

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Martial Frindéthié, Ph.D.

Caramel (2005) Henri Duparc (1941-2006)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Writer-producer Henri Duparc is a Guinean-Ivorian film-maker. He was born on December 23, 1941 in Forécariah, Guinea, and died on April 18, 2006 in Paris. Duparc's training in filmmaking first took place in 1962, at the Cinematographic Institute of Belgrade (former Yugoslavia), then at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques de Paris (IDHEC), between 1964 and 1966. In 1967, Duparc worked as a producer for the Ivorian government's Société Ivoirienne de Cinéma (SIC), and when the company went defunct, Duparc created his own production company Focale 13 (later known as les Films Henri Duparc), in 1983. Duparc's work can be characterized as "cinéma naïf" in the sense that it captures and caricatures the flaws of his fellow countrymen. His first source of inspiration is Côte d'Ivoire, whose traditions and everyday life he showcases and at the same time parodies with humor. Duparc has produced a number of shorts, some documentaries, a television series, *Aya* (1986), and eight features: *Abusuan/Family* (1972), *L'Herbe sauvage/Wild Grass* (1978), *Bal poussière/Dancing in the Dust* (1988), *Le Sixième doigt/The Sixth Finger* (1990), *Une Color Coffee/Color Coffee* (1997), *Je m'appelle Fargass/My Name is Fargass* (2000) and *Caramel* (2005).

Film Ivorian popular culture abounds with stories in which people who have died suddenly, and who have not had time to bid farewell to their loved ones, return before their burial to visit their loved ones. The story, which has been retold many times in African literature and cinema, finds another interpretation in Henri Duparc's *Caramel*. Among other themes, *Caramel* explores the difficulties of African cinema, love, sexuality, family, and, above all, a topic dear to the filmmaker—the promotion of African cinema against the backdrop of the takeover of world cinema by American action films.

Background *Caramel* is an 88-minute comedic drama, in French. It is the last completed film by Henri Duparc before his death in 2006. The original title of *Caramel* was 'Caramel ou le destin contrarié' ('Caramel or the thwarted destiny'). The film was produced by Focale 13, Duparc's production company. The actors in the film are local comedians well known to Ivorian and African audiences. Akissi Delta, for example, who plays Tatiana, had already appeared in several of Duparc's films, including *Dancing in the Dust* and *Rue Princesse*. She is also the director of the internationally successful series *Ma Famille*.

CHARACTERS

Caramel A ghost, who comes back from the underworld to fetch Fred, the man she loves.

Fred A young man, who falls in love with a ghost.

Maria Fred's sister, who tries to find her brother a suitable woman to marry.

SYNOPSIS

Maria is concerned that, at the age of thirty, her brother Fred, a film theater owner in the Ivorian capital of Abidjan, is still single. So she moves in with Fred and sets out to find him a wife among her friends, one who will meet her own criteria of loyalty and respect for the extended family. Unbeknownst to Fred, Maria first visits Tatiana, the young woman Fred sees from time to time when he needs feminine warmth, his "problem-solver", as he names her. Maria wants to see for herself if Tatiana can be a good wife for her brother. Tatiana has two children from two previous relationships, and Maria concludes that Tatiana is a promiscuous woman who would drain her brother's financial resources by having him take care of her and her two children. Maria forbids Tatiana to see her brother again. Maria then tries to hook Fred up with two of her friends, Lea and Patricia. Lea, who eats and burps like a pig and drinks like a fish, immediately turns Fred off. As for Patricia, whom Fred meets aboard a boat-bus on the Abidjan lagoon, her bluntness about her uninhibited libido and her assertiveness turn the young man off. Patricia tells Fred that she would make

love to him several times a day, every day of the week. Fred tells her that this is more than he can handle. To prove to Fred that she is ready to die for him, Patricia pretends to throw herself overboard, causing fear among the commuters on the boat. Fred leaves Patricia, offended and resolute to avoid her. Meanwhile, Fred meets Caramel, a twenty-five-year-old restaurant owner, who meets his expectations of beauty and self-control. Caramel is sweet, seductive, and, like Fred, she loves to talk about movies. However, Maria is convinced that the girl her brother has fallen in love with is not from this world, and that Fred is in danger of dating a witch. Indeed, when Maria inadvertently pours hot tea on Caramel's arm, Caramel shows no signs of pain. And Maria believes she saw something frightening in Caramel's eyes. Maria's investigations into Caramel's life lead her to discover that Caramel is a revenant: she had already died in a car accident the day before Fred introduced her to his sister and spent his first night in a hotel room with her. Caramel had returned as a ghost to make love to Fred before returning to the realm of the dead, leaving Fred, lifeless, in the hotel room.

