in 1895, "that tragedienne [Bernhardt] coached her in the part [of *La Glu*], and the result was a great triumph for the neophyte."¹⁰³ Auguste Vitu—criticizing Richepin for re-presenting (rather than rewriting) Zola's *Nana*, Daudet's *L'Arlésienne*, Frédéric Soulié's *La Closerie des Genêts*, and Emile Augier's *Mariage d'Olympe*—in *La Glu*, nevertheless celebrated the signs of Bernhardt that he saw in Réjane's performance. "From time to time," Vitu observed, she [Réjane] agreeably imitated Madame Sarah Bernhardt."¹⁰⁴ Another reviewer described the second act of *La Glu*: "Mlle. Réjane, in a very flirtatious white negligée, makes an appearance à la Sarah Bernhardt. Let's state right away that all of her costumes are equally inspired by those worn by the celebrated mother [Bernhardt] of her young director [Maurice Bernhardt, in whose name the Ambigu Theatre had been leased]. Further, at each entry, Mlle. Réjane's slenderness helped; the illusion was complete. Above all, one believed they were seeing the 'grande tragédienne' [Bernhardt]."¹⁰⁵

x. SUPPLEMENT TO THE BIOSCOPE, APRIL 23, 1914.

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THE FILM

That will create Havoc
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FIGURE 22. *The Fatal Enchantress* advertisement, showing Mistinguett descending a rockface and in “the much-discussed Bedroom scene.” *The Bioscope*, April 23, 1914.

THE FATAL ENCHANTRESS: A STUDY IN PSYCHOLOGY

When Mistinguett appeared in *La Glu* in England, there was no comment about Réjane's earlier consolidation of fame in the theatrical role. Nor was there an apparent awareness that it was Bernhardt's support for Richépin and Réjane as young artists at the Ambigu Theatre that enabled *La Glu* to be performed onstage. Released in April 1914, the film was first reviewed in *The Bioscope* as *The Fatal Enchantress* (fig. 22) and uniquely associated with Richépin as a novelist and member of the Académie Française. Describing Capellani's film, therefore, as “essentially French in its conception and realisation,” the reviewer claimed that the work was foreign both because it was French and because it dealt with the *femme fatale*. Moreover, the work's cinematic style was considered unusual. Described as a “visualisation” of a celebrated novel,” it is “less a play, as regards conventional form, than a human document or a detailed study in abnormal psychology.” Showing “representations

of life as it is," it paraded visual realism. The reviewer also attended to screen performance. Mistinguett, readers were told, "has every opportunity to render this study as complete and graphic as possible, since the film includes scene after scene more or less irrelevant to the action of the piece but introduced merely for the sake of character analysis."¹⁰⁶

With *La Glu* culturally validated through reference to a celebrated French novel by a member of the Académie Française, its achievement lay in the film's remarkable capacity to make us see landscape and character development "as it was." This doubling of what realism on the screen might represent indicated that *La Glu* was visually and structurally "foreign" as a cinematic text: it revealed the wild coast of Brittany to foreign audiences, as well as the intimate recording of unusual character details. In relation to this outdoor landscape and a roving tourist gaze enabled by the mobile camera, we are presented with Fernande (Mistinguett) in a variety of settings. First, we see her in her home in a homestead in a township in France (Douai). Here, the setting is a two-story house in a large garden, surrounded by high fences and quiet streets, where horses still provide transport. We are also introduced to the calm idyll of the Scarpe River, where Doctor Cézambre (Henry Krauss) retreats when he contemplates suicide after discovering Fernande's infidelity. In Paris, we see Mistinguett dance the Maxixe (a popular spirited one-step Brazilian polka) at the famous open-air café in the Bois de Boulogne, Le Pré Catalan, which had opened just eight years earlier.¹⁰⁷ In this scene, a Renault Coupé-Chauffeur replaces the horse and carriage of Douai, chandeliers hang ostentatiously in the café, and we see a neatly organized outdoor seating arrangement. Men are shown in smart suits and light summer hats, and women are shown in couture dresses, wearing elegant hats (as Mistinguett herself wore) with stylish, feathered trimmings.

