



FRANÇOIS TRUFFAUT: FOR THE LOVE OF FILMS

Philosophical Screens: Jules et Jim

François Truffaut's lyrical and melancholic journey through the lives of the participants in a love triangle makes for one of his most adored films; *Jules et Jim* offers a profound and complicated portrait of love. In this session of Philosophical Screens our regular panellists Lucy Bolton and Catherine Wheatley are joined by Professor Fiona Handyside (University of Exeter) to discuss the many facets of love in Truffaut's film – jealousy and possession, eros and platonic love – as well as contemplating the fleeting nature of happiness, the elusiveness of memories, and the enduring appeal of the feminine enigma.

Speakers

Lucy Bolton is Reader in Film Studies at Queen Mary University of London. She is the author of *Contemporary Cinema and the Philosophy of Iris Murdoch* (EUP 2019) and is currently writing a book on philosophy and film stardom.

Fiona Handyside is Associate Professor in Film Studies at the University of Exeter. She is the author of *Sofia Coppola: A Cinema of Girlhood* (I.B.Tauris, 2017) and *Cinema at the Shore: The Beach in French Film* (Peter Lang, 2014). She is the editor of *Eric Rohmer: Interviews* (University of Mississippi Press, 2013) and co-editor of *International Cinema and the Girl: Local Issues, Transnational Contexts* (Palgrave, 2016). She is currently working on a study called *Girls' Hairstories*, analysing hair styles from Elsa's plait in *Frozen* (Buck and Lee, 2013) to Arabella's pink wig and shaved head in *I May Destroy You* (Coel, 2020).

Catherine Wheatley is Reader in Film and Visual Culture at King's College London. Her books include *Stanley Cavell and Film: Scepticism and Self-Reliance at the Cinema*, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: The Ethic of the Image*, the BFI Film Classics book on *Caché*, and, with Lucy Mazdon, *Sex, Art and Cinephilia: French Cinema in Britain*. Catherine also writes regularly for *Sight and Sound* magazine.

Reading Suggestions:

Robert Stam, *François Truffaut and Friends*, Rutgers University Press, 2006.

Antoine de Baeque and Serge Toubiana, *Truffaut: A Biography*, University of California Press, 2008.

Tim Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Jules et Jim: a contemporary review

Jules et Jim is very much a conscious attempt on Truffaut's part to make a synthesis of his first two films: to combine the 'big' subject with obvious human significance of *Les Quatre cents coups* with what he calls the 'plastic enterprise' of *Tirez sur le pianiste*. And he has succeeded partly, perhaps,

because the novel by Henri-Pierre Roché (best known as ‘the man who introduced Gertrude Stein to Picasso’) from which the film is adapted was already in itself both a ‘plastic enterprise’ and a strikingly honest study of human relationships.

In the Paris of 1910, two young writers, one with a French passport, the other with a German one, but both inhabitants of that pre-1914 Bohemia nourished by letters of credit, meet and become friends for life. Jim, the Frenchman, is tall and successful with women; Jules is neither. Into their lives steps Catherine (Jeanne Moreau). Both are taken with her, but it is Jules she marries. Jealousy scarcely enters into these relationships, for Catherine is a ‘new woman’, more a pal than a girlfriend – ‘Jim always thought of Catherine as *un vrai Jules*’ – and Jules is also slang for a he-man. Like the Scandinavian heroines she admires, Catherine is a force of nature, a cataclysm. On the eve of her marriage, she avenges an imagined slight from Jules’ family – and his failure to back her up – by sleeping with one of her ex-lovers. Like most people who are basically and irredeemably unhappy, she feels that it doesn’t really matter if she hurts other people – they are still better off than she is. And when, after the Armistice, Jim comes to Germany to stay with Jules and Catherine, he finds Jules resigned to Catherine’s periodic bolting. Rather than lose her, he even pushes Jim into her arms: she’ll still be *ours* that way, he says.

Friendship, Truffaut seems to be saying, is rarer and more precious than love. Or perhaps he is also saying that friendship, not being as natural or as innate as sex relationships, must always be destroyed by the forces of nature re-asserting themselves – just as in Goethe’s *Elective Affinities*, to which several references are made in the film, the wilderness is always waiting to destroy the carefully nurtured garden.

