



LOVE, PAIN & CINEMA: THE FILMS OF JEAN EUSTACHE

The Lost Sorrows of Jean Eustache

La Peine perdue de Jean Eustache (The Lost Sorrows of Jean Eustache)

Director: Angel Diez

Subject of Film: Jean Eustache

Production Company: Films du Poisson

Producer: Yaël Fogiel

Director of Photography: Philippe Théaudière

Editor: Yvan Gaillard

Music: Groupe Musical Saint-Martin de Pessac

Sound: Jean-Pierre Ruh

With:

Jean-Pierre Léaud

Michel Lonsdale

Boris Eustache

Françoise Lebrun

Sylvie Durastanti

Le Père José Pena

Jean-Michel Barjol

Henri Martinez

France 1997

53 mins

Video

LOVE, PAIN & CINEMA: THE FILMS OF JEAN EUSTACHE

**The Virgin of Pessac (La Rosière de Pessac) +
The Virgin of Pessac 79 (La Rosière de Pessac
79)**

Sun 3 Sep 14:45; Tue 12 Sep 20:20

**The Pig (Le Cochon) + Job Offer (Offre d'emploi)
+ Alix's Pictures (Les Photos d'Alix)**

Sun 3 Sep 18:30; Wed 20 Sep 20:50

**The Lost Sorrows of Jean Eustache (La Peine
perdue de Jean Eustache) + panel discussion**

Tue 5 Sep 18:15

**Robinson's Place (Du côté de Robinson) + Santa
Claus Has Blue Eyes (Le Père Noël a les yeux
bleus)**

Tue 5 Sep 20:40; Thu 14 Sep 18:00

Numéro zéro

Fri 8 Sep 17:55; Sat 23 Sep 11:30

**The Mother and the Whore (La Maman et la
putain)**

Sun 10 Sep 14:15; Sat 23 Sep 14:10

My Little Loves (Mes petites amoureuses)

Mon 11 Sep 18:05; Mon 25 Sep 20:30

**A Dirty Story (Une Sale histoire) + Hieronymus
Bosch's Garden of Delights (Le jardin des
délices de Jérôme Bosch)**

Fri 15 Sep 18:20; Wed 27 Sep 20:40

With thanks to

Presented in partnership with Janus Films

As our retrospective of Jean Eustache's work begins, join us for the screening of *The Lost Sorrows of Jean Eustache*, followed by a conversation about Eustache and his cinema. An extremely personal portrait of the troubled director, Diaz's documentary uses the testimony of several of Eustache's collaborators and friends to probe the themes so strongly felt in his films, in particular the way the medium records life and reality. Following the screening, season curator David Thompson will lead a discussion with film critic Muriel Zagha and David Jenkins, Editor of *Little White Lies*, on Eustache and his extraordinary legacy.

Speakers

David Jenkins is a critic and writer on film who is currently editor of *Little White Lies* magazine and is just putting finishing touches to their 100th issue. Prior to that, he was a staff writer on *Time Out's* film section, and is the author of the book, *Filmmakers on Film: How They Create, Craft and Communicate* (Laurence King). He has edited monographs on the Coen brothers, David Fincher, Paul Thomas Anderson and Bong Joon-Ho.

Muriel Zagha is a French writer and broadcaster based in London. She has across many years contributed to *Front Row* and *The Saturday Review* on Radio 4 and *Night Waves*, *Free Thinking* and *The Essay* on Radio 3. She has made series for Radio 4 relating to French culture, including *Le Top des Pops* (a programme about French pop music, from Serge Gainsbourg to MC Solaar) and *Prisoners of Albion* (about famous French exiles in Britain: Voltaire, Verlaine and Victor Hugo). She also appears regularly on the TLS podcast and recently outlined a 'History of France in 10 Films' on *The Rest Is History* podcast. She writes film reviews and arts features for various publications including the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Apollo*, *Engelberg Ideas* and *Les Inrockuptibles*. She has also had two novels published in English.

