

Marguerite Renoir: More Than He Deserved?

Marguerite (née Houlle) Renoir was born in 1906 in a working-class family—her father was a militant trade unionist, and her brother a member of the PCF (the French Communist Party). Marguerite also had a strong personality, acquiring the nickname “the little lion” amongst Renoir’s cadre. At the age of fifteen, she began working as a film colourist at Pathé. In 1927, she worked on the editing of Alberto Cavalcanti’s *La P’tite Lili* and met Jean Renoir, who played a small role in that film. They lived together during the 1930s while Marguerite edited all his films, including *La Grande Illusion* and *La Règle du Jeu*, until he left for America at the start of World War II. When Renoir accepted an invitation from the Fascist government in Italy to direct a film based on *Tosca* in 1939, Marguerite broke with him, never to be reconciled. Ironically, Renoir left the project after only a day’s shooting.

Meanwhile, *Partie de Campagne* (*A Day in the Country*), shot in July 1936, remained unedited until after the war, when Pierre Braunberger, the producer, rescued the material from the laboratory and Marguerite created the beautiful gem of a film we have today. This is exemplified by the transition from the fateful afternoon to some years later when the one-time lovers nearly meet again. Marguerite fashions a montage from elements of nature—wind in trees, scudding clouds, and rain on the water of the river, material gleaned from when the summer turned nasty and the shoot was eventually abandoned. Suddenly we have an emotional narrative that etches itself into our souls and heralds the inevitability of lives emptied of joy.

Marguerite’s star rose, despite never working with Renoir again, and she continued to edit for many years after, including on all of Jacques Becker’s films, culminating in *Casque d’or* in 1952—which, ironically, is a beautiful echo of Renoir’s best work.

Here is what the late Gilberto Perez had to say about Marguerite in his book *The Material Ghost* (John Hopkins UP, 2000):

‘Renoir was fortunate to have Marguerite as his editor; what she did in his absence with *A Day in the Country* attests to how much he owed her in his other films of the thirties. His predilection for long takes and avoidance of the conventional shot

breakdown have led commentators to neglect the editing of his films. This is a mistake. His style called for a different kind of editing that required special skill. Marguerite had that skill. It is time that her talent and accomplishment be recognised.'

Suzanne De Troeye: Pagnol's Amanuensis

Marguerite's "inseparable friend" was Suzanne de Troeye, born Suzanne Verfaillie in Vincennes in 1908. The two met at Pathé and Suzanne assisted Marguerite on the editing of *La Nuit du Carrefour* (1932), Renoir's adaptation of a Georges Simenon Inspector Maigret book. This film had a checkered history since a double reel (twenty minutes) was apparently lost en route to a screening. The incomplete film is a neglected gem featuring some brave editing that makes use of atmospheric landscape shots and moody inconsequential moments.

Suzanne soon linked up with Marcel Pagnol on his first essay into direction, *Jofroi* (1934). Pagnol would shoot each scene in his films from several angles and leave it to **Suzanne** to edit her choice of shots together. Watch her skill in the editing of the crucial scene of *La Femme du Boulanger* (1938) as the baker's wife, Ginette Leclerc, in intimate proximity seduces the shepherd, Charles Moulin, as she counts loaves into his sack one by one, while her husband the baker, Raimu, is intent on feeding his oven with dough.

Suzanne went on to edit at least ten times for Marc Allégret. This included a documentary on André Gide just before the writer's death in 1951. It climaxes with a charming 12-minute sequence of Gide talking with young Annik Morice as she nervously plays a Chopin scherzo for him and listens to his comments and reflections. **Suzanne** edits with sensitivity for both the music and the moment.

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