

WHAT IS CINEMA?

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*On Jean Painlevé*

Jean Painlevé occupies a unique and special place in French cinema. He understands that the most skilful trepanning can fulfil two simultaneous, incommunicable and absolute postulates: saving a life and depicting Père Ubu's machine for cracking skulls. His film *Le Vampire*, for example, is both a zoological document and the fulfilment of the great and bloody myth made famous by F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. Unfortunately, this dazzling cinematic truth cannot be borne by everyone. From the viewpoint of current ideas about art and science, there is too much scandal about it. This may be why the audience of a neighbourhood cinema, as if before a sacrilegious profanation, protested against the jazz music accompanying the little underwater dramas found in *Assassins d'eau douce* (*Freshwater Assassins*). How true it is that commonplace wisdom is not always capable of recognising that extremes can meet.