Host: **David Thompson** has worked as a film programmer and film critic. Based in London, from 1990 he produced and directed arts documentaries at the BBC, working on such series as *Omnibus*, *Arena*, *Moving Pictures* and *The Late Show*. He has made films on artists, writers, musicians and composers, as well as profiles of the directors Jean Renoir, Quentin Tarantino, Milos Forman, Paul Verhoeven and Robert Altman. Since going freelance in 2008, he worked in France for the series *Il était une fois (Once Upon a Time...)* and for *Arena* he made portraits of Paul Scofield, Jonathan Miller and Nicolas Roeg. He has programmed several seasons at the BFI, including the first retrospectives devoted to Martin Scorsese and Jonathan Demme. Aside from contributing to magazines such as *Sight and Sound* and *Film Comment*, he was co-editor of the book *Scorsese on Scorsese* and editor of *Altman on Altman*.

Where to begin with Jean Eustache

In an unsurpassed era of cinematic scandals – think of *The Devils* (1971), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) or *La Grande Bouffe* (1973) – the controversy provoked by Jean Eustache's *The Mother and the Whore* at the 1973 Cannes Festival might seem surprising. A self-styled 'intimate epic' shot in unadorned black and white, lasting over three and a half hours and set solely in dowdy Parisian apartments and cafés, the film portrayed a love triangle whose participants spend most of their time... talking.

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Out of Sight

Fri 1 Sep 20:30; Thu 7 Sep 20:35; Fri 22 Sep 17:55

Girlhood (Bande des filles)

Sat 2 Sep 16:00; Sun 17 Sep 18:30; Mon 2 Oct 18:10

Il bidone (The Swindle)

Sun 3 Sep 12:20; Thu 14 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:40

Hidden (Caché)

Mon 4 Sep 18:00; Thu 21 Sep 20:40; Wed 27 Sep 17:50 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large)

Notorious

Tue 5 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep 11:45; Sun 1 Oct 15:20; Tue 3 Oct 20:30

The Wind Will Carry Us (Bad mara khahad board)

Wed 6 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by Shohini Chaudhuri, Professor of Film Studies, University of Essex); Fri 15 Sep 20:40

Ace in the Hole (aka The Big Carnival)

Fri 8 Sep 14:40; Mon 11 Sep 20:45; Fri 29 Sep 18:00

The Killers

Sat 9 Sep 18:20; Tue 12 Sep 14:30; Mon 18 Sep 20:50

The Maltese Falcon

Sun 10 Sep 11:50; Mon 25 Sep 14:40; Tue 26 Sep 20:55

F for Fake

Wed 13 Sep 18:20 (+ intro by Jason Wood, BFI Executive Director of Public Programmes & Audiences); Thu 21 Sep 18:30

Barry Lyndon

Sat 16 Sep 19:30; Sun 24 Sep 14:30

The Kid with a Bike (Le Gamin au vélo)

Tue 19 Sep 20:45; Tue 26 Sep 18:05

Au revoir les enfants

Wed 20 Sep 18:00 (+ intro by film critic and lecturer Dr Julia Wagner); Thu 28 Sep 20:45

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But the verbal fireworks eventually reveal a deep core of despair; most of the outrage the film provoked came from its very strong language. Eustache gave us an astounding example of confessional cinema, both emotionally unsparing and appallingly funny, which transcends its very specific place and time – a period of lost dreams following the failure of the May '68 revolution.

The film has become a touchstone for many directors in France and beyond who have explored similar territory. It has been highly praised by Olivier Assayas, Gaspar Noé and Harmony Korine, who called it 'the greatest movie about love'. Richard Linklater, Mia Hansen-Love and Cristi Puiu placed it in their most recent *Sight and Sound* top ten. For some time hard to see (for complex rights reasons), the film – along with Eustache's entire output – has now been lovingly restored.

While Jean Eustache knew well the French New Wave as personified by Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut – he even worked for the influential magazine *Cahiers du cinéma* – his film seemingly arrived from nowhere. Eustache grew up in Pessac, close to Bordeaux in the south-west of France, and was driven to move to Paris by his cinephile passion. Once there, he made two short films and a number of observational documentaries.