SCENES

You need a wife Maria leaves church and goes to buy a baguette for breakfast. She meets her brother, Fred, at the breakfast table. Maria tells Fred that she has spent another sleepless night worrying about his bachelor status. She insists that Fred's house needs a woman. She tells him to be more proactive and seek a soulmate. Maria advises her brother to go to a bar frequented by beautiful women who love salsa. Fred retorts that he has better things to do than hop around like a goat in a nightclub. Maria tells her brother that in his thirties, he should be seriously worried about not having an heir. Maria's insistence irritates Fred, who gets up and leaves.



Tatiana with two kids already Fatou, the housekeeper, tells Maria that Fred has a friend, Tatiana, who often comes to eat at the house, and whom he calls his "problem-solver". The maid vaguely indicates to Maria the neighborhood where Tatiana lives. Maria decides to pay this "mysterious" woman a visit. After some inquiries, Maria knocks on the door of Tatiana's apartment. Tatiana is delighted when Maria introduces herself as Fred's sister. Maria immediately confides in Tatiana that she has come to ask her to put an end to her brother's celibacy, which has lasted too long. In the course of their conversation, Tatiana reveals to Maria that she has two children with different fathers. Maria's attitude changes immediately, and so does her language. She tells Tatiana that she has come to ask her to stay away from her brother. Taken aback, Tatiana asks Maria why she wants to control Fred. Tatiana comes to see Fred to tell him about the bad treatment she received from Maria that morning. Fred is astonished that Maria knows who Tatiana is and even where she lives. Tatiana tells Fred that her sister is trying to separate them. Fred reassures her that she is worrying for nothing.



Lea drinks too much Maria goes to see her friend, Lea, and tells her about her meeting with Tatiana. Maria tells Lea that her brother needs a woman like her, one who is fat and who loves life and all good things, and especially a woman who cares about the extended family. She invites Lea to the house for lunch so she can seduce Fred. Lea loves the prospect of being Fred's wife. Invited for lunch by Maria in order to meet Fred, Lea guzzles down several glasses of wine before she even sits down at the table. Lea is visibly intoxicated. Maria tells her that her wish is to see her married to her brother, and asks her to behave herself and do everything she can to please him. Maria introduces her friend Lea to her brother. Lea accumulates blunders and glasses of wine. She eats like a pig, slurping her food. She drinks excessively, and she brags about her drinking capacity. Lea goes to the kitchen to wash her hands. Fred turns to Maria and tells her that if she meant to hook him with Lea, she has failed. Fred tells Maria that Lea is a catastrophe. Maria asks her brother to be patient with Lea, saying that she is an ordinary woman, who does not pretend to be a holy saint. Fred retorts that a pig like Lea is going to eat up all his movie income when he already has financial worries.



Patricia's sexual expectations Maria visits Patricia, the daughter of one of her friends. Maria asks Patricia if she is still single. Patricia tells her that men are not eager to get married. She adds that she is already twenty-five, that her biological clock is ticking and that her parents are pressuring her to get married. Maria asks Patricia if she would be interested in starting a home with her brother, Fred. Patricia is interested and asks what she should do, especially as Fred has never shown interest in her. Maria tells Patricia that it seems to her that Fred is inexperienced with women and does not really know what he wants. Maria tells Patricia that it is up to her to sell herself to Fred like a good merchandise. Maria reveals to Patricia Fred's schedule and itinerary for the following day. Maria advises Patricia to surprise Fred and do something extraordinary to prove that she loves him. Patricia arrives at the boat-bus landing before Fred and feigns coincidence when she sees Fred. Patricia immediately asks Fred why he is not yet married. Fred replies that he just has not found the right person yet. Patricia promises to be a good wife to him, one who will always put him in a good mood, give him massages, feed him well and make love to him several times a day, if he takes her as his wife. Fred is amused by Patricia's proposal. He replies that he is too preoccupied with his business and too stressed to think about marriage. Besides, he adds, he does not believe he can live up to Patricia's sexual expectations. Patricia says she cannot swim but is willing to jump into the water to prove to him that she loves him. Patricia pretends to jump into the water. Fred grabs her to stop her. She clutches onto his shirt and tears it. The passengers on the boat-bus panic.



