



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Mississippi Mermaid

(La Sirène du Mississippi)

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

A contemporary review

Oddly enough, after Moreau's obsessive hunt in *La Mariée était en noir*, and before the more jocular manipulations of destiny and chance by the femme semi-fatale of *Une belle fille comme moi*, Truffaut has declared himself dissatisfied with *La Sirène du Mississippi* because of the disproportionate weight that it supposedly throws on Catherine Deneuve's insouciant gold-digger. Odd, that is, since the film seems an ideal mapping out of everything that is quintessentially Truffaut, and the relationship of Louis and Julie/Marion such a perfect and characteristically balanced match – the idealism of the one, the deceits and disguises of the other – that the synthesis suggested by the name of the island where they meet, and anticipated through the introductory clip from *La Marseillaise* depicting the revolutionary alliance of the National Guard with the volunteers from Marseilles, almost fails to take place (and appears to have less chance of doing so in the version that has finally arrived in this country, which is not only lamentably dubbed but shorn of the occasional scene, including one in which the rapprochement of the star-crossed lovers seems for a while most complete).

But the inequality sensed by the director perhaps has less to do with the attention paid to Marion's capriciousness than with the peculiar passivity with which Louis' idealism is revealed: a stripping away, in fact of the character's realism. 'I don't keep souvenirs, it's the ring that matters' is Louis' comment when presented with the piece of string sent by Julie Roussel for measuring the wedding ring; Louis commits a calculated deception of his own in writing to Julie that he is the foreman rather than the owner of the cigarette plant, so that money would not be a factor in their long-distance relationship; and Jardine manager of the plant and Louis' confidential adviser (played by Marcel Berbert, also the film's producer), is a man who delights in facts and figures.

Louis progresses to his final declaration (and acceptance of his own death) through a series of decreasingly real landscapes: from the lush mountains and valleys of Réunion to some kind of countryside mural (a suggestion of Renoir *père*) in the Cap d'Antibes hotel room where the first reconciliation takes place, to the bleak hotel room in Lyon and the final snowbound hideaway in Switzerland.

But while the terrain becomes progressively more abstract, drained of life and sustenance (while scarcely making a political point, Truffaut lingers equivocally for a moment on the blacks toiling in the fields of Réunion after Louis has passed by on a tour of inspection with his bride), the lovers become more real, or at least more revealed. White is the dominant colour on Réunion, both in the clothes of the central characters and the appointments of the house – a pretence of purity surrounded by darkness, in church and in the bedroom scenes, and in the formal masking device used when Marion slips away to meet her accomplice. When Louis discovers her duplicity, he rips up her

immaculate finery and hurls it on the fire; after their first reconciliation, their brief period of contented domesticity in Aix-en-Provence centres on the scene in which, now dressed in indeterminate beige, they sit blissfully in front of the fire; and for their final ‘misunderstanding’, breakdown and equivocal reunion in the mountain cabin, clothing is appropriately sombre and motives and desires have a caricatured clarity (Louis ‘reading’ Marion’s latest treachery in the Snow White comic strip; Marion incongruously clinging to her expensive coat).

Louis’ pursuit of the real Marion and the ideal ‘Julie’ he had originally taken her to be: ‘You were nicer to me when you called me Julie’, complains Marion at one point in their flight – involves his divesting himself of everything he has; a total commitment which Marion maliciously suggests, in her quoting of her ex-accomplice’s division of the world into fools and bastards, is also an abasement which might finally make him unworthy. Paralleling Louis’ private detective hunt (‘I thought I had already come part of the way’, he says ruefully at the beginning, looking from his photograph of Julie Roussel to the girl who presents herself to him, ‘but I find it isn’t so’), ironically conducted through the media of classified advertisements and the television commercial which leads him to Marion in France, is the formal search of the detective Comolli-Michel Bouquet in the Martin Balsam role of the private eye who inconveniently proves as persistent as the hero.

La Sirène, in fact, takes the Hitchcock glazing more successfully than any other Truffaut film, and far from being the mistake that its director seems to believe, looks to be, thematically as well as chronologically, the centre-piece in his clutch of films about the wilfully destructive heroine and the wilfully destructible hero.

