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2 LA FILLE DE L'EAU / *The Water Girl, The Whirlpool of Fate*

PRODUCTION

Director	Jean Renoir
Script	Pierre Lestringuez
Production Company	Films Jean Renoir
Producer	Jean Renoir
Distribution	Maurice Rouhier, Studio Films
Assistant Director	Pierre Champagne
Photography	Jean Bachelet, Alphonse Gibory
Set Design	Jean Renoir
Costumes	Mimi Champagne, Catherine Hessling
Premiere (France)	12 December 1924, Artistic, Paris (preview); April 1925, Ciné-Opéra, Paris

CAST

Catherine Hessling	Virginie Rosaert
Pierre Philippe (Pierre Lestringuez)	Uncle Jef
Pierre Champagne	Justin Crépoix
Harold Lewington	Georges Raynal
Georges Térof	M. Raynal
Fockenberghe	Mme Raynal
Maurice Touzé	La Fouine
Henriette Moret	La Roussette
Charlotte Clasis	Mme Maubien
Pierre Renoir	a peasant (with a pitchfork)
André Derain	the patron of "Le Bon Coin"
Van Doren	

TECHNICAL

Shooting Date	Summer 1924
Interiors	G.-M. Studios
Exteriors	"La Nicotière," Marlotte; "Le Bon Coin" café, the Forest of Fontainebleau; the banks of the Loing River, near Montigny
Process	Black and white
Gauge	35 mm
Length	1632 metres; 5354 feet
Time	89 minutes (16 f.p.s.)

(2 La Fille de l'eau)

NOTES

The plot of *La Fille de l'eau* is every bit as banal as that for *Catherine*, and most of the same principals are involved in the production, with the unique difference that this was Renoir's first film as sole director. This time, as his own director and producer, he could only disagree with himself about how the film was to be shot. But the material was no more promising, however much the amicable party of novices had learned from its first commercial failure of a few months before. *La Fille de l'eau* is another melodrama, on