



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Anne and Muriel

(Deux Anglaises et le continent)

The screening on Thursday 17 February will be introduced by actor Kika Markham.

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

David Thomson on 'Anne and Muriel'

Truffaut called *Anne and Muriel* 'a sorrowful film, possibly even wallowing in its own misery, but sincere'. The previous year, his love affair with Catherine Deneuve had ended. Seriously depressed, he entered a clinic for a sleep cure, and took one book with him: Henri-Pierre Roché's *Les Deux Anglaises et le continent*. He knew the novel already, because he had had such success with Roché's *Jules et Jim*. He seems to have set out on this new project to wipe away depression, and he shot it in a hurry, falling in love with one of his two British lead actresses, Kika Markham. Still, it's a dark picture with disturbing emotions, not as poised or pretty as *Jules et Jim*, and the darkness found box office failure.

The girls are the Brown sisters, Anne (Markham) and Muriel (Stacey Tendeter), and they live in north Wales (a location rediscovered in Normandy), in a grey house on a cliff side; it's pale green outside, with rich blues and browns inside. A French youth, Claude Roc (Jean-Pierre Léaud), visits them. The trio play games indoors and out. They argue over words and ideas. Immense attraction flows. Claude believes he is in love with Muriel. The girls' mother, Mrs Brown, decides he must lodge in a neighbour's house, and that separation locks the love in place. But Muriel declines him. 'No, never,' she says, and then she withdraws 'never'. Mrs Brown settles the confusion with Claude's mother (the fathers are dead). Claude goes back to Paris and breaks off with Muriel. At which point, she decides she was his 'wife'.

Time passes – it is one of the best films about the passage of time. Anne arrives in France to be a sculptor. She and Claude have an affair. She sees other men. Muriel comes to Paris. She and Claude are together again. But then Anne tells her about her own affair with Claude. Muriel storms away and Anne dies of tuberculosis. Then Muriel returns to France and she and Claude are lovers for one night. She came to make love, and to bury it. Later still, Claude the novelist writes about it all.

Truffaut and his scriptwriter Jean Gruault called their story 'the Brontë sisters meet Marcel Proust', and it is a film of words and letters: we see the Roché novel with Truffaut's handwritten notes on it; we hear the director's narration, the germ of Claude's novel; and there are recurring issues of translation. Apparently the English actresses were taken aback by Léaud at first. He seemed restrained and inward. They wondered if both sisters would fall for him so deeply, and they have a point. These women deserve a more interesting Claude.

But an essential to *Anne and Muriel* is its lack of tidiness, Muriel – onanistic and repressed, 'untamed' but nearly an invalid, withdrawn yet controlling – is never explained or healed, except that her masked power could be something she clings to in competition with the prettier and more social Anne. This is an

intricate study of siblings, in which Truffaut's initial hope – to hire actresses who were sisters – may have lingered from his affairs with both Françoise Dorléac (whom he directed in 1964's *Silken Skin*) and her sister Catherine Deneuve.

We know Truffaut's famous estimate that 'women are magic', but it's a tricky proposition. In her 1978 book on Truffaut, Annette Insdorf wrote: 'To the question posed by numerous males in Truffaut's films, we can add "are women mad?", "are women vulnerable?", "are women more complex than men assume?"' But if women are magic – or more extreme – do they depend on men who are watchers, suckers or shy?

There are overwhelming women in Truffaut: Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), of course, in *Jules et Jim*; Julie (Moreau again) in *The Bride Wore Black*; the elusive seductress (Deneuve) in *Mississippi Mermaid*; Adèle H (Isabelle Adjani) – and don't forget the wife (Nelly Benedetti) in *Silken Skin*, or even Bernadette Lafont from *Les Mistons* and *A Gorgeous Girl like Me*. Some of these are killers or self-destructives, and some seem underachieved. Adèle H feels to me more a scheme than a human being, and I never think Moreau quite gets or wants to get *The Bride Wore Black* (whereas in *Jules et Jim*, her assurance, her rapid shifts of mood, are so instinctive they lead the movie). But Truffaut steadily identifies with men drawn to women, yet often bewildered or destroyed by them and by their urge to see beyond male designs.

