



**FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS**

# **The Bride Wore Black** **(La Mariée était en noir)**

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

## **Penelope Houston on Hitchcock's influence on Truffaut**

In the introduction to his Hitchcock interview book, François Truffaut lists 28 directors who seem to him, at one time or another, to have fallen under the Master's influence. The assortment is eclectic, ranging from Chabrol, Resnais, Donen (of course) to Bergman, Kurosawa, Delvaux (perhaps), and the 28th entry on the list is François Truffaut (*Fahrenheit 451*). It's slightly surprising to find that Truffaut apparently regards *Fahrenheit* as more Hitchcock-orientated than, say, *La Peau douce*, that love story cast in the style of a thriller. But future editions are undoubtedly going to contain two additional entries: François Truffaut (*The Bride Wore Black*) and Peter Bogdanovich (*Targets*).

Both Bogdanovich and Truffaut have interviewed Hitchcock lovingly and lengthily, an occupation which, once embarked on, obviously becomes slightly obsessional; and both their films are riddled with allusions, visual nods and becks in the direction of the great man. They compare intriguingly at other points: neither film finally feels Hitchcockian (Truffaut, after all, is Renoir's spiritual son, which can't allow anything closer than a step-fatherly association with Hitchcock); both films deal in the theme of multiple killing, one which for obvious reasons of difficulty and sympathy-switching has never attracted Hitchcock himself; and the Atlantic stretches between Bogdanovich's view of murder in public and Truffaut's European preference for bloodless, fantasised death.

Perhaps it's being a little solemn to talk about Jeanne Moreau in *The Bride Wore Black* as a multiple murderess: she would be, that is, if she were real, and if Truffaut hadn't gone to a good deal of trouble to keep her in a state of suspended animation – an enigma, an illusion, an elegant black and white fantasy in a Technicolor landscape. In the opening sequence, she is unmistakably playing Marnie: the half-packed suitcase, the neat little piles of banknotes, the doleful parting from mother and sister, and the moment when, having sadly boarded the train on one side, she ducks briskly down on the other and marches back along the platform (Marnie camera angles all around) on her errand of vengeance. But when she turns up to commit her first murder – the avenger in white at the cocktail party, luring her victim out on to the balcony and giving him a vertiginous and entirely unrealistic push – Truffaut is already parting company with Hitchcock. The special quality of *The Bride Wore Black*, it's apparent, is the floating airiness with which it dreams strange dreams.

I haven't read the William Irish novel on which the film is based, though one might guess it to be not unlike his *Phantom Lady*. But whatever its origins, Truffaut's construction is distinctly Hitchcockian: the teasing opening; the quick, cavalier first murder, to keep you guessing about what the lady may be up to; the slower, more involving second killing (poison in the bank-clerk's arrack in an Alpine village); then, with the third victim, the full disclosure of

motive; followed by a longer episode in which the question is whether the lady, by now posing as Diana the Huntress for an artist susceptible enough to have painted her before he met her, will have the heart to shoot her arrow.

As a structure, it ought to work. And in detail the film is often so felicitous that it very nearly does. Moreau doesn't come on to a set: she materialises, suddenly there, with her Bette Davis basilisk stare. And Truffaut has Hitchcockian fun with her delayed entrances – like the sequence in which the little boy keeps glancing over his shoulder on his way home from school, and you expect the apparition in every camera swirl around a bush, and only finally get it after a characteristic trick with a bouncing ball. She has a neat little avenger's diary, in which she meticulously crosses off names; white gloves, to be drawn on primly while a victim groans at her feet; a trick of fingering knives, though it's only at the end that she murderously employs one; and she compels a measure of admiring disbelief which makes Kim Novak in *Vertigo* look like the heroine of a documentary.

One could easily work one's way through *The Bride Wore Black* listing instances of Truffaut's alluring ingenuities – the juxtaposition of scream and Wedding March on the last shot, or Moreau's engaging appearance, in full widow's rig, at the tail end of the funeral procession, or the dream atmosphere of the shooting on the church steps, with its mixture of shock and repetition. But everyone knows the quality of Truffaut's sun-and-shadow charm, and it depends whether you see *The Bride Wore Black* as a diversion, a minor exercise after the (presumable) disappointment of reactions to *Fahrenheit*, or whether you take Truffaut up where he might choose to be taken, on higher Hitchcockian ground.

His problem is the basic one of persuasion – which doesn't mean that one is asking for realism, querying how Moreau apparently comes to know so much more than the police, or how at the end she finds herself in a prison cell practically cheek by jowl with her next (male) victim. But her motive for an extreme course of action is that in a careless moment with a loaded rifle five men destroyed the great love of her life; and to show the great love in a fey slow-motion fantasy (*I Confess?*) of two skipping children really won't do, at any level from parody upwards. The men, in their role of pre-ordained victims, exist only to die; though Truffaut rings the changes on vanity, folly and duplicity by making each in turn see Moreau as an object, an illusion, a prize to be added to the list of conquests or a consolation prize for conquests never attempted. Because her victims would use her if they could, her annihilating use of them seems somehow defensible, if not credible.