Only with the commercial success of *The Mother and the Whore* was Eustache able to realise the feature he had long planned to make about his teenage years, *My Little Loves* (1974). But when this did not achieve a comparable success, he became more and more withdrawn, ending his own life at the age of 42 in 1981.

There's no question that *The Mother and the Whore* stands above everything else Eustache made, so it's worth diving into the deep end. The length of the film (3 hours and 40 minutes) may seem intimidating given the absence of obvious high drama or visual kinetics, but the extraordinary dialogues and brilliant acting carry the audience on a completely absorbing journey.

Eustache wrote the part of Alexandre, a central character of unremitting self-obsession and tireless articulacy, with the impish New Wave icon Jean-Pierre Léaud in mind, and it is arguably his greatest screen performance. Alexandre's dandyish manners and rakish intentions closely mirrored those of Eustache himself, a seasoned flâneur who relished sitting in cafés and chatting up women. And the female characters were based on the director's past lovers, both the older, more resourceful Marie (Bernadette Lafont) Alexandre lives with (and off) and the promiscuous nurse Veronika (Françoise LeBrun) who he is determined will replace a girlfriend who has just dumped him.

Although many believed the film to be partly improvised, absolutely every word was scripted by Eustache, who would not allow his actors (or in the case of LeBrun, former lover and non-actor) to make any changes. What is especially liberating is the sense of real time unfolding. People tell jokes and anecdotes in full, they listen intently to the records they play (an eclectic selection encompassing Zarah Leander, Edith Piaf and even Deep Purple), they smoke profusely, they communicate by land-lines.

Eustache's absorption in the minutiae of social behaviour has its roots more in classic French literary traditions than the imperatives of mainstream narrative cinema. Even the dated attitudes, the jibes at women's liberation and the political cynicism feel honest and truthful to the time and place. And it's worth noting that when the film was re-released in Paris last year, it found an entirely new audience and was a major success. At one cinema, the admissions exceeded those of *Top Gun: Maverick* (2022).

The logical move after seeing *The Mother and the Whore* is to watch its successor, *My Little Loves* (*Mes petites amoureuses*). The subject is again autobiographical, but this time Eustache recounts his early adolescence in

A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE FILMS OF YASUJIRO OZU

Tokyo Story (Tōkyō monogatari)

From Fri 1 Sep

I Flunked, But... (Rakudai wa shitakeredo)

Sat 2 Sep 16:15; Wed 13 Sep 20:35

Tokyo Chorus (Tōkyō no kōrasu)

Sat 2 Sep 18:30; Sun 17 Sep 16:00

An Autumn Evening with Yasujiro Ozu

Mon 4 Sep 18:15

I Was Born, But... (Umarete wa mita keredo)

Mon 4 Sep 20:30 (+ intro by Jinhee Choi, King's

College London); Fri 15 Sep 18:30

Tokyo Twilight (Tōkyō boshoku)

Thu 7 Sep 18:00; Wed 27 Sep 20:15

The Only Son (Hitori musuko)

Fri 8 Sep 20:40; Sat 16 Sep 18:10 (+ intro by
season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

A Story of Floating Weeds (Ukigusa monogatari)

Sat 9 Sep 11:50; Sat 23 Sep 16:00

Good Morning (Ohayō)

Sat 9 Sep 18:10; Sat 30 Sep 20:40

Floating Weeds (Ukigusa)

Sat 9 Sep 20:30; Sun 1 Oct 11:30 BFI IMAX; Mon 2
Oct 18:00

Late Spring (Banshun)

Sun 10 Sep 12:15 (+ intro by season curator, Ian
Haydn Smith); Fri 22 Sep 20:50

Early Summer (Bakushu)

Sun 10 Sep 15:00; Wed 13 Sep 14:30; Sat 23 Sep
20:35

Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family (Todake no kyōdai)

Mon 11 Sep 18:00; Sat 30 Sep 18:20

There Was a Father (Chichi ariki)

Mon 11 Sep 20:40; Thu 28 Sep 18:20

City Lit at BFI: Ozu: Cinema of Everyday Life

Tue 12 Sep – 3 Oct 18:30-20:30

Record of a Tenement Gentleman (Nagaya Shinshiroku)