Fred wants to show African Films Fred is so disgusted by Lea's attitude that he barely touches his food. Instead, he goes to a restaurant for a *chawarma* (Lebanese sandwich) and takes the opportunity to promote the collection of African films he intends to show over the next few days. The restaurant owner tells Fred that he should play American movies like Rambo because this is what Ivorian audiences like. Fred tells him that he is confident his selection of African films will draw big crowds. Fred asks his collaborators to rethink their way of working. He asks them to display as many African film posters as possible to arouse the public's curiosity, but to show only one film at a time over several days, rather than several films a day. Fred is delighted to have found a film from the first generation of African cinema, which had disappeared from the archives. He intends to show it. Fred's co-workers tell him of a movie being made about female ghosts who come back to seduce and take back men they have loved as living. They are like women from the sea, like mermaids (called Mamie Wata). Fred tells them that these are old folk tales, and that he does not believe them.



An enthusiastic movie-goer Fred checks in on his movie theater. He has decided to show Indian films to attract nostalgic moviegoers. His assistant tells him that there is a customer, a woman, sitting in the theater, even though the projection only starts in a few hours. Fred goes to see who this enthusiastic moviegoer is. The young woman's name is Caramel. She says that she was hooked on the film *Mangala* from an early age, as it was her father's favorite movie, when he was an usher in a movie theater. Fred listens to Caramel talk about her passion for films. He asks Caramel if they can get together again. They arrange to have lunch together in a few days.



Fred meets Caramel Fred goes to meet Caramel. Caramel runs a small restaurant she opened with some friends. Fred and Caramel sit down at a table. Fred compliments Caramel on her cooking and her beauty. Caramel asks Fred about himself. Fred tells her he is thirty-two years old. He tells her he is a graduate of film studies. He says he used to work for the Ministry of Information but had to resign from the civil service to take over a movie theater to show films he would have liked to produce if he were a filmmaker. Caramel tells Fred that she was engaged to a man who cheated on her and beat her. So one day she decided to take courage and leave him. Caramel also reveals to Fred that on Saturdays, she sings in a well-known local bar. She invites him to come and see her sing one day. In the meantime, they promise to see each other later that day.



An inquisitive sister Maria takes a quick look at her brother's calendar. She notes that he will be taking the boat-bus tomorrow for an appointment. Fred confides in his sister that he met a gorgeous girl, who loves cinema, and with whom he will be dining tomorrow. He also tells her that Tatiana told him about their conversation, and he asks his sister to stop meddling in his private life. Maria watches for her brother's arrival. She sees him smell Caramel's perfume on his shirt. As soon as Fred enters his bedroom, Maria sniffs the shirt he has left on a chair in the living room. Maria asks the maid, Fatou, to witness that Caramel's perfume is cheap, and that Caramel is not sophisticated enough for her brother.



Caramel's no-show Fred is worried that Caramel has missed their appointment. He fears that she has read about the scandal with Patricia, which a reporter captured and published in the newspaper, and that she has decided not to see him anymore. Fred decides to go to Caramel's restaurant to find out exactly what is going on. The restaurant is closed. Another day, Caramel has come to see what is playing at the movies. Fred is very happy to see her again, and he wants to know why she missed their appointment the day before. She tells him that she and her cousin were hit by a cab. She spent the day in hospital but is doing better.



