



Jean Rollin

with Aïda Ruilova

"You are the only memory I have right now."

— Jean Rollin's *La Nuit des Traquées* (*Night of the Hunted*, 1980)

Le Viol du Vampire (*The Rape of the Vampire*) opened in Paris cinemas in 1968. Originally intended to be a short film, pressure from distributors and financial backers forced the director to extend the film into a full feature. Rather than re-editing the first half, a second half was added that resurrected the cast killed off at the end of the first half. Crowds howled and threw trash at the screen causing a near riot. It was, as the French say, "un succes de scandale" and it was director Jean Rollin's first film.

France's sole horror auteur, Jean Rollin's work in the late '60s contributed to his now trademark vampire sex epics *La Vampire Nue* (*The Naked Vampire*, 1969), *Le Frisson des Vampires* (*The Shiver of the Vampires*, 1970), and *Requiem pour un Vampire* (*Requiem for a Vampire*, 1971). Narcotically slow narratives filled with derelict locations and violent undertones, Rollin films defy standard horror fare. Casting actors alongside French porn starlets to play solitary erotic vampires created notoriety and skepticism with French critics. Acquiring financing for his personal



films proved difficult with the porn boom in the '70s, so under the moniker Michel Gentil, Rollin made twelve hardcore films. Rollins personal output still grew as he ventured into gore with the conventional *Les Raisins de la Mort* (*The Grapes of Death*, 1978) and critical success came with the Rollin classic *Fascination*. *Fascination*'s scythe wielding porn starlet Brigitte Lahaie became a regular in Rollin films after this.

Rollin was a published fiction writer before he touched the camera. In 1995 he adapted his novel *Les Deux Orphelines Vampires* (*The Two Vampire Orphans*) for the screen. Rollin received the lifetime achievement award at the Fantafestival for his efforts, but because of poor health he has turned back to his writing.

I visited Jean in his Paris home and he presented me with a stone flower he stole from the Père-Lachaise cemetery. A tireless romantic at a sprightly 64 years old, he planted endless kisses on my forehead as the cameras rolled.



A: I read somewhere that when you were a little boy George Bataille told you bedtime stories.

J: It's real. My mother lived with Bataille from 1939 to 1941. I was born at the end of 1938,

so my very first memories are of war souvenirs and Bataille. I remember we were hiding [as a game] in the little village where we lived, to see little girls get out of the church in white, with white gloves, white veils and black books. I remember Bataille said to me, Those girls in white, they are the bad wolf in disguise! And we crossed the village, hiding, to follow the girls (the wolves) going home. He told me the girls were "big wolf babies" when in fact it was the girls' first communion. And to make me sleep, he told me the story with a sequel each night of *Mister the Priest*. It's interesting when you know what kind of person he was. All this is told in the beginning of my book, *Dialogues Without End*, but it's only available in French.

A: Your films feature beautiful teenage girls acting as vampires. Vampirism and youth are themes you seem fascinated with.

J: The first book I read of Bataille was *Story of the Eye*. This book is for me one of the greatest books I have ever read. It was the first time a writer spoke of eroticism like tragedy and not only pleasure. The characters are very young. The book impacted me so much. Of course, I give a primordial importance to very young girls, discovering evil (vampirism) and their fascination, love of it, even if it's evil and

probably because it's evil. The beauty of evil, a certain purity of it, was always a temptation for me.

A: The first time I saw the twins Marie-Pierre and Catherine Castel was in *La Vampire Nue*. I know they were also in a few of your hardcore films too. How did you find the twins?

J: The twin Castel sisters were for me like the Denise in the *Story of the Eye*. They were young, about 18-years-old, for my first film with them. They looked innocent, with a naïve candor, but in reality they were completely perverse, doing anything with anybody. It's the reason I was attracted to shoot hardcore films with them. They played perversion exactly as if it was the most natural thing in world. I am always in touch with one, Cathy. She lives near me.

A: You were shooting hardcore porn and fantasy films at the same time. Do you feel one informed the other?

J: When hardcore films were authorized in France, all the cinemas which were showing films like mine transformed themselves into hardcore theatres and there was no place for my films. So, to survive I was obliged to shoot hard films during those years. The films had no interest for me, but in a certain way, it was



a great experience.

A: Philippe Druillet is a comic book artist and contributor to *Metal Hurlant* (the French language version of *Heavy Metal Magazine*). He really seemed to share your aesthetic. The posters he created for your films are strange and beautiful. How did you meet him?

J: I meet Druillet in a library where the avant-garde publisher Éric Losfeld received many artists from the underground—intellectuals, the surrealists, the lettrists, etc. All my formation came from that shop, Le Terrain Vague. When Losfeld died, it was like I lost my father. He spoke of me in his book of memoirs.



A: *Fascination* is one of your best known and best liked films. It also has some of my favorite

costumes. Can you tell me about the films origins and who came up with all the beautiful clothes?

J: My script girl Natalie Perrey was in charge of the costumes. The film is in the 1900 period. We had no money, so Natalie found dresses, hats, etc. That was important for me. The script is based on, but far from, a short story of the writer Jean Lorrain, *The Glass of Blood*. The challenge was to shoot a film like this one with no more money than the budget of a hardcore film!

A: There is a romantic preoccupation with memories in your films.

J: Memories are one of the great themes in all of my films and books. I wrote a book of short stories about time. I need more time, a place, and better English to speak to you about this.

A: Any new projects on your horizon?

J: I am waiting to find the money for the script I just finished called *La Femme Spectrale* (*The Ghostly Woman*). I hope to shoot this film this year or in 2003. **K4B**

Jean Rollin's films are released on DVD by Redemption USA, online at: www.salvation-films.com.