



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

# **The Woman Next Door**

## **(La Femme d'à côté)**

### **Mike Figgis on 'The Woman Next Door'**

The following scene takes place 19 minutes and 45 seconds into François Truffaut's 1981 film, *The Woman Next Door*.

Bernard (Gérard Depardieu) is in a supermarket staring a hole in a shelf of food. In the background we see Mathilde (Fanny Ardant) slide across into the frame, spot Bernard and decide to come and talk to him. They shop and talk about what an unfortunate coincidence it is that she and her husband have moved into the house next to him (and his wife and small child). How they haven't seen each other for over eight years, since the end of their love affair. How she was unhappy at the time that she couldn't take any more and walked out of his life. However, they are both older now, mature enough to deal with the situation and also both lucky they have found such great partners. Mathilde thinks that Bernard has a great wife and Bernard feels the same about Mathilde's husband.

We cut to the underground car park, and in a long single take we follow Bernard and Mathilde as they walk and talk their way to the car. Bernard is pushing a trolley full of grocery bags. We learn that neither of them has confessed their past relationship to their new partners. They stop for a while and there is a moment when we catch a glimpse of exposed emotion on Mathilde's face as she talks about the pain of their break-up, but she holds it in check and they resume walking. (So far, there has been no music at all on the soundtrack.)

She tells him that he and his wife are invited to dinner next week and she hopes that he will turn up this time (a reference to the fact that he ducked out of the last dinner). 'I'll be there,' he says, 'your faithful servant.' His face has a curious half smile. They have reached the car and she opens the back door and he hands her the bags as she packs them. (The car is unlocked which makes me wonder if this is a comment on the relative safety of France in the early 80s, or the director's decision that it was a lot quicker than having to do the scene fumbling with car keys.) He watches her with this funny half smile as she packs, and when she has finished, he hands her her shoulder bag. (It's difficult to say why exactly, but the way Depardieu does this is rather fine. He is a really interesting actor, and as I write this piece I realise there is no-one like him in the British or American acting world.) She takes the bag from him, shuts the back door and they both sort of grin at each other. She says: 'Shall we kiss on it?' (being French, this actually means 'Shall we shake on it?'), and they do a formal double cheek job. She opens the driver's door and faces him (the door is between them). We have by now cut out of the long master shot and are now in a tighter two shot which will hold to the end of the scene. She: 'One more request... will you say my name... from time to time? I used to know when you were feeling hostile because you'd go a whole day without calling me Mathilde.' He stares at her with the same odd smile as she continues. 'I'm sure you don't even remember.' He looks down and sighs, then looks at her and moves around the car door so they are now next to

each other. He puts his right hand onto the side of her face (his hands are huge) and says ‘Mathilde.’ He says this in a very gentle way. She puts her hand onto his and cubs her face against his hand, then they look at each other, and then they kiss. It’s quite a long kiss and, unlike most screen kisses, it’s believable. It’s the kiss of two ex-lovers who have just realised that the ‘ex’ is redundant. She eases out of the kiss and her eyes close and she falls to the ground in a dead faint. At this point the music comes in for the first time and it’s a very good piece of dramatic, romantic score which really pulls at your heart, especially when Bernard says ‘Mathilde’ over and over again as he cradles her head in those huge hands. She opens her eyes and he helps her up. She gives him a tragic glance as she gets into the car and starts the engine. He says ‘Sure you can drive?’, but she doesn’t answer, just floors the accelerator and drives out of the shot leaving Bernard standing alone.

This is a very good film. I’ve seen it twice now. The first time was at the Phoenix in London and again recently on video. Both times it made me sad (which is good). Let’s face it, most films are very boring and vanish quickly from memory.

Wasn’t this Truffaut’s penultimate film? And wasn’t he with the stunning Fanny Ardant at the time? This must have been a tough film for him to make. I think he must have been pretty sad when he shot it. But that is not why the film is so good. The script is very tight, every scene is about one or both of the lovers; the acting is really good and very believable. It’s not a sentimental film (and here the sparse use of music is a plus). It’s quite erotic but the sex never takes over, it’s just something that lovers need to do, they have to have each other. I don’t think it’s ever funny, but there is a very French scene in which Depardieu cannot get to grips with his car and is very uncool. His job is pretty strange too – he seems to be a driving instructor for supertankers, and we keep seeing him on a scale model of a ship in a scale model of a harbour. It’s not the sort of job Tom Cruise would do.

Other reasons why I love this film: it’s got so much heart, and it seems to be about *something*. Check it out.

**Mike Figgis, *Sight & Sound*, October 1995**

**THE WOMAN NEXT DOOR (LA FEMME D’À COTÉ)**

*Director:* François Truffaut  
*©/Production Companies:* Les Films du Carrosse, TF1 Films Production  
*Executive Producer:* Armand Barbault  
*Production Manager:* Roland Thénot  
*Assistant Production Managers:* Jacques Vidal, François Héberlé  
*Administration:* Jean-François Lentrelien  
*Production Secretaries:* Josiane Couëdel, Anny Bartanowsky  
*Assistant Director:* Suzanne Schiffman  
*2nd Assistant Directors:* Alain Tasma, Gilles Loutfi  
*Script Supervisor:* Christine Pellé  
*Original Screenplay:* François Truffaut, Suzanne Schiffman, Jean Aurel  
*Director of Photography:* William Lubtchansky  
*William Lubtchansky’s Assistants:* Caroline Champetier, Barcha Bauer  
*Electricians:* Robert Beulens, Emmanuel Demorgon, Patrick Lemaire  
*Grips:* André Atellian, Michel Gentils  
*Stills Photography:* Alain Venisse  
*Editor:* Martine Barraqué  
*Assistant Editors:* Marie-Aimée Debril, Catherine Drzymalkowski  
*Art Director:* Jean-Pierre Kohut-Svelto  
*Assistant Art Director:* Pierre Gompertz  
*Properties:* Jacques Preisach  
*Costumes:* Michèle Cerf  
*Costumes Assistant:* Malika Brahim  
*Make-up:* Thi-Loan N’Guyen  
*Hair:* Catherine Crassac

*Titles/Opticals:* Euro-Titres  
*Laboratory:* L.T.C. Saint-Cloud  
*Prints by:* Fujicolor, Pyral  
*Music:* Georges Delerue  
*Music Publisher:* Editions Sidonie  
*Sound:* Michel Laurent, Jacques Maumont  
*Sound Assistant:* Michel Mellier  
*Sound Studios:* Paris-Studios-Cinéma  
*Sound Effects:* Daniel Couteau  
*Subtitles:* Helen Scott  
*Publicity:* Simon Mizrahi

**Cast**  
Gérard Depardieu (*Bernard Coudray*)  
Fanny Ardant (*Mathilde Bauchard*)  
Henri Garçin (*Philippe Bauchard*)  
Michèle Baumgartner (*Arlette Coudray*)  
Roger Van Hool (*Roland Duguet*)  
Véronique Silver (*Mme. Odile Jouve*)  
Philippe Morier-Genoud (*doctor*)  
Nicole Vauthier  
Muriel Combe  
Olivier Becquaert (*Thomas Coudray*)

France 1981©  
106 mins

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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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