Fred invites Caramel home Fred thinks his sister has already gone to bed, so he can spend some quiet time with Caramel. But Maria is not sleeping. She emerges from the kitchen with a kettle of *kinkeliba* (leaves used in African pharmacopoeia to treat a variety of illnesses) in hand. Fred introduces her to Caramel. Maria offers Caramel a cup of *kinkeliba* tea. As she tries to serve her, the boiling cup slips from Maria's hands and spills its contents onto Caramel's arm and legs. The young woman does not flinch. She shows no reaction to any pain. Maria looks at her, astonished. Maria wipes Caramel's arm. She notices that Caramel is wearing a bracelet made from rifle bullets. Caramel explains that it is a present from her father. Caramel bids Maria farewell and is driven home by Fred. Maria advises Fred not to be long in returning. Caramel gives Maria a hostile look, which seems to disturb Maria.



Maria investigates Caramel Fred suggests to Caramel that they spend the night together at the hotel. Caramel likes Fred's proposal. Meanwhile, Maria is convinced that her brother is in danger with Caramel. Maria asks the Virgin Mary to protect her brother. Maria goes to see Lea. She tells her that her brother has introduced her to an abnormal woman, insensitive to pain and whose eyes shoot sparks. Maria tells Lea that she is convinced Caramel is a witch. Lea replies that it is late, and that she sees no reason to meddle in the affairs of Fred, who has rejected her.

Caramel is a ghost Maria's investigations lead her to Caramel's cousin. A wake is being held. Caramel's cousin tells Maria that the wake is for his cousin, Caramel, who died the day before in an accident. He explains that Caramel was very happy the day before because she had a date. For this, she had bought herself a beautiful floral dress and a pair of white shoes. But she was unable to wear them. A bad driver had taken her life. Maria refuses to believe Caramel's cousin's explanation. She tells him that Caramel is presently with her brother, Fred. Caramel's cousin tells her that his cousin always wore a bracelet made of shell casings. He also brings her a photo of Caramel. Maria gets up, astounded, and leaves without saying anything more.



Caramel takes Fred away At the hotel, Fred tells Caramel he never wants to leave her again. She tells him it will be difficult because she has a long journey ahead of her. Fred replies that he is ready to go to the end of the world with Caramel because his life will have no meaning without her. Caramel wants to know if he means what he says. Fred replies that he does. Caramel asks Fred to relax. Then she sings him a funeral song until he sinks into unconsciousness. Then she kisses him and leaves.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CARMEL Caramel is a gentle, courageous and enigmatic young woman. She is soft-spoken and always smiling. She has gone through some difficult times in her life but has remained strong and optimistic, forging ahead to better her life. She is, however, an enigmatic woman, who ends up proving Fred's sister's suspicion of her as out of this world.

Gentle What seems to have attracted Fred to Caramel is her gentle, romantic soul. Caramel is, like Fred, a film aficionado, in love with Indian romance films, about which she speaks passionately. The gentleness of her gestures and words, and her vulnerability as she talks about the abusive relationship she once experienced with her ex-fiancé, stand in stark contrast to the brutality and coarseness of Lea and Patricia. It is certainly Caramel's sober, gentle character that convinces Fred that she is the right woman for him.

Courageous Caramel explains to Fred that life has not been kind to her. Having lost her father at an early age and having dropped out of school for lack of means, she found herself in an abusive relationship with an unfaithful, alcoholic and violent fiancé. Despite family pressure to stay in this abusive relationship, she decided to leave one day. With some friends, she opened a small restaurant that enables her to remain independent. She also sings some evenings in a cabaret in Abidjan and dreams of one day becoming a music star. Determined to beat life's vicissitudes, Caramel was unable to fulfill all her dreams before being mowed down by a reckless driver on the evening of her date with Fred.

Enigmatic The first day she meets Caramel, Maria finds her enigmatic and becomes suspicious of her. The name she bears, her bracelet made of bullet shells, her defiant gaze, and the fact that she is impervious to pain lead Maria to suspect Caramel of being more than ordinary. Maria's investigations prove her right. Caramel is not of this world. She is a ghost.