Tue 12 Sep 20:30; Wed 20 Sep 21:00; Sat 23 Sep
18:30

Early Spring (Sōshun)

Thu 14 Sep 20:10; Sun 1 Oct 18:00

The Flavour of Green Tea Over Rice (Ochazuke no aji)

Fri 15 Sep 20:45; Sat 30 Sep 15:30

The Anatomy of Ozu

Sat 16 Sep 12:00-17:00

Late Autumn (Akibiyori)

Sun 17 Sep 18:20; Sat 30 Sep 12:30

Equinox Flower (Higanbana)

Thu 21 Sep 18:00; Sun 1 Oct 15:10

An Autumn Afternoon (Sanma no aji)

Sun 24 Sep 18:25 (+ intro); Tue 3 Oct 20:45

Influence and Inspiration

Make Way for Tomorrow

Sat 2 Sep 12:40; Sun 24 Sep 15:50 (+ intro by
season curator Ian Haydn Smith)

Tokyo-Ga

Sun 3 Sep 14:00; Mon 2 Oct 20:45

With thanks to

With special thanks to Janus Films
Kristy Matheson

Pessac and Narbonne, growing up as a lonely boy suspicious of the ways of adults and deeply troubled by the rituals involved in dealing with girls.

Again his method is highly rigorous, close to that of Robert Bresson in its simplicity and purity. Eustache also used a mainly non-professional cast, and shot this time in colour (employing Truffaut and Rohmer's master of natural light, Nestor Almendros). Wholly unsentimental in its viewpoint, and as silent as *The Mother and the Whore* is deafening, the film is full of haunting sequences, including an epiphanic visit to the cinema to see Ava Gardner in glorious Technicolor in *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (1951).

The real Pessac featured in two documentaries – *The Virgin of Pessac* (1968) and *The Virgin of Pessac 79* (1979) – Eustache made a decade apart, when he revisited the town to film the quaint annual ceremony to elect 'the most virtuous girl'. The contrast between life there in 1968 (apparently oblivious to the upheavals in Paris) and 1979 is subtly drawn, as Eustache is determined not to pass judgement or editorialise, rather simply to record events much as the Lumière brothers would have done at the beginning of the century (and cinema). A similar ethnographic impulse lies behind *The Pig* (1970), this time filmed in the Massif Central where we follow the slaughtering of the animal through to the manufacture of sausages.

Before *The Mother and the Whore*, Eustache made two short-form fictional films, both comic and sad, originally released together under the title *Bad Encounters. Robinson's Place* (1963) was based on a story recounted to Eustache by a young woman who met by chance two men in Montmartre and then persuaded them to spend time with her. The film has the air of an improvised drama, yet like everything that followed, it was all tightly scripted. The second film, *Father Christmas Has Blue Eyes* (1966), is set in Narbonne, and marked Eustache's first collaboration with Jean-Pierre Léaud.

Eustache's last years were plagued by emotional and financial hardships. His creative output was mainly limited to short films ostensibly made for educational purposes. Most personal was *Numéro zéro* (1977), an unedited interview with his grandmother who had raised him. Her life story is far from a comforting one, but she tells it with impressive fortitude. A much shortened version was prepared for French television, but it's only very recently that the full-length material has become available to see.

A Dirty Story (1977) could be considered Eustache's last feature film, though it certainly doesn't conform to any usual expectations. It's made in two parts, one shot in 35mm, the other 16mm, both representing the same scene – a man tells a group of friends about his discovery of a basement toilet in a bar where women could be spied upon from the men's room. In the more 'professional' version, the story is told by the actor Michel Lonsdale, in the second, by Eustache's friend Jean-Noël Picq, who it seems originated the story, which may or may not be true.

There is clearly a game of aesthetics at play here – which is the more 'real' of the two versions, is one fiction and another documentary? But it's essentially an act of provocation, challenging the audience to deal with the immense gap that exists between the two sexes. Like *The Mother and the Whore*, the film provokes discussion, but there is less of the sheer pleasure factor of its predecessor.

David Thompson, bfi.org.uk, 28 August 2023