Tirez sur le pianiste moved back and forth between comedy and tragedy with intoxicating brio. In *Jules et Jim* both elements are constantly present, one within the other, as in a chemical suspension. Although the film begins gaily enough, one soon realises that, under the gaiety, tragedy is already present. And even at the end, terrifying though it is, one feels that life is nevertheless re-asserting itself. This precarious balance, this refusal of the genres, is of course very reminiscent of Jean Renoir; and indeed Renoir’s influence can be felt throughout the film, in its treatment of character, direction of actors, and feeling for landscape. Jules never seems either contemptible or ridiculous, as he so easily might have been. In fact, all of the characters are sympathetic – even Jim, even Catherine. As in *La Règle du jeu*, everyone is in the right, everyone has his reasons. Although Truffaut is in complete control of the situation, the actors are allowed a life of their own, and this freedom to breathe, to exist totally, is what makes them such thoroughly rounded characters, enabling one to sympathise with them. Nor are Oskar Werner (whom Truffaut first noticed as the Bavarian student in *Lola Montès*) and Henri Serre (a young avant-garde theatre actor), who play Jules and Jim respectively, ever crushed by the immense authority of Jeanne Moreau. Catherine is a very difficult role to bring off, but she achieves extremely effective simplicity without sacrificing any of her brilliance and technique. Just as Renoir always seemed able not only to get a good performance from his actors, but also to let them express themselves as fully as possible, here we have Jeanne Moreau giving a total representation of her possibilities.

As in Renoir, too, music plays a large part in *Jules et Jim* (and there is even a song for Jeanne Moreau), as does an economically successful evocation of

period and place: pre-World War I Paris, the Riviera before the tourists got hold of it, and the deliquescent landscapes of the Rhine valley. The greatest tribute to Truffaut's period sense is that there is never any jarring when he occasionally cuts in actual newsreels of the time. For the war episodes he has distorted ordinary film to CinemaScope width, with shell bursts spreading right across the screen; when he goes back to Paris, it is always with a newsreel shot that communicates a sense of motion – a train, a bus, the Métro.

What belongs undeniably and unmistakably to Truffaut is the film's sense of movement. Just as the story sweeps along from 1910 to 1933, so Truffaut's camera pans, swoops, dives, irises in and out, tracks and turns on itself in great full circles. Cuts and jump-cuts follow on each other with breathless speed and elegance. But whenever it is necessary, Truffaut never hesitates to slow his camera down, to slide in and hold the characters in close-up for important dialogue scenes. And then, smoothly, the movement starts up again: aerial shots scoop down and we soar away. In short, his technique (and Raoul Coutard's photography) is even more brilliant than in *Tirez sur le pianiste*; and as someone pointed out the other day, technique, after all, comes from the Greek word for art – *techne*. There will be those who will regret the simplicity of *Les Quatre cents coups*; and there will be those (myself included) who still have a sneaking nostalgia for the anarchy of *Tirez sur le pianiste*. But no one, I think, will have any more doubts about Truffaut's stature: he is right up there with the great directors (make your own list) of our time.

Richard Roud, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 1962

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

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

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

Fahrenheit 451

Sun 13 Feb 12:40; Sun 27 Feb 18:40

The Green Room (La Chambre verte)

15 Feb 20:40; Wed 23 Feb 20:40

Anne and Muriel (Les Deux Anglaises et le continent)

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

THE HITCHCOCK TRUFFAUT

Shoot the Pianist (Tirez sur le pianiste)

Fri 11 Feb 18:30; Sat 26 Feb 13:20

Finally Sunday! (Vivement dimanche!)

Sat 12 Feb 12:30; Sun 27 Feb 15:00

La Peau douce (Silken Skin)

Sat 12 Feb 17:20; Sat 26 Feb 15:30

The Bride Wore Black (La Mariée était en noir)

Sun 13 Feb 18:00; Sun 27 Feb 12:10

Mississippi Mermaid (La Sirène du Mississippi)

Fri 18 Feb 20:35; Fri 25 Feb 18:00

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

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

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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

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Programme notes and credits compiled by the BFI Documentation Unit

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