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CHUTKOW, PAUL, *Depardieu A Biography*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994. ISBN 0679-40943-2. Pp. 351. \$24.

Depardieu. Paris: Belfond, 1994. ISBN 2-7144-3153-4. Pp. 381. 1.20F.

"The genius resembles everyone, and no one resembles him." This quotation from Balzac, which serves as the epigraph of Chutkow's biography of Depardieu, is a doubly appropriate choice in that it pays tribute to the talent and versatility of France's best-known actor and, at the same time, reflects the unabashed admiration of his American biographer. Readers will follow these two men of different cultures and languages from their first encounter (a telephonic introduction via Bertrand Blier) through a developing relationship that results in the agreement produce this work and on to further related adventures, many of them on location (*Germinal*, *Cyrano*, 1492).

Having obtained Depardieu total cooperation for the project while assuring his own autonomy as biographer, Chutkow, a journalist specializing in French film, began two years of observation and research, the results of which have been distilled into eighteen brief chapters plus an epilogue and prologue. Grouped into five parts ("On the Road", "Chateauroux", "Paris", "Wings", and "To America"), these chapters chronicle Depardieu's personal and professional life from his humble beginnings through his incarnation of Christopher Columbus in 1492. Illustrated with family photographs as well as stills from Depardieu's many films, the book is completed by a very useful appendix of his works and awards and a handy index of references to films, directors., actors, etc. Chutkow's approach and style are those of a reporter (albeit a reporter with a *préjugé favorable* for his subject), one who investigates and informs, who complements his own observations with visits to significant sites and, especially, with numerous interviews of members of the film community, as well as friends, family, neighbours and former teachers, The journalist-biographer reports these conversations in English, with an *alors* or *merci* here and there for flavor. For those who prefer to "hear" the interviews in French there is a translation published in Paris by Belfond.) An American addressing an American public, Chutkow, who lived in Paris for twelve years, also attempts to interpret French culture for his audience. indeed, cross-cultural comparisons abound in this work which high-lights the reciprocal influences, and sometimes mistrust, of the two cultures and, in particular, the contrasts between French and America cinema. If a biography can be said to have a topic apart from the life of the subject, a case could be made that a secondary theme

of this book is that of language. While the motif of language recurs throughout, two chapters are of particular interest in this respect. The first, entitled "Dr. Mozart", offers an answer to the perplexing question: ". . . how did a boy with severe speech handicaps wind up as Cyrano de Bergerac . . . ?" (17); the second, entitled "The Time Affair", investigates and elucidates the miscommunication (mistranslation?) that may have cost Depardieu's Cyrano an Oscar. Both chapters are exhaustively researched and documented. For example, in order to understand Depardieu's language problems, Chutkow himself underwent a cure in Paris at the Center founded Alfred A. Tomatis, a specialist in speech and hearing. The mature actor whose language was liberated by Tomatis during his late teens emerges from these pages as a man of contrasts embodying elements of both the exuberant peasant and the introverted intellectual, a man whose gargantuan appetite for food and drink is matched only by his equally voracious appetite for work, and one whose "sixth sense" regarding films, directors, and actors ensures his success as an *entremetteur*, creating just the right chemistry at the right time. Actor, *viticulteur*, father, husband, friend, Depardieu, as viewed by Chutkow, is a multi-faceted genius in almost perpetual motion who essentially carries French cinema on his broad shoulders. The documenting of Depardieu's talent by his admiring American Boswell has produced a biography which, while not a piece of great literature, is, nevertheless, a well-researched and thoroughly readable work, one of interest not only to film buffs but to the general reader as well.

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