

= The Story of Marie and Julien =

The Story of Marie and Julien (French : Histoire de Marie et Julien) is a 2003 French drama film directed by Nouvelle Vague film maker Jacques Rivette . The film slowly develops from a drama about blackmail into a dark , yet tender , supernatural love story between Marie and Julien , played by Emmanuelle Béart and Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz . Anne Brochet plays the blackmailed Madame X. Béart had previously worked with Rivette in *La Belle Noiseuse* , as had Radziwiłłowicz in *Secret défense* . The cinematographer was William Lubtchansky .

The film was originally going to be made in 1975 as part of a series of four films , but shooting was abandoned after two days , only to be revisited by Rivette 27 years later . It premièred at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2003 and had a cinema release in France , Belgium and the UK . It was shown in competition at the San Sebastian International Film Festival and was nominated for the Prix Louis @-@ Delluc . Some critics found the film over long , slow , and pretentious , while others said it was moving , intelligent , and among Rivette 's best work . The film 's subject led to comparisons to *Vertigo* , *The Sixth Sense* , and *The Others* .

= = Plot = =

Julien (Radziwiłłowicz) is a middle @-@ aged clockmaker who lives alone with his cat in a large house in the Paris suburbs . Julien is blackmailing ' Madame X ' (Brochet) who is importing fake antique Chinese silks , and may have murdered her sister . By chance , he meets Marie (Béart) , a beautiful young woman he last saw a year ago , and they begin a passionate relationship . Though elusive , Marie agrees to move in with him ; she acts strangely at times and appears absent . A mystery connects Marie to Madame X 's dead sister and in uncovering Marie 's secret Julien risks losing her . The film is separated into four parts , named to reflect the narrative perspective .

Julien : Julien dreams of Marie , whom he met just over a year before at a party , and with whom he would have begun a relationship but for them both having partners . He immediately runs into her on the street as she is running for her bus and he is off to meet Madame X. They agree to meet again , but Marie fails to appear and he returns home to find Madame X waiting for him against their agreement , so he raises his price tenfold . Madame X returns the next day to try to bargain , and asks for a letter back that he does not have . Marie invites him to her place for dinner , where Julien tells her his girlfriend ran away with another man and Marie says her boyfriend Simon died six months ago . They have sex , but in the morning Marie has checked out of her apartment . Julien returns home to find that his house has been ransacked . He tries to find her by ringing her old boss , then tracks her down when an unknown woman calls to tell him the hotel Marie is staying at . Julien visits her there , and Marie agrees to move in with him .

Julien et Marie : Marie makes herself at home , trying on the clothes of Julien 's old girlfriend , exploring the house , and watching him at work . Their lovemaking is passionate , but Marie 's behaviour is unusual . She is sometimes cold or trance @-@ like , at one point reciting words in an unidentified language , and she is physically detached and unaware of the time ? Julien corrects her " bonjour " to " bonsoir " . She is jealous of his ex , compulsively decorates and rearranges a room in his attic , feels compelled to act out her dreams , and does not bleed when scratched ? something she keeps from Julien . She sees a girl in her dreams who shows her a " forbidden sign " with her hands . Marie helps Julien in his blackmailing , and after meeting Madame X , who only knows of Marie as " l'autre personne " , Marie is handed a letter by someone who says she is Madame X 's sister (Bettina Kee) ; she is the girl Marie dreamed of before .

Marie et Julien : The letter is from Madame X 's sister Adrienne to Madame X. Julien meets Madame X again , and she tells him her sister killed herself by drowning six months before . He cannot understand who gave Marie the letter , but she insists that her sister left the letter to frame her and although dead she is " reliving " (a revenant) ? and Marie is also . Adrienne ? who though dead still appears and speaks to her ? has told Madame X that Marie is " like me " . He thinks she is mad . Julien becomes frustrated at Marie spending so much time alone in the attic . When she finally shows him the room , she says she does not know what it is for . She leaves before Julien wakes

and checks into another hotel . He rings Marie 's old boss who suggests talking to Marie 's friend Delphine ; Delphine says that Marie 's relationship with Simon drove Marie mad and ended their friendship .