'I dozed off. I thought I was at the cinema,' says the politician, just before Moreau, in her school-teacher disguise, locks him in the absurd little cupboard under the stairs and tapes down the door. One could repeat it of the film: 'I dozed off. I thought I was at a Hitchcock movie.' The mistiness is quite deliberate, and knowing Truffaut's liking for the Hitchcock films (*Vertigo*, *Notorious*) which he sees as filmed dreams, the intent seems plain. But Hitchcock, as we know, directs the audience; Truffaut only directs the film, and the dream remains on the screen and never breaks out into the auditorium. *The Bride Wore Black* remains graceful and slender; a Truffaut lamb in Hitchcock wolf's clothing.

**Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1968**

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## THE BRIDE WORE BLACK (LA MARIÉE ÉTAIT EN NOIR)

*Director:* François Truffaut

*Production Companies:* Les Films du Carrosse,

Les Productions Artistes Associés,

Dino De Laurentiis Cinematografica (Rome)

*Producer:* Marcel Berbert

*Production Manager:* Georges Charlot

*Assistant Directors:* Jean Chayrou, Roland Thénot

*Screenplay:* François Truffaut

*Adaptation/Dialogue:* Jean-Louis Richard

*Based on the novel* The Bride Wore Black *by:* William Irish

*Director of Photography:* Raoul Coutard

*Camera Operator:* Georges Liron

*Stills Photography:* Marilù Parolini

*Film Editor:* Claudine Bouché

*Art Director:* Pierre Guffroy

*Hair:* Simone Knapp

*Music:* Bernard Herrmann

*Music Director:* André Girard

*Sound:* René Levert

## Cast

Jeanne Moreau (*Julie Kohler*)

Jean-Claude Brialy (*Corey*)

Michel Bouquet (*Robert Coral*)

Charles Denner (*Fergus*)

Claude Rich (*Bliss*)

Daniel Boulanger (*Holmes*)

Michel Lonsdale (*René Morane*)

Serge Rousseau (*David*)

Jacques Robiolles (*Charlie*)

Luce Fabiole (*Julie's mother*)

Sylvine Delannoy (*Mrs Morane*)

Jacqueline Rouillard (*maid*)

Van Doude (*Inspector Fabri*)

Paul Pavel (*mechanic*)

Maurice Garell (*plaintiff*)

Gilles Quéant (*examining magistrate*)

Alexandra Stewart (*Miss Becker*)

Frédérique Fontanarosa, Renaud Fontanarosa (*musicians*)

Christophe Brunot (*Morane's son*)

Dominique Robier (*Sabine*)

Michèle Viborel (*Gilberte, Bliss's fiancée*)

Michèle Montfort (*model*)

Daniel Pommereulle (*Fergus's friend*)

France/Italy 1967

107 mins

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From Fri 4 Feb

### Philosophical Screens: Jules et Jim

Thu 10 Feb 20:20

### The Representation of Women in Truffaut's Films

Fri 18 Feb 18:20

## THE LITERARY TRUFFAUT

### Anne and Muriel (Les Deux Anglaises et le continent)

Sat 5 Feb 12:20; Thu 17 Feb 17:50 (+ intro by actor Kika Markham); Tue 22 Feb 20:25

### Fahrenheit 451

Sat 5 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 12:40; Sun 27 Feb 18:40

### The Story of Adèle H (L'Histoire d'Adèle H)

Wed 9 Feb 20:55; Sat 12 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 18:20

### The Green Room (La Chambre verte)

Thu 10 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:40; Wed 23 Feb 20:40

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## THE HITCHCOCK TRUFFAUT

### Shoot the Pianist (Tirez sur le pianiste)

Tue 1 Feb 20:50; Fri 11 Feb 18:30; Sat 26 Feb 13:20

### The Bride Wore Black (La Mariée était en noir)

Fri 4 Feb 20:45; Sun 13 Feb 18:00; Sun 27 Feb 12:10

### Finally Sunday! (Vivement dimanche!)

Sat 5 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 12:30; Sun 27 Feb 15:00

### Mississippi Mermaid (La Sirène du Mississippi)

Sun 6 Feb 12:40; Fri 18 Feb 20:35; Fri 25 Feb 18:00

### La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sun 6 Feb 18:20; Sat 12 Feb 17:20; Sat 26 Feb 15:30

### The Woman Next Door (La Femme d'à côté)

Tue 8 Feb 20:30; Mon 21 Feb 18:10; Thu 24 Feb 20:30

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