



### A Dirty Story (Une sale histoire)

Director: Jean Eustache  
Production Company: Films du Losange, Paris  
Assistant Director: Bertrand van Effenterre  
Assistant Director (Part I): Élisabeth Couturier  
Assistant Director (Part II): Luc Béraud  
Script Supervisor (Part I): Claude Luquet  
Screenplay (Part I): Jean Eustache  
Author of the Original Work: Jean-Noël Picq  
Photography (Part I): Jacques Renard  
Photography (Part II): Pierre Lhomme, Michel Cenet  
Camera Assistants (Part I): Jean-Noël Ferragut, Jacques Stein  
Stills Photography: Dominique Le Rigoleur  
Editor: Chantal Colomer  
Sound (Part I): Roger Letellier  
Sound (Part II): Bernard Ortion  
Cast:  
Michel Lonsdale (narrator, Part I)  
Douchka, Laura Fanning, Josée Yann,  
Jacques Burloux (audience, Part I)  
Jean Douchet (director, Part I)  
Jean-Noël Picq (narrator, Part II)  
Elisabeth Lanchener, Françoise Lebrun,  
Virginie Thévenet, Annette Wademant  
(audience, Part II)  
France 1977  
50 mins  
Digital (restoration)

### Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Delights (Le Jardin des délices de Jérôme Bosch)

Director: Jean Eustache  
Production Company:  
Institut National de l'audiovisuel  
Producer for Series Les Enthousiastes:  
Jean Frapat  
Director of Photography: Philippe Théaudière  
Camera Operators: Michel Davaud,  
Jacques Pamart  
Editor: Jean Eustache  
Sound: N'guyen Van Thuong, Xavier Vautrin  
Cast:  
Jean-Noël Picq (Narrator)  
Sylvie Blum  
Catherine Nadaud  
Jérôme Prieur  
France 1979  
34 mins  
Digital (restoration)

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## LOVE, PAIN & CINEMA: THE FILMS OF JEAN EUSTACHE

# A Dirty Story + Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Delights

### Une sale histoire

In the first part of *Une sale histoire*, Eustache's friend Jean Noël-Picq tells the story, before an audience of several, mostly passive, spectators, of his discovery of a spy-hole from the men's bathroom into the women's at a Paris restaurant. He spares no detail in describing his addiction to this voyeuristic opportunity and the precise ritual involved. In the second part of the film, an actor (Michel Lonsdale) plays Noël-Picq in a nearly identical repetition of the first part. In the case of both *La Rosière de Pessac* and *Une sale histoire*, both parts can stand alone, and in both cases the second film significantly changes the way we see the first. In *Une sale histoire*, it serves a more experimental, self-conscious end: the first film can stand alone as a record of the performance of a natural storyteller, an amateur but enthusiastic entertainer, but the second part broadens the film's subject, turning our attention towards the nature of movies and performance.

*Une sale histoire* is the closest thing I know to a movie version of Jorge Luis Borges' short story, *Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote*. The Borges piece masquerades as an appreciation of the work of a man who has set himself to produce an exact replica of parts of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, not copying the novel, but actually recomposing it word for word by means of pure intellectual effort. In the middle of the piece, the narrator critiques a passage from the new novel which appears to be identical to a passage from the original, but which he claims is not only distinct but actually superior.

*Une sale histoire* is actually not as similar to the Borges story as it could be: it might have been interesting had Eustache and his actors truly attempted to replicate the first part of the film, down to the smallest detail, but they had something slightly different in mind. There are clear, intentional differences between the two versions – the second is much more polished, the storytelling more concentrated, the language perfected, and the delivery more subdued. But the difference that comes across most vividly has nothing to do with Eustache's directorial or conceptual decisions – it's the difference between a film that is (or, more accurately, that we believe to be) once removed from reality and a film that's twice removed. It's not a question of what's on-screen but of our own perceptions – there's a difference between watching a man telling a story which we believe he actually experienced and watching a man telling a story which he is pretending to have experienced.

Make no mistake, though – it's not that Noël-Picq is simply being while Lonsdale is acting. Both are actors, both are giving performances – but the nature of their performances is very different. Lonsdale sees his performance as part of the film – he has conceived of a certain character and, in collaboration with Eustache, is labouring to create it. Noël-Picq's acting is not a part of the film, it is the subject; the first part of *Une sale histoire* is like a concert film, a record of a performance. I don't know how much planning or rehearsing went into the filming of this first part, but his performance feels very spontaneous – his pleasure in his own storytelling skill, in his own invention, his awareness of the hold he has on his audience, comes across loud and clear. So in a way it doesn't even matter whether or not the story is true – the film is a documentary not on the story but on the storytelling. Acting, then, is perhaps the central subject of the two films together, rather than filmmaking. It presents a contrast between acting as an art form and acting as an expression of personality. Acting in the second part is a way of creating a character; in the second part it is an aspect of character.

There's more to *Une sale histoire* than its cinematic experimentation, though. Jean Noël-Picq himself is very significant in the context of Eustache's filmography, and represents an important connection to *The Mother and the Whore* and to Eustache's earlier fictional films. Both *Une sale histoire* and *The Mother and the Whore* consist of the same strange mixture of transgressive humour and extreme sexual frankness on the one hand and a reactionary and

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

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

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

Wed 20 Sep 20:50

**Numéro zéro**

Sat 23 Sep 11:30

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

Sat 23 Sep 14:10

**My Little Loves (Mes petites amoureuses)**

Mon 25 Sep 20:30

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oppressively grim attitude towards the characters' behaviour on the other. Eustache's works would be unimaginable without a liberalisation of attitudes towards sex, but his view of this new-found freedom, and of the relations between the sexes generally, is an unrelentingly dark one.

Jared Rapfogel, [sensesofcinema.com](http://sensesofcinema.com), December 2000

### Le Jardin des délices de Jérôme Bosch

In this unconventional work, Eustache's friend and collaborator Jean-Noël Picq, the happy scopophilic of *Une sale histoire*, describes Bosch's famous painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* to an audience of two. Rejecting traditional readings in favour of a 'pure play of the eye' over the canvas, Picq's oblique analysis makes us wonder, ultimately, if his account concurs with or contradicts the imagery we see.

*Le Jardin des délices de Jérôme Bosch* is a playful inquiry into the relationship between words and images, a running theme throughout Eustache's career.

[harvardfilmarchive.org](http://harvardfilmarchive.org)

*Le Jardin des délices de Jérôme Bosch* opens with the following words spoken by Jean-Noël Picq: 'I remember it well: a few years ago I was sitting in this very place, in this very armchair. It was about two o'clock in the morning, just like it is now. I had this exact picture in my hands – the third panel of Hieronymous Bosch's triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

'I remember that I looked at it for a while and then I said, slightly pedantically perhaps, "If you don't mind, I'll tell you what I can see here." I remember specifically that I started at the bottom right-hand corner of the picture, and I'll tell you again now, several years later, what I can see in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture.' So the film has built into its narrative a pre-existing narrative (an evening with Picq), as though he is unable to talk without taking his own words from the past.

According to his interpreter, the shoot was difficult. It started with bad feelings between Eustache and his technicians; Picq was tired and having difficulties with his delivery. On seeing the rushes, it was obvious that they couldn't be shown to Jean Frapat, producer of *Les Enthousiastes*, the television series it was to be included in.

Jean-Noël Picq: 'Several hours of monologue were filmed and when Jean initially showed me what had been shot we agreed that there was no way that we could let Frapat see it. Jean locked himself in the editing suite for an incredibly long time for such a short film. His work was extremely detailed but at the same time it was very faithful to the text. This may seem absurd, but he went almost to the point of taking a piece of silence from one phrase and inserting it into another.

'We had to redo the tape recording several days later. There were problems because I was speaking very slowly on the first take and much faster on the second. Any given phrase had a fast version and a slow version: Jean managed to even it out by slightly speeding up the slow version and slightly slowing down the fast version. He ended up totally rearranging my speaking and breathing patterns. The words are mine all right and it is my voice but I can tell you this: I didn't actually say what you hear on the screen at all.

'When the film was shown, we read the reviews like everyone does. Frapat received the most praise and I was the one whose name was most frequently mentioned. Eustache was treated as if he were a technician, somebody who just turned a handle and shouted "Action" and "Cut"! This was completely unfair. In *Une sale histoire* I felt that Eustache was given too much credit and that my own work was overlooked. So there had been a bit of a conflict between us, but I had the opposite feeling at the time of *Jérôme Bosch*. People hadn't really understood that Eustache's role had been absolutely essential and that with anyone else, such a film would not have worked at all.

'Ultimately, it made me realise that he had also played a very important part in *Une sale histoire*, that the film was really his, and that there was no reason for anyone to put: "Picq, co-scriptwriter".'

Alain Philippon, *Jean Eustache* (Cahiers du cinéma, 1986)