Marie : Julien visits Marie and Simon 's old apartment , where the letting agent shows him a room that Julien chillingly recognises ? it is identical to the room Marie has prepared . This is where Marie hanged herself , trying to frame Simon in revenge after a terrible row . Julien returns home and Marie silently leads him to the attic where she has prepared a noose , feeling she has to hang herself again . Julien carries her downstairs , and they make love again . She leaves to meet Adrienne , who says that she knows that Marie no longer wants to die . They agree they do not know the rules of their situation . Returning , Marie interrupts Julien about to hang himself in a desperate attempt to join her . He runs to the kitchen and tries to slit his wrist ; Marie stops him and her wrist and his palm are cut . Marie warns him that he will lose all memory of her , but he says that all he wants is for her to be there . Marie slowly covers her face with her hands ? " the forbidden sign " ? and Julien becomes oblivious to her and unaware of why he is bleeding . Madame X arrives for her letter and he hands it over , confused by her enquiries about " l 'autre personne " . Madame X burns the letter , freeing Adrienne . Marie cries while watching Julien sleep , and as her tears land on her wrist her cut bleeds . Julien wakes and asks who she is ; she replies that she is " the one he loved " . He doubts it as she 's " not his type " , but she says with a smile to give her a little time .

= = Cast = =

Emmanuelle Béart as Marie Delambre .

Jerzy Radziwi?owicz as Julien Müller .

Anne Brochet as Madame X.

Bettina Kee as Adrienne , the sister of Madame X.

Olivier Cruveiller as Vincent Lehmann , L 'éditeur , Marie 's old boss .

Mathias Jung as Le concierge , the desk clerk at Marie 's apartment .

Nicole Garcia as L 'amie , Marie 's friend .

= = Themes and analysis = =

Like Rivette 's earlier film *La Belle Noiseuse* , the main themes are romantic longing , impermanence , and identity , but this film adds the themes of mortality , chance , and destiny , and motifs are repeated from Rivette 's *Celine* and *Julie Go Boating* . The name of Julien 's cat , *Nevermore* , evokes Poe 's *The Raven* and its similar themes of death and longing . Julien 's work as a clockmaker , literally trying to repair time , is an obvious metaphor , and the film is also timeless , giving no indication of when it is set . The blackmail sub @-@ plot is a device to help tell the central love story between Marie and Julien and to explain Marie 's situation ; Julien is an unlikely blackmailer and Madame X 's benevolence towards him is surprising . The plot features dream logic impinging on reality : Senses of Cinema highlighted the role of " outlandish chance " and Film Comment noted the feeling that the characters are inventing or re @-@ enacting the narrative . Marie may be aware that she is part of a narrative , but she still lacks control over her fate . Michael Atkinson believed that Rivette was working in the " border world between narrative meaning and cinematic artifice " .

The emotional distance of the characters and the intellectual and artificial @-@ seeming , quasi @-@ theatrical dialogue is deliberate , depicting their simultaneous connection and isolation . The chasm between Marie and Julien , due to his corporeality and her ghostly nature , is emphasised in the contrast between his physical activity and her status as an onlooker . Rivette says he wanted the lovers to appear ill @-@ suited and for the viewer to question the relationship ; they love each other passionately yet they are essentially strangers . Béart believes that Marie was more alive than Julien , and that he literally wakes up to her existence only at the very end of the film .

Finally revealed to be a ghost story inspired by nineteenth @-@ century French fantasy literature , the film uses the conventions of the genre ? that people who die in emotional distress or with an

unfinished task may become ghosts ? and openly details these conventions . Marie and Adrienne 's ' lives ' as revenants are reduced to a single purpose , each with only the memory of her suicide and her last emotions remaining . Julien , like the audience , is eventually confronted with Marie 's nightmare of repetition . Elements of the horror genre are used , not to scare but to explore memory and loss . To stay with Marie , Julien first has to forget about her , and at the end they have the promise of a new beginning . Marie becomes a living person again rather than an object of fantasy . Marie 's tears and blood are a miracle overcoming her death , and may reflect a fantasy of turning back the menopause . The credits are accompanied by an upbeat jazz song performed by Blossom Dearie , *Our Day Will Come* , that represents love as a pledge , the only music used in the film .