In 2000, Ian MacKillop published an invaluable book, *Free Spirits: Henri-Pierre Roché, François Truffaut and the Two English Girls*, based on research at the Roché archive. He points out that in the novel Anne does not die, and he wonders why Truffaut made that change. Do movies need to be more decisive? Is it the pay-off to Anne saying, 'My mouth is full of earth' – supposedly the last words of Emily Brontë? Truffaut was intrigued by the gap and the bond between Charlotte and Emily Brontë (though which is which in this film?). But for the director this was also a work made out of despairing passion, or a despair with passion.

There's a startling scene where Muriel at last gives herself to Claude; we see a bed steeped in blood, and the camera sinks into its magma. Truffaut was seldom so explicit, and over the years that scene has become more painful. It matches Muriel's black vomit when she hears about Anne and Claude. The film's commercial reception was so poor that Truffaut was persuaded to cut it down, from 132 to 108 minutes, and he was urged to lose the bloody bed. But he would not give it up.

Anne and Muriel has remained with me better than most Truffaut films. It is a period piece that feels true, but the period is not laid on like cream. The Georges Delerue score is heartfelt, and not allowed to be ecstatic. Psychologically this is a modern story, despite characters from before World War I. Muriel is more interesting than Anne, but Anne is more natural. Muriel is always laying down the law, then breaking it. Anne is like the flow of water. They are sisters, but from Bresson and Renoir. It is a story about how dangerous love is, and the wounds it leaves.

David Thomson, *Sight & Sound*, March 2011

ANNE AND MURIEL (DEUX ANGLAISES ET LE CONTINENT)

Director: François Truffaut
©: Les Films du Carrosse S.A.
Production Companies: Les Films du Carrosse, Cinétel
Executive Producer: Marcel Berbert
Unit Production Manager: Roland Thénot
Production Manager: Claude Miller
Production Administrator: Christian Lentrelien
Assistant Director: Suzanne Schiffman
Script Supervisor: Christine Pellé
Adaptation and Dialogue: François Truffaut, Jean Gruault
Based on the novel by: Henri-Pierre Roché
Director of Photography: Nestor Almendros
Camera: Jean-Claude Rivière
Assistant Camera: Yves Lafaye
Editors: Yann Dedet, Martine Barraque
Art Director: Michel de Broin
Assistant Art Director: Jean-Pierre Kohut-Svelko
Properties: Jean-Claude Dolbert
Costumes: Gitt Magrini
Costume Assistant: Pierangelo Cicoletti
Hair Stylist: Simone Knapp
Laboratory: L.T.C. (Saint-Cloud)
Music: Georges Delerue
Sound: René Levert
Sound Mixing: SIS La Garenne
Narrator: François Truffaut

Cast

Jean-Pierre Léaud (*Claude Roc*)
Kika Markham (*Anne Brown*)
Stacey Tendeter (*Muriel Brown*)
Sylvia Marriott (*Mrs Brown*)
Philippe Léotard (*Diurka*)
Marie Mansart (*Mme Roc*)
David Markham (*palmist*)
Irène Tunc (*Ruta*)
Mark Peterson (*Mr Flint*)
Georges Delerue (*Claude's Business Agent*)
Marie Iracane (*Claire and Claude Roc's maid*)
Marcel Berbert (*art dealer*)
Jeanne Lobre (*Jeanne*)

uncredited

Annie Miller (*Monique de Monferrand*)
Christine Pellé (*Claude's secretary*)
Anne Levaslot (*Muriel as a child*)
Sophie Jeanne (*Clarisse*)
René Gaillard (*taxi driver*)
Sophie Baker (*friend in café*)

France 1971©

130 mins

FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Jules et Jim (Jules and Jim)

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

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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