
LA CHIENNE

Made in 1931, at the beginning of the talking era, *The Bitch* appears to be a unique film, free of the poetic pessimism that would henceforth tinge most of Jean Renoir's films and mark the history of French cinema. Realistically and in large part in the streets of Paris, the filmmaker shot the fall of this discreet employee and modest amateur painter, portrayed by the incomparable Michel Simon. Despite the technical limitations of the time, he also recorded the sound live, there again distinguishing himself from the earliest films with dialogue.

The Bitch was not easy to shoot. It so happened that, before The Bitch, I had directed silent films with hordes of extras, even with the army, and with horses, lances, tons of things. So those films had been expensive, and people were convinced that if they added microphones and sound for me, it would be ruinous. So they didn't want to entrust me with a talking picture.

To prove that I could shoot a talking picture without ruining the producers, I made a small film that was called Baby's Laxative, taken from Feydeau. It was a big financial success. [...] So I was a great man, and it was agreed that I do The Bitch. I absolutely wanted to do The Bitch for lots of reasons. One of the most important was the fact that I adore, I love very much, I'm rather fascinated – platonically – by the women you meet in the streets of Paris. I think there's nothing more charming than a young working-class girl walking or running to catch her train at Saint-Lazare or the North Station. It's something quite lovely and unique in the world. So I wanted to tell a story that would take place round a girl like that.

In truth, I had long dreamt about this kind of story. I hadn't managed to put it on the screen, but finally, I'm sure that even in Nana I have things that prepare The Bitch. Like that, we have old pet subjects, hidden loves for forms of expression and even for physical forms.

As concerns Michel Simon, I dreamt of seeing him on the screen with certain expressions, with his mouth pinched in a certain way; I dreamt of seeing him with a kind of mask as fascinating as a mask of ancient tragedy. And I was able to make my dream come true¹.



¹ Jean Renoir, *Entretiens et propos*, Editions de l'Étoile, 1979

The Bitch / La Chienne

France, 1931 – 100 minutes

Direction, script and dialogues: Jean Renoir

From the novel of Georges de La Fourchardière

Production : Etablissements Braunberger- Richebé

Photography : Theodor Sparkuhl

Set : Gabriel Scognamillo

Editing : Denise Batcheff, Jean Renoir and Marguerite Renoir

Cast : Michel Simon, Janie Marèse, Magdeleine Bérubet, Georges Flamant, Roger Gaillard

An unassuming employee, married to a cantankerous woman, Maurice Legrand has a hobby: painting. He falls in love with Lulu, a young woman under the protection of Dédé, a pimp for whom she is the source of income. He pushes her into a relationship with Legrand, who comes to support her. Dédé, ever in need of money, begins to sell Legrand's canvases, passing them off as being painted by Lulu. She does not hesitate to take advantage of Legrand's gullibility...

The Bitch was restored in 2014 by Les Films du Jeudi and La Cinémathèque française, with support from the CNC and the Franco-American Cultural Fund - DGA - MPA - SACEM – WGAW.

The film was restored from the original nitrate negative, which was particularly fragile and damaged. A master positive safeguard was made by immersion then digitized in 4K at the Digimage laboratory. The film was then restored in 2K in order to eliminate damage frame by frame. The restoration of the sound was carried out at the L.E. Diapason studio in order to recover the intelligibility of the dialogues whilst preserving the sound of the film typical of the beginnings of speaking films.

