

Document Citation

Title	La peau douce
Author(s)	Gordon Gow
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	La peau douce (The soft skin), Truffaut, François, 1964

LA PEAU DOUCE

Directed by Francois Truffaut. Original screenplay by Francois Truffaut and Jean-Louis Richard. Director of photography, Raoul Coutard. Music Georges Delerue. A Films du Carosse production, distributed by Gala. French. English subtitles. English title: *Silken Skin*. Cert X. 118 mins.

Pierre Lachenay, JEAN DESAILLY; Nicole Chomette, FRANCOISE DORLEAC; Franca Lachenay, NELLY BENEDETTI; and Clément, DANIEL CECCALDI.

François Truffaut has been conscientious in his resolve to make *La peau douce* less glamorous and more realistic than the average triangle drama. The middle-aged husband, the sensual wife and the young but not unworldly air hostess are credible people, and their agitations are set persuasively against real backgrounds (camera: Coutard) with much incidental emphasis on inanimate objects which seem to be forever deriding their human frailty.

The casting is just about right: perhaps Françoise Dorléac's interpretation of the young mistress is unduly glum from time to time, but Jean Desailly plays the literary husband with a clever mixture of pathos and clamminess, Nelly Benedetti's performance as the wife is superior to most exercises of the kind, and all three of them look as if they exist in the world of raw emotions, unglazed by the wardrobe department, the make-up department, or the arc lamps.

Yet, given all this, *La peau douce* is the least of Truffaut's major films. It is too evidently calculated, too sober, too inclined to hammer the subject out. Truffaut has said that neither he nor his collaborator on the screenplay, Jean-Louis Richard, knew how to end the story. Did it never occur to them not to end it? *Les 400 Coups* had no ending: it stopped. The long tracking shot and the ultimate stop-frames amounted to a masterly piece of cinema, and served a purpose, leaving the audience suspended in concern. This is how we should be left at the finish of *La peau douce*, where the problems of individuals, three of them, have been real enough to falsify any dramatised 'conclusion'. Earlier on, the frozen frame that Truffaut likes to get in somewhere has been used momentarily to signify an emotional accord between the husband and the air hostess. How much better to have saved it until the end and then to have used it three times over, arresting each of the three in turn at their individual moments of despair, and leaving us to grieve for them . . . and to understand them.

Instead . . . the newspaper report of a real-life incident . . . the elated notion that this might provide the missing end . . . and the old reminder that what happens in life cannot always happen effectively in the cinema. Certainly not this incident in this kind of cinema. A finale in which the wife takes a shotgun and heaves it to her shoulder to kill her husband as he sits in a congested bistro . . . a finale tacked roughly on to a film which at all points has dealt in realism, and now, ironically, by adopting a fragment of somebody else's reality, assumes the inappropriate face of melodrama.

The misjudgment casts a blight, from which one tries to recover and to delve back through the things that have been right, in the midst of the over-earnestness:

the eloquence of the love scene depicted with a hint of seediness, apt in its proximity (and genially noted by Godard in the dialogue of *Bande à part*); the Clouzot-exactness of tension surrounding a telephone call; the literary celebrity being provincially lionised, and thereby thwarted in his plans for getting to bed with the air hostess; the wife's diverting reaction to the invitations of an amorous stranger. These last two are the most heartening, because they bring a smile without relinquishing the realism. Springing quite naturally from the basic drama, they are at once true and funny and sad and moving, affirming that Truffaut is still there . . . really.

What he needs now, whether by means of the projected science-fiction or something else, is a resounding come-back.

GORDON GOW



STEWARDESS—Francoise Dorleac in the French "The Soft Skin" tomorrow at the Paris.