Cézambre's move from Douai, in the north of France, to Guérande, in Brittany, allowed audiences to enjoy the visual allure of regional France in *The Fatal Enchantress*. In this second of the film's central locales, we watch Cézambre walk along a winding medieval city street and see the changed regional costume of local inhabitants. Slouched hats, white workmen's coats, and checked aprons replace the fashionable display of Paris. Still later, in Le Croisic, a famous fishing town—and one of France's most popular tourist towns, with a railway having recently opened in 1879—we see the traditional clogs, white lace headdresses, collars, and light aprons of the Breton costume; the men are similarly dressed in traditional white shirts, black trousers, and dark tunics or vests. In the town, we are also introduced to another mode of transport—the fishing boat—with its crews of men, cane baskets, and single lug sail, used for inshore shellfish fishing. In the distance the port of Le Croisic is visible, its tightly packed medieval buildings picturesque against the hubbub of fishing activity. Fernande arrives, incongruous in a chauffeured car, her city dress in contrast with the standardized working clothes of town dwellers. We see her on the coast of Le Croisic, in white shorts and shirt, agile as she

descends a rockface. Subsequently, she swims in a black, one-piece Annette Kellerman bathing suit, the camera panning to show stretches of jagged rocks, dark caves, and a distant fishing boat on the horizon.

These scenes of local beauty are joined to Mistinguett's spectacular and fashionable presence onscreen. In the interior scenes, there is no landscape to define or frame Mistinguett's wild, savage excesses as a young woman railing against social traditions, sexual mores, married life, regional customs, and moral codes. Instead, we see bourgeois interiors disrupted by Mistinguett's performance of female difference. She is a youth, agitating her hair and coyly caressing the back of a chair before cleverly realizing she will be better noticed if she performs female distress (so she cries melodramatically into a white handkerchief). Mistinguett is then a successful courtesan, her capacity to commercialize her appeal greatly abetted by an exuberant physicality. Throughout, a white negligée à la Sarah Bernhardt appears in emotionally climactic moments: when Mistinguett is pulled violently from her bed after her husband first discovers the extent of her infidelity and when she madly embraces Marie-Pierre (Paul Capellani) in her bedroom, urging him to hurl a potted plant from her balcony in defiance of his parents below. Finally, she wears the same long, white, flowing dress when Marie-Pierre is wounded in his delirium of jealousy at her house. In this scene, she performs a wide range of volatile emotions (defiance, shocked collapse, and teary repentance, as well as cunning contrition and hysterical outrage). In contrast, when she is abruptly but premeditatively killed in the final scene by Marie-Pierre's angry mother, she is dressed as a fashionable woman of Paris (a Parisian *mondaine*), collapsing wordlessly to the floor.

FINDING FAME IN AMERICA

Mistinguett was mentioned in major American presses such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Times*, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, much later than she was mentioned in comparable papers in England. Cited for the first time in the *New York Times* in 1910, she was associated with dance. Mistinguett had galvanized the "dance madness" overtaking Paris. Presented as the creator of the Apache dance, she was linked with Max Dearly and the Moulin Rouge.¹⁰⁸ The following year, a sequence of three photographs of Mistinguett dancing "the New Dance," the Tango, illustrated and introduced the novelty of this "celebrated Spanish dance" to American readers.¹⁰⁹ In 1911, *The Billboard* featured Mistinguett prominently in a photograph as "a favorite Parisian dancer."

At the same time that attention was given to Mistinguett's fame as an erotic and sexual Parisian dancer, *Moving Picture World* described her as a French actress. An advertisement for *Fleur de pavé* (*Her Dramatic Career*, SCAGL, 1909) stated that the story was "dramatically portrayed by Mlle Mistinguett of the 'Gymnase,' M. Prince of the 'Varietes,' [sic] M. Nunes of the 'Varieties,' and M. Vernoud of the

‘Grand Guignol.’”¹¹⁰ In 1909, Mistinguett was indeed performing at the Gymnase Theatre in the comedy *L’Âne de Buridan* between February and July. Nevertheless, showcasing this theatrical association gave prestige to the short dramatic film, emphasizing the French theatrical origins of its players.

When *Her Dramatic Career* was reviewed a couple of weeks later, *Moving Picture World* was unequivocal in its praise:

The picture was dead still on the screen, the photographic quality of the film was perfect, and so soon as the picture started the shadowy figures commenced to act—act naturally—and they acted naturally right throughout the thousand and thirty feet of it. It was just for all the world as if we ourselves sat in the old Porte St. Martin Theatre in Paris, the chosen home of French melodrama, and were looking at one of those plays of passion so dear to the heart of the Parisian populace . . . not, perhaps, the most uplifting of stories and characteristically French, but how splendidly acted and photographed it is impossible for us to tell! As we have said last week, quoting a companion in the theatre, “These French people can act.”¹¹¹

The focus on Pathé—rather than Michel Carré, as a director—as well as natural French acting, was cited as evidence of a quality film. Mistinguett was not named here as the star performer. Whereas in England she was a celebrity, in America she was folded into a discussion about French film production.

