

# Eric Rohmer, 1920-2010

By [John Petrakis](#) in the [February 23, 2010](#) issue

To those who frequented small, dingy art houses in the 1970s and 1980s, the death of Eric Rohmer in January meant that a film artist of the first rank has faded to black. Rohmer was a member of the celebrated French New Wave in cinema that included such luminaries as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut, and he was editor of the hugely influential film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* from 1957 to 1963.

Rohmer is best known for his “Six Moral Tales” (which included the groundbreaking *My Night at Maud’s*), a sextet of films that followed a simple formula: a man involved in a relationship with one woman is tempted by a second, usually more exotic, woman before returning to the first woman, satisfied that he has made the right choice. This way of summarizing the films makes them sound banal, but in Rohmer’s hands the treatment was never that. In showing matters of love, fidelity, morality and betrayal being hashed out in conversation—over glasses of wine or on windy beaches or in darkened bedrooms at dawn—Rohmer gave us a peek into the complexities of human decision making as it is influenced by family, religion, desire and an individual sense of right and wrong.

Rohmer produced other series, including his whimsical “Comedies and Proverbs,” which tackled odd love stories with a lighthearted but anxiety-provoking tone, and “Four Seasons,” which addressed issues of loneliness and loss through the prism of the seasons. One of his most honored films, and one of my favorites, *Pauline at the Beach*, is based on the proverb “He who talks too much will only hurt himself.” It was a bit of an in-joke, since the movie was filled with dialogue, elusive and profound—an example of what made Rohmer a witty and intelligent movie moralist.