

# JEAN SEBERG— Woman Between Two Worlds

The teen-ager from Iowa has  
become the cosmopolite from Paris—  
but at what expense to herself?

By JACK RYAN



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**D**URING THE FILMING of "St. Joan" six years ago, famed British actor Sir John Gielgud took a nervous young girl aside and told her:

"Don't worry about fame as an actress. Fame does not change a person. People who know you least will say you've changed—but those who know you best will see that you are still the same."

These words come back to Jean Seberg nowadays because fame has come—and accusations that the druggist's pretty daughter from Marshalltown, Iowa, is now a sophisticated and hardened actress of Paris' "New Wave."

"It annoys me," Jean says, "when a Frenchman comes up and says, 'Oh, you're so unexpectedly Parisienne.' He means to compliment me but I can't help snapping: 'I'm an American—Iowa American.'"

Yet when she visits her parents' home, high-school acquaintances tell her how "different" she is—"so foreign." Jean sighs: "They're trying to be complimentary, too."

If Jean Seberg, the woman, has remained unchanged, however, it is as remarkable an achievement as the success of Jean Seberg, the actress. You'll remember her as Otto Preminger's "discovery of the century," a fan-magazine-reading teen-ager picked from 18,000 contestants to star in "St. Joan," one of the most difficult of dramatic roles. Her debut was one of the great failures of the century. Scathing reviews, Jean says, sent her "running off to Nice (France) and just trying to keep busy—mostly crying."

At 20 a has-been to American producers, Jean soon became the darling of young French directors making their first films and searching for a fresh face with the outward appearance of American wholesomeness and the suggestion of smoldering Mediterranean passion. They had no money, and Jean had nothing to do (although still enjoying a fat American contract). The result was four "New Wave" films, including "Breathless," that turned critical catcalls into cheers. This year, back on top, Jean stars in two major American movies: the current Irwin Shaw-Robert Parrish production of "In the French Style" with Stanley Baker and the forthcoming Robert Rossen production of "Lilith" with Warren Beatty.

In recalling less happy days, Jean says, "I was determined not to let the critics get me down. I come from Swedish peasant stock. That and the support of friends helped me withstand the knocks."

Jean studied French art at the Sorbonne, and no less than André Malraux, the minister of culture, signed her degree and sketched a cat on it as a mark of his esteem. She hired a Comédie Française actress to perfect her French, although an acquaintance says she still "speaks French with a Harry Truman accent." And, most unac-

cessfully, she married a Frenchman, François Moreuil, in an old-fashioned Iowa ceremony. He was a businessman who wanted to direct a Jean Seberg "New Wave" drama, but before he could start, Jean was back in Marshalltown divorcing him for "cruel and inhuman treatment." The couple did make the picture, but with Jean's grandmother nearby to act as a referee during tempestuous fights.

Through the hectic years, Jean records only one regret. "My parents have been happy when I'm happy, unhappy when I'm unhappy, but some things hurt them more than they do me—some publicity, I mean." This includes a reported romance with Otto Preminger, leading to his divorce; supposedly Bohemian living on the Left Bank; and "amoral" French films. Most recently, publicists had Jean playing a scene in the seminude with Warren Beatty, and Jean let loose a rare burst of temper. "It wasn't true, but what can my parents say when everybody reads about it?"

About the ups and downs of the past years, Jean says: "Even if Otto Preminger hadn't found me, I would have gone off from Marshalltown starry-eyed to be an actress. I wouldn't have faced the same problems, but there would have been others, maybe ones I would have run away from. I suppose my parents would have preferred that I marry the doctor's son and raise a family at home. My sister in Ames did, and in many ways her life is more rewarding than mine. But everybody has his own life. My unhappy marriage could have happened anywhere, you know."

**J**EAN SPEAKS FREELY on the French attitude toward marriage: "The French father is too casual toward his home. And he expects his wife to tolerate his 'adventures.' That is something few American women can accept."

Ironically, Jean and French novelist-diplomat Romain Gary have been a romantic pair for two or three years—and he, 26 years her senior, is married (though long separated) to a Frenchwoman. Currently he is again trying to get a divorce, and he and Jean hope to marry soon.

Jean's two worlds and topsy-turvy career have admittedly left her a little confused. "Since I first won the 'St. Joan' role, I haven't stopped running long enough to know much about myself. But I have two important pictures finished now, and time to go off and take inventory. Oh, I won't lock myself in a dark room and contemplate, but I will see what these last years have brought."

Fame, as Sir John Gielgud predicted, hasn't changed Jean Seberg. She is still warm, friendly, and modest in the Iowa fashion. But she also has experienced the cruelest failures and learned the good and not-so-good of two vastly different worlds. These unexpected lessons may have made a "new" person, and one Jean Seberg will be happy to become acquainted with in her inventory.