



Forming Couples: Godard's Contempt

By *Leo Bersani*

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With *Contempt* ('Le mépris'), dating from 1963, the French writer and director Jean-Luc Godard (1930-) made his first and much-debated big-budget feature, whose all-star cast included Brigitte Bardot, Michel Piccoli, Jack Palance and Fritz Lang. The central theme of the film is the contempt a wife, Camille, suddenly feels for her husband, Paul, bringing to an end the intimate relationship the couple enjoyed. The authors examine the appeal of contempt both for Camille and for Godard, turn our attention to the effects of contempt in the world, and explore how contempt affects the range and kinds of movement allowed for in the visual field with which Godard works.

Leo Bersani, Emeritus Professor of French at the University of California at Berkeley, specializes in 19th- and 20th-century literature, psychoanalysis, literature and the visual arts, and cultural criticism. Ulysse Dutoit, Lecturer in French at the University of California at Berkeley, specializes in the visual arts, particularly film and painting.

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by Leo Bersani

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