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| The Smiling Madame Beudet (1923) |
| La Souriante Madame Beudet |
| The Smiling Madame Beudet [La Souriante Madame Beudet] (1923), directed by French Impressionist filmmaker and theorist Germaine Dulac, serves as an early example of feminist, avant-garde cinema. Mme. Beudet tells the story of a bourgeois housewife trapped in a loveless marriage, whose fantasy and imagination offer a powerful means of potential liberation. A loosely constructed narrative provides the scaffolding for a battery of cinematic techniques (dissolves, superimpositions, masks, soft focus, slow motion, and unusual camera angles) used to reveal the heroine’s states of mind. The plot hinges on Mme. Beudet’s decision to load her husband’s (generally empty) revolver in anticipation of his habitual ‘suicide parody’. Unaware that it is loaded, M. Beudet unexpectedly fires the gun, barely missing his wife. Misinterpreting her murder scheme for a suicide attempt, M. Beudet is overcome, asking, ‘How could I ever live without you?’ The film closes with a rear-angle shot of Mme. Beudet and her husband walking side by side down a street in a small provincial town. While the final scene seems to foreclose the possibility of escape, the haunting images conjured by Mme. Beudet’s imagination serve as a poignant reminder of the generative power of the female psyche. |
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| Further reading:  (Abel)  (Bordwell )  (Flitterman-Lewis)  (Williams, Beyond Impressions: The Life and Films of Germaine Dulac from Aesthetics to Politics)  (Williams, Sensations and Dreams: The Life and Films of Germaine Dulac) |