Richard Combs, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, June 1974

MISSISSIPPI MERMAID (LA SIRÈNE DU MISSISSIPI)

Director: François Truffaut
©/Production Company: Les Films du Carrosse
Production Companies: Les Productions Artistes Associés, Produzioni Associate Delphos
Producer: Marcel Berbert
Production Manager: Claude Miller
General Manager: Roland Thénot
Assistant Directors: Jean-José Richer, Jean-François Detré
Script Girl: Suzanne Schiffman
Screenplay: François Truffaut
Based on the novel Waltz into Darkness *by:* William Irish
Director of Photography: Denys Clerval
Camera: Jean Chiabaut
Assistant Camera: Jacques Assuérus
Chief Electrician: Claude Rouxel
Key Grip: Louis Balthazard
Set Photography: Léonard de Reamy
Film Editor: Agnès Guillemot
Art Director: Claude Pignot
Catherine Deneuve’s Costumes by: Yves Saint-Laurent
Make-up: Michel Deruelle, J.P. Eychenne
Hairdresser: Jacqueline Anatole
Music: Antoine Duhamel
Sound Recording: Guy Chichignoud
Sound Mixer: René Levert

Cast

Jean-Paul Belmondo (*Louis Mahé*)
Catherine Deneuve (*Julie Roussel/Marion*)
Michel Bouquet (*Comolli*)
Nelly Borgeaud (*Berthe Roussel*)
Marcel Berbert (*Jardine*)
Martine Ferrière (*landlady*)
Roland Thénot (*Richard*)
Yves Drouhet

France/Italy 1970©
123 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

In cultural partnership with



A selection of 10 Truffaut films will be available on BFI Player Subscription from January, and a selection of Truffaut films will screen around the UK

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

To Wong Foo, Thanks for Everything! Julie Newmar

Tue 1 Feb 18:20; Fri 25 Feb 20:45

Young Soul Rebels

Wed 2 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Thu 17 Feb 20:45

All About My Mother (Todo sobre mi madre)

Wed 2 Feb 20:45; Wed 16 Feb 21:00

Beautiful Thing

Thu 3 Feb 20:45; Mon 14 Feb 20:30

The Handmaiden (Ah-ga-ssi)

Fri 4 Feb 17:50; Sat 12 Feb 20:10; Sun 27 Feb 17:50

Rent

Sat 5 Feb 12:30; Sun 20 Feb 18:10

Maurice

Sun 6 Feb 15:20; Mon 14 Feb 18:00

The Watermelon Woman

Mon 7 Feb 20:45; Sat 26 Feb 20:30

Happy Together (Chun gwong cha si)

Tue 8 Feb 18:15 (+ intro by Yi Wang, Queer East); Sun 13 Feb 15:20

My Own Private Idaho

Tue 8 Feb 20:45; Wed 23 Feb 18:00 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair)

Brokeback Mountain

Wed 9 Feb 17:45 (+ intro by BFI Race Equality Lead Rico Johnson-Sinclair); Mon 21 Feb 20:25

Go Fish

Wed 9 Feb 20:40; Sat 26 Feb 18:20

Rope

Thu 10 Feb 18:30; Tue 22 Feb 14:30

Victim

Thu 10 Feb 20:40; Sun 13 Feb 13:00; Mon 21 Feb 18:00

Desert Hearts

Fri 11 Feb 20:40; Wed 16 Feb 18:20 (+ intro by BFI Head Librarian Emma Smart)

My Beautiful Laundrette

Sat 12 Feb 18:20; Tue 15 Feb 20:45; Sat 19 Feb 20:45

A Fantastic Woman (Una mujer fantástica)

Sun 13 Feb 18:40; Tue 22 Feb 20:50

Mädchen in Uniform

Fri 18 Feb 20:30; Sat 26 Feb 16:00

Moonlight

Thu 24 Feb 14:30; Mon 28 Feb 20:45

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://www.bfi.org.uk/join)

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We’re also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.