



Silken Skin (La Peau douce) (France 1964)

Directed by François Truffaut

Starring Jean Desailly, Françoise Dorléac, Nelly Benedetti

118 mins | B/W | Cert PG

A BFI release

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Release date: 4 February 2011

Opening venues: BFI Southbank plus key cities nationwide

François Truffaut's fourth feature (directly following **Jules et Jim**), was initially a disappointment to critics who had expected something more strikingly innovative from the *enfant terrible* of the French New Wave. Over the years, however, the reputation of **Silken Skin** (*La Peau douce*) has grown. Now acclaimed as one of Truffaut's subtlest and most insightful films, it is released by the BFI to selected cinemas on 4 February.

What Truffaut had set out to make was – in his own words - ‘a story of adultery - very realistic, which will give an antipoetic idea of love, the reverse in a way of **Jules et Jim**, like a polemical reply’.

Pierre Lachenay (Jean Desailly) is a somewhat unprepossessing middle-aged ‘man of letters’ and minor media celebrity who lives in a fashionable Paris apartment (Truffaut's own) with his wife Franca (Nelly Benedetti) and young daughter Sabine. While on a trip to Lisbon to deliver a lecture on ‘Balzac and Money’, he embarks on an affair with Nicole, a beautiful air-stewardess half his age. The independent, self-possessed young woman is sensitively portrayed by Françoise Dorléac (Catherine Deneuve's elder sister who was to die tragically in a car crash in 1967). Back in Paris, Pierre and Nicole continue to see each other but are constrained by the need to conceal their relationship from his forceful, passionate wife – who is intent on rekindling the flames of their marriage - and by Pierre's timidity and clumsiness in dealing with the many obstacles that stand in their way. Obsessed with his lover and irritated by his wife – while somehow managing to misread both women - Pierre is a man increasingly out of his depth.

Although Truffaut was condemned for making the kind of bourgeois melodrama that had once seemed anathema to him, his treatment of adultery in **Silken Skin** was deliberately unconventional – a dark, un sentimental, startlingly true-to-life portrayal of the petty frustrations and

practical problems of an illicit affair. The romantic lyricism of **Jules et Jim** is here replaced by a more rigorous, detached style, while the script – co-written with Jean-Louis Richard (who has a wickedly funny cameo as a creep who accosts Pierre's wife in the street) – was inspired by a number of authentic newspaper reports which combined with autobiography and fiction to create a single story.

Featuring beautifully nuanced performances, the precise black and white cinematography of Raoul Coutard, and one of Georges Delerue's most memorable scores, **Silken Skin** is psychologically astute, suspenseful, packed with telling detail and laced with black humour – showing just how much the brilliant young director had learned from his idols Renoir and Hitchcock.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Silken Skin is released on 4 February. It plays at BFI Southbank as part of its François Truffaut season which runs from 1st February to 28th March.

The BFI will also release *Day For Night* (La Nuit américaine) directed by François Truffaut on 18 February.

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