FRED Fred is an uncharacteristic Ivorian young man in that he is a sober man, in terms of pleasure, focusing all his attention on his main passion. An avid fan of African cinema, he opens his own movie theater to promote African films. This business is a risky enterprise in a country whose population is more interested in foreign, especially American, films. However, Fred remains undaunted, following his dream.

Enterprising Fred is an enterprising young man. As a civil servant at the Ministry of Information, he could have twiddled his thumbs and collected his monthly salary, like most Ivorian civil servants. However, he resigned his post to do on his own what he criticized his ministry for neglecting: promoting African cinema. Fred bought himself a movie theater in the Ivorian capital and made it his business to interest Ivorian cinephiles in African films by systematically, rather than episodically, showing African films alongside Indian and American films.

Sober Fred is a sober man. Unlike his peers, he drinks no alcohol, eats little, rarely goes out, and has a moderate sex life. Apart from Tatiana, whom he calls his "problem-solver" and whom he sees only intermittently, Fred has no intention of having any other relationship with any other girl. Lea's immoderate taste for alcohol is repugnant to him, and Patricia's passionate sexuality frightens him.

Skeptic Fred is a great skeptic. He scoffs at the superstitious beliefs of his sister Maria, who sees evil souls lurking around every corner, and who has erected a shrine to the Virgin Mary in her bedroom. He thinks his sister's superstition is getting out of hand. Moreover, when his friend Antoine tells him the story of the mythical Mamie Wata, Fred brushes it aside, declaring that these are grandmothers' tales. In the end, Fred falls victim to his own disbelief.

MARIA Fred's sister, Maria, is a superstitious, nosy, and selfish character. Maria is afraid that her brother's naivete in matters of dating will lead him straight into the embrace of a witch. She spies on him and sets about to find him a woman. However, Maria wants that woman to adhere to her own principles first.

Nosy Maria is a nosy person. She is always on the lookout for her brother's movements and seeks out his maid, Fatou, to find out how his business is going, where he goes and who he goes out with. She learns that Fred has a girlfriend, Tatiana, and she goes to see what Tatiana looks like and if she meets her brother's and her own standards. When Fred introduces her to Caramel, Maria investigates her, too, discovering that she is, in fact, a ghost.

Superstitious Maria is a superstitious woman. She has erected a shrine in her bedroom, and entrusts her life to the Virgin Mary every day before she leaves the house. She is convinced that some people around her have a negative aura, while others give off good vibrations, and she is afraid that her brother might encounter a witch. From the moment Fred introduces her to Caramel, Maria is convinced that Caramel is a witch, and she investigates to find out more.

Selfish There is something selfish in Maria's determination to find a wife for her brother. Maria wants to make sure that the woman her brother marries will not shut the door of Fred's house on her. So she wants to be the one to choose that woman. Maria tries to get Fred seduced by Lea and Patricia, both of whom she knows well and can easily manipulate. When Fred falls for Caramel instead, Maria displays a certain hostility towards her, sensing that Caramel is a young woman she will have difficulty controlling.

THEMES

Tradition The film *Caramel* is based on an African legend, that of Mamie Wata (Mamie Water), the enchanting or bewitching woman. The figure of Mamie Wata is present in African literature and art as a water deity, and her physiognomy is often depicted in popular art as a white or black mermaid. This mythical character from the coastal regions of Africa can prove wicked and grant the sinister wishes of those who, by making offerings to her, solicit her to harm their enemies. Mamie Wata can also turn out to be a seductive and jealous woman who, taking on human appearances, lures men into her arms and carries them off into her world. Sometimes, too, Mamie Wata is a revenant who comes to sleep for the last time with the man she once loved in the world of the living, and whom she had to leave abruptly without having had a chance to say goodbye to. And if this man, not knowing that his lover is from the realm of the dead, insists that she stay with him, then she takes him with her to the world of the dead. This is the case of Fred, who, unaware that Caramel had died the previous day, tells her that his only wish is never to leave her again. Caramel grants Fred's wish and takes him with her. Duparc revives an old African myth in *Caramel*. This too is part of the filmmaker's desire to be an archivist, a curator of African culture and tradition