When *Les Misérables* was released in America in January 1914, there was again no mention of Mistinguett as an identifiable actress performing in the film. The Carnegie Lyceum Theatre in New York, for the first time becoming a “regular photoplay house” with the projection of the film (previously, it had shown travel views in a variety show format), charged between thirty-five cents and one dollar for entrance. The film was seen as a test case for whether the cinema could break into Broadway territory with photoplay adaptations of standard theatrical or literary works.¹¹² In many respects, this launch at the Carnegie Lyceum Theatre, therefore, paralleled the inauguration of the New Gallery Kinema in London, with its location in the West End. Moreover, the Carnegie Lyceum similarly launched the film at a special inaugural screening. Reports state that “on the invitation of the Gordon Brothers Amusement Company, a large audience assembled in Carnegie Lyceum to witness the first showing in New York State of the nine-part Eclectic production of ‘Les Misérables.’ Present were a hundred ministers, many from Barnard College, and persons representative of all walks of life, as well as the newspapers. Richard Henry Warren, choirmaster of the Church of the Ascension, was at the keys of the specially installed Moller organ, and by his musicianly work added to the charm of this wonderful picture.”¹¹³

The attention paid to the Carnegie Lyceum as a theater screening film before a respected audience, with (as at a theatrical debut) newspaper professionals present, revealed the commitment that the Gordon Company was making to the film industry’s legitimacy. Previously, I highlighted the function that music played in the reception and framing of film, and again in this account—with a choir and a

special organ used for exhibition purpose—music effectively elaborated what was seen onscreen. Moreover, the American trade press similarly emphasized the educative and uplifting function of the film. Explaining not just the moral content of the film but also the educative function of film as integrative technology, uniquely capable of joining word and moving image, W. Stephen Bush advocated for the educational character of “filmed versions” of *Quo Vadis*, *Inferno*, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, and *Les Misérables*. In Bush’s opinion, the motion pictures amplified our capacity for learning: “The combination of text and motion picture is the most effective method of reaching the human mind whether of the child or of the adult, whether of the learned man like our schoolmaster [discussed in the article] or just an ordinary mortal.”¹¹⁴

Les Misérables reached “ordinary mortals” because of its combination of text with quality acting on the screen. In America, however, it was Henri Krauss, in the role of Valjean, who was named as an actor in the film. I found only one short article that also mentioned Mlle. Ventura, La Petite Fromet, Mons. Étiévant, “and other stars.”¹¹⁵ Discussion of the film did, however, foreground what was deemed “natural” (and preferable) in its acting and setting. This approach indicated that Pathé, Capellani, and the film’s actors were together seen as demonstrating a close link between theater and film. As *Moving Picture News* argued, the film presented acting that was “perfection in every sense”:

None of the exaggerated motions so common in foreign films, where the actors believe they must talk by moving the arms like the old telegraph signals. This most natural acting reminds any one of a representation at either the Comédie-Française or the Odeon of Paris. . . . The lack of exaggerated motions is replaced by the most correct facial expressions, and if you don’t hear the sound of the voice of Jean Valjean, you know what he says and what he thinks by following the motions of his lips, eyes, and other facial expressions.¹¹⁶

As this commentary revealed, actors were attuned to the appropriateness of gesture on film—the large, expressive gestures supported by orchestral music on the French theatrical stage were scaled down yet still heightened and therefore legible to foreign audiences following good actors performing on film. Moreover, the settings were realistic, with “every costume, every bit of furniture is of the proper epoch, even to the old style of the loaf of bread and to the then small size of the French newspaper.”¹¹⁷

Anonymously implicated in the realism of acting, setting, and props in *Les Misérables*, Mistinguett was also part of the Eclectic Film Company’s consolidation in America as a significant distributor of quality French films. Indeed, reports stated that the company, which “sprang into the limelight” through the success of *Les Misérables*, rented “the western half of the 10th floor” of the World’s Tower Building.¹¹⁸ A prestigious building—at the time, the highest office block in the world—the World’s Tower Building opened in spring of 1913. It represented the prestige and modernity of urban New York. The Eclectic Company installed

an “up-to-date comfortable and cool exhibition room with an approved system of ventilation” for business in the building.¹¹⁹ Moreover, the company began to expand into other states (such as New England), while also pursuing exhibitors who did not use the lithograph posters they contracted, designed, and printed for their films.¹²⁰ Again, in an arrangement that paralleled theatrical practices, the film company controlled the marketing and publicity of its “play.”¹²¹ Significantly, the Eclectic Company was a film exchange that incorporated “Paris–New York” into its trademark and had as its logo “The Cream of American and European Studios.”¹²² Max Alvarez, discussing the Film Exchange in America, reminds us that “in late 1913, France’s Charles Pathé took control of the U.S. distributor Eclectic Film Corp. and eventually renamed it Pathé Exchange.”¹²³