There is an aesthetic focus on Béart 's body , Julien telling Marie that " I love your neck , your arms , your shoulders , your mouth , your stomach , your eyes -- I love everything . " The focus is more than erotic as it symbolises Marie 's fight for corporeality . The film includes Rivette 's first ever sex scenes , one of them arranged by Béart . The five candid and emotionally charged sex scenes focus on their upper bodies and faces , and on their erotic monologues that employ elements of fairy tale , horror , and sadomasochism .

Béart is given an ethereal quality by Lubtchansky 's cinematography and lighting , and she subtly portrays Marie 's detachment and vulnerability . In the latter part of the film Béart is dressed in grey and looks tired and wan , showing Marie 's ageing and angst . Béart says she made deliberate use of silence in playing the part . Radziwi?owicz 's performance allows the viewer to sympathise with Julien despite the character 's initial dislikeable nature . Brochet as Madame X has a cool ease and grace .

= = Production = =

= = = Original shoot = = =

Rivette originally began to make *Marie et Julien* , as it was then titled , in 1975 with producer Stéphane Tchaladjieff as part of a series of four films he first called *Les filles du feu* and later *Scènes de la Vie Parallele* . Rivette said in 2003 that the film was based on the true story of a woman who committed suicide . He first shot *Duelle* (fr : *Duelle*) in March ? April and *Noroît* (fr : *Noroît*) in May , although the latter was not released , and the fourth film , a musical comedy meant to star Anna Karina and Jean Marais , was never shot . Filming began on *Marie et Julien* that August , with Albert Finney and Leslie Caron in the lead roles and Brigitte Rouan as Madame X , but after two days Rivette gave up filming due to nervous exhaustion . He later used the names of the lovers , Marie and Julien , in his 1981 film *Le Pont du Nord* .

= = = Revisiting the screenplay = = =

After Rivette had later success with *La Belle Noiseuse* and *Va Savoir* in the 1990s , he revisited his older unproduced screenplays . With Hélène Frappat , he published in book form three of his " phantom films " including *Marie et Julien* in 2002 . He decided to film *Marie et Julien* ; a script had never been written and the footage had been lost , but cryptic notes by his assistant Claire Denis that had been kept by Lubtchansky (who had also been cinematographer in 1975) were enough to work from . The original screenplay included a speaking " polyglot cat " , characters whose names change , a " suicide room " similar to *The Seventh Victim* , " Madame X " , and an unknown " forbidden gesture " that the notes stated : " Do not forget " .

= = = Filming = = =

Rivette worked with scriptwriters Pascal Bonitzer and Christine Laurent using an automatic writing approach that involved writing the script day by day ; the actors and filmmakers did not know the direction of the story in advance of each day 's filming . Eurimages provided ? 420 @, @ 000 of

funding in July 2002 , and the film was shot that autumn and winter . Rivette immediately thought of Béart , who starred in *La Belle Noiseuse* , to play the carnal Marie . Béart has said that " Of all the films I 've made , this was the one which most disturbed people very close to me . They said : ' It 's almost as though the Emmanuelle we know was up there on the screen . ' " Béart 's image in the media at the time was characterised by the near hysteria seen when she appeared naked on the cover of *Elle* in May 2003 after filming ended .

= = = Direction = = =

The film illustrates Rivette 's view that films involve game @-@ playing , day @-@ dreaming and paranoid fantasy . He leaves aside the usual devices of the horror genre ? no music , shock sound effects , special effects , or gore ? evoking feelings and scenes verbally rather than showing them , but he does employ Hitchcockian " MacGuffins " such as chance encounters , " clues , " and the blackmail plot @-@ line . The use of dream @-@ like sequences at the start and end of the film was influenced by Rivette 's 1985 film *Hurlevent* , an adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* . Some of the dialogue that was in the original notes was read as though quoting .

Glenn Kenny notes that the " calm precision " of the *mise en scène* in the opening dream sequence " put [him] under such a powerful spell " that it lasted the whole film . Throughout the film , everyday sounds are amplified by a lack of music , and the film uses sweeping long shots , and several incidental scenes of Julien working , talking with his cat , and of the characters sleeping . *Slant Magazine* commented that the cat is the film 's most interesting character , and Philippa Hawker of *The Age* notes that " this has one of the best sequences involving a cat on film . " The camera follows the cat and films it looking directly at the camera , giving a sense of artistic freedom and spontaneity .