Art and Culture Côte d'Ivoire's prosperity seems to have been achieved by neglecting African art and culture. Although Ivorians individuals and institutions display little interest in local art, they are obsessive consumers of foreign culture. Duparc seems to advocate a return to African values through the consumption of African art. Fred is passionate about cinema, but more specifically African cinema, the absence of which he laments in Ivorian theaters. He notes Africans' disproportionate interest in Hindi love movies and American Rambo-style action films. He believes he has found a way to encourage Ivorian cinema-goers to watch African films. He plans to devote two full days to one African film in his theater. And he has selected five films for that. For Fred, people come to the cinema to dream, not to be depressed. This is why he displays a large-lettered sticker on his car, expressing his conviction that "CINEMA IS DREAM". From this perspective, Duparc departs somewhat from the directives of FEPACI, which asserted at its first convention in Algiers that African cinema must refuse to be a dream factory, as is the case in the West, and instead be a cinema committed to working alongside African states in their efforts to fight imperialism. In addition to being an advocate of African cinema, Fred, who is certainly the filmmaker's mouthpiece, is a big consumer of African paintings and sculptures, which he proudly displays in his home—an encouragement from the filmmaker to his compatriots to be consumers of art.

Cinema What does Duparc really mean by a cinema that makes people dream? Cinema, Duparc's spokesman Fred tells us, is a dream. Although apparently contrary to the objectives of African cinema as set out by FEPACI, Duparc's objectives for African cinema are not so far removed. Indeed, while FEPACI's plea for complicity between African cinema and African governments was easily understood in the aftermath of independence, forty years after independence, Henri Duparc seems to believe that this argument is now obsolete, and that African cinema must set itself other objectives, including that of making spectators dream, and concomitantly, inciting governments to realize the dreams of their citizens. With this in mind, rather than praising those in power, cinema needs to put its finger on social wounds, exposing the enormous amount of work that still needs to be done. For Fred, who, like Duparc, resigned from the Ministry of Information because of the ministry's lack of enthusiasm in developing African cinema, one of the neglected projects of African governments is to give a strong impetus to the arts. There is also a need to protect women, so that single mothers like Tatiana and battered women like Caramel, are properly taken care of.

And yet still another project is to support small and medium-sized businesses, such as Caramel's restaurant and Fred's cinema, which are struggling to fill up with customers.

Selfishness Maria is a sister seemingly concerned about the welfare of her brother, Fred. She worries that he lives alone, and she wants to see him married. However, Maria's concern is not entirely selfless. In fact, what Maria wants for her brother is a wife who will serve her own interests, whom she can manipulate as she pleases, and who will not keep her away from her brother. When Fred's maid reveals to Maria that Fred has a girlfriend, Tatiana, Maria tries to meet her. Realizing that Tatiana has two children of her own, Maria forbids her to see her brother and later admits to Lea that a woman like Tatiana would ruin Fred by putting her two children in his care. Maria then asks Lea to try to seduce her brother, but not without reminding Lea of the essential values that make a good woman: a respectful, attentive wife, a good cook, and above all a commitment to the extended family. Maria loves good food, and Lea is a good cook. Maria insists on being looked after by her brother, and Lea understands and accepts this requirement. Maria thinks Lea would be a good wife for Fred, but also, and more importantly, the ideal sister-in-law for her. Maria is thinking less of Fred and more of herself in her quest to find a wife for her brother.

Quest The quest for a better life is at the heart of human concerns in this film. For Fred, who has invested his savings in a movie theater that is struggling to make a profit, success in business is what preoccupies him, and what he desperately seeks by multiplying strategies to attract moviegoers. In his quest for financial success, Fred sacrifices the prospect of a love life, a secondary element for him, contenting himself only with brief moments with Tatiana. However, for Tatiana, his girlfriend, living a married life with Fred is her main concern. The episodic moments spent with Fred hardly satisfy her. What she wants is validation of her status as a woman by Ivorian standards. And this validation is achieved through marriage. Indeed, Lea, Patricia and Caramel are looking for the same validation. In an earlier relationship, Caramel endured the blows and insults of a violent, unfaithful partner, simply so as not to belie the image of respectability that comes with married status. As for Lea and Patricia, in their quest for marriage, they throw themselves into all sorts of humiliating contortions to attract Fred's attention. Fred's sister, Maria, who sets Patricia and Lea on the path of Fred, also has a hidden agenda: to find her brother a wife who will be indebted to her, and who will always keep the door to her brother's house open for her.