SELLING *THE SIREN* IN AMERICA

The Eclectic Film Company marketed and distributed *La Glu* to American audiences as *The Siren* in August 1914. Full-page advertisements in *Moving Picture World* and *Motion Picture News* partnered *The Siren* with *Nick Winter and the Lost Prince* (Paul Garbagni, 1914). Described as “a woman who senses to the full her power over men,” Mistinguett was identifiable in the three photographs that accompanied the description of the film’s plot. In one advertisement, she was shown in the sea at Le Croisic, her arms reaching out for help, as Marie-Pierre saved her. In another, Mistinguett was in her white nightdress as she leaned on a table, watching the emotional exchange among Marie-Pierre, his father, her husband, and Kernan des Ribiers (the father of Adolphe, another of Fernande’s amorous victims). A second advertisement showed the dramatic moment when Marie-Pierre’s mother raises a hammer, high overhead, to kill the unsuspecting Fernande.¹²⁴ In each example, the dramatic moments of legible story, rather than the psychological nuance of Capellani’s cinematography, came to the fore.

Reviews of *The Siren* identified Mistinguett as the titular antiheroine and celebrated her acting, physicality, and personality. As J. Burroughs Noell explained in *Motion Picture News*, it was Mistinguett’s capacity to perform her role with “just the right amount of impudent seductiveness and captivating heartlessness to make her ensnaring of so many sensible men entirely probable.” Moreover, her youth and “fine figure,” as well as her “indefinable something called personality,” helped to explain the success she enjoyed alongside such stellar supporting actors as Henri Krauss and Paul Capellani. Krauss, in particular, was known to audiences in America thanks to *Les Misérables*. As Noell writes, he will be remembered as Jean Val Jean in *Les Misérables*, had appeared in Sarah Bernhardt’s company, and was well trained before entering film. Moreover, Krauss was identifiably French and particularly suited to film, as he was gesturally expressive and spontaneous, talking as well with his hands as with his tongue.¹²⁵ In a front-page presentation of the film in *Motography*, this point was reiterated when readers were introduced to

the film as the Eclectic Company's "best feature since that masterpiece 'Les Misérables.'" In this ad, Mistinguett was not associated with *Les Misérables* but, instead, was introduced as "Mlle. Mistin Guett [who] plays the leading role as Fernande, the treacherous flirt."¹²⁶

The Siren was released in America a year after it was made in France and nearly two years before America joined the Great War. As my next chapter explains, *The Siren* and *Les Misérables* continued to circulate in America during the war, returning Mistinguett to the creative achievements of prewar Paris. In contrast, English audiences could watch Mistinguett in lighthearted comic works, dramatic films, and thrillers. In these feature films—in *The Temptations of Life* (*La Double Blessure / La doppia ferita*, Milano Films, 1915), *Chignon d'or* (*The Gold Chignon*, Films Succès, 1916), *Fleur de Paris* (*Flower of Paris*, Films Succès, 1916), *Mistinguett détective I and II* (Films Succès, 1917)—Mistinguett was a physically fit and enterprising protagonist, either pursuing or fleeing gangsters, criminals, and state enemies or self-reflexively performing in Parisian cafés and theaters. Offering a stalwart and defiant image of an unchanging Paris in the war, Mistinguett's films can be compared to Réjane's somberly patriotic *Alsace* (Film d'Art, 1915) and Sarah Bernhardt's cinematic war cry, *Mothers of France* (*Mères françaises*, Éclipse, 1917). In both instances, these two aged French actresses became national spokespeople for the war, urging transnational audiences of women—mothers, sisters, daughters, lovers—to join their battle against a common enemy. When we elide discussions of the relationship between the late nineteenth-century theater and early film, we not only overlook important histories of female leadership and entrepreneurship in the arts. We also presume that the nineteenth-century French actress was little more than a diversionary form of entertainment rather than a cinematic clarion call to global action.