The cinematography shows Rivette 's interest in visual texture . The colours are natural , except in certain scenes like the initial dream sequence that are filmed in vivid colours . The lighting when Marie is arranging the attic room changes from shadow to warm light when she places an oil lamp on a stool to indicate that she has placed it correctly , introducing a supernatural element that contrasts with the realism of the rest of the film .

= = Reception = =

Critics ' responses were mixed : some found the film evocative and powerful , whereas others saw it as slow and frustrating . Guy Austin writing in *Scope* noted that " bodily reactions are not part of critical reactions to [the film] . In both press and online , the head governs the body in reactions to Rivette . " Rivette had said before the release that " This I know in advance ? whether it is good or not , some people will love it and others will hate it . "

It was nominated for the 2003 *Prix Louis @-@ Delluc* . *Senses of Cinema* suggested that it is Rivette 's most important work since his 1974 film *Celine and Julie Go Boating* and saw it as " a film about filmmaking " , including it in their favourite films of 2004 . *DVD Verdict* concluded that " it is not only intelligent , but willing to assume the same of its audience " . Glenn Kenny rated it as his favourite film of the decade , and film curator Miriam Bale writing in *Slant Magazine* included it in her ten most enduring films of the decade . *Film Comment* was equally taken with the film , stating that " what 's most remarkable about the film is how moving it is finally , how much is at stake after all--nothing Rivette has done before prepares you for the emotional undertow that exerts itself in *The Story of Marie and Julien* 's final scenes . " *LA Weekly* described the film as " elegant and unsettling " ; *The Age* called it " quietly mysterious and haunting " and " heartrending " .

Peter Bradshaw was disappointed , arguing that " All the story 's power is allowed to leak away by the deliberative heaviness with which Rivette pads through his 150 @-@ minute narrative , with its exasperating lack of dramatic emphasis . " Philip French noted similarities to Hitchcock 's *Vertigo* and Jean Cocteau 's *Orphée* , but called it " surprisingly flat and unmagical " . The *New York Times* also found it " dry and overdetermined , " and *Time Out* complained that it " never supplies the frissons expected of a ghost story or the emotional draw of a good love story . " *Film 4* compared it

to *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* , but said that " its glacially slow pace will frustrate all but the most patient " . (Rivette said when promoting the film that " I like *The Sixth Sense* because the final twist doesn't challenge everything that went before it . You can see it again , which I did , and it 's a second film that 's just as logical as the first one . But the end of *The Others* made the rest of it meaningless . ") " An intellectual exercise in metaphysical romance - Ghost for art @-@ house audiences " was *Empire* 's wry take . The Digital Fix argued that Rivette 's direction resulted in a product that " if never exactly dull and certainly the work of a master , is ultimately an empty film that has nothing to offer but its own cleverness " . Keith Uhlich of *Slant Magazine* found it was " a lesser Rivette offering ? a watchable , ultimately unfulfilling ghost story " .

= = Distribution = =

The film was ignored by both Cannes and Venice , then premièred at the Toronto International Film Festival on 10 September 2003 . It was shown in competition at the San Sebastian International Film Festival later that month , as well as at the 2004 Melbourne International Film Festival and the 2004 International Film Festival Rotterdam , among others . The film opened in France and Belgium on 12 November 2003 ; that night 239 people watched the film in Paris . The cinema release was on 26 August 2004 in Germany , and on 8 October 2004 in the UK , but there was no US cinema release .

The DVD was released on a two @-@ disc set by Arte Video in France on 18 May 2004 , and features the theatrical trailer , actor filmographies , a 40 @-@ minute interview with Rivette , covering the film 's origin , mythology , narrative viewpoints and relations to his other films , and a 15 @-@ minute interview with Béart , covering working under Rivette 's direction and how the experience of acting in the film compared to her earlier role in *La Belle Noiseuse* . The US and UK distributions , respectively released on 12 July 2005 by Koch Lorber Films and 28 February 2005 by Artificial Eye , come with optional English subtitles and the special features on a single disc . The Arte Video release additionally features commentary by Lubtchansky over a cut @-@ down (41 : 45 minute) version of the film , and an analysis of the film by Hélène Frappat (21 : 28 minutes) . The film was also released with *Un Coeur en Hiver* and *Nathalie ...* in " The Emmanuel Beart Collection " by Koch Lorber in 2007 .