Marriage In Africa, marriage is a rite of passage for women, a status of respectability. While men like Fred and his colleague Antoine flutter from woman to woman and are in no hurry to marry, women like Tatiana, Lea and Patricia feel the passage of time and the pressure of society to find themselves a husband who will validate them. Tatiana is a single mother and a civil servant. She is financially independent, and, as she tells Maria, Fred comes to her when he needs a good hot meal and human warmth. And she has been waiting for years for Fred to propose marriage. Lea is also an independent woman. But her single life weighs heavily on her, and she jumps at the chance to seduce Maria's brother into a possible marriage. She makes a fool of herself trying to please Fred, and in the end, is repulsed by him. Patricia owns a successful restaurant-bar in Abidjan. She is in her mid-twenties and still not married. She will do anything for a husband, and when Maria invites her to seduce her brother, Patricia goes all out. However, like Lea, she takes the wrong approach and loses Fred's respect. Before she met Fred, Caramel had been living with a violent alcoholic who beat her. However, her relatives advised her to put up with her fiancé's cruelty rather than leave him, as being single and approaching her thirties would be a tragedy. Despite pressure from her relatives, Caramel decides to leave, thus ignoring the social wisdom that a woman must marry at all costs or remain a failed woman.

Sexuality The theme of sexuality, so present in Duparc's films, is again featured in *Caramel*. The treatment of open sexuality, which in countries such as Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Niger and Mauritania would have been controversial, is tackled in a lackadaisical way in the Ivorian context. Here again, women seem to be more sexually assertive than men. The sexual recipes proposed by Lea and Patricia frighten Fred. Fred confesses to Patricia that he is not ready for her sexual ardor, and that sex once in a while is more than enough for him, and that for this he has Tatiana, his problem-solver. Fred may not be all that sexually inclined, but not all men feel that way. Antoine, for example, makes the rounds of funeral wakes in search of grieving souls (women) to console. Sacrilegious, one might say, but in Côte d'Ivoire, it is at weddings, christenings and, above all, funeral wakes that love encounters take place. It is as if death awakens buried sexual impulses. Incidentally, it is while making love with Caramel, the dead woman who has returned, that Fred experiences his greatest sexual fulfillment, a fulfillment that leads him to his own death.

Gender Women are often represented in a positive light in Duparc's films. *Caramel* is laudatory of the female gender, offering us an image of strong, fighting women acting as protectors of men. Fred is a single entrepreneur whose declining business keeps him worried. However, Fred can count on his maid, Fatou, to keep his house clean and cook him good dishes to maintain his body's health and a healthy environment. This is Duparc's nod to the women who work as maids to keep men's lives clean but whose contribution to society is too often seen as minor, if not negligible. When Fred is in need of feminine warmth, he turns to Tatiana, his girlfriend, the one he calls his problem-solver, for moments of intimate pleasure. Tatiana deserves the nickname Fred gives her, for it is thanks to her that he is able to avoid promiscuity in this Ivorian capital under attack by infectious diseases. Maria sees herself as her brother's protector. She wants a woman with established morals for him, who is attentive, a good cook and has a strong sense of the extended family. Lea, Patricia and Caramel are independent, enterprising women who need a man's presence only as a companion, not as a master. From this perspective, the film is also a celebration of African women in all their socio-economic diversity.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fred believes that the purpose of cinema is to make people dream. Do you agree? Elaborate on your answer.
2. Does cinema also have an obligation to guide society? How can it do so? To what extent does the film *Caramel* fulfill this task?
3. *Caramel* was filmed at a time when Henri Duparc (the filmmaker) knew he was dying. Do you think he introduced a message to humankind in the film? What could it be?
4. How does Fred's story appear as a lesson against intransigence and stubbornness?
5. To what extent are stories of ghosts in love found across cultures? Do you know of any others?
6. Imagine and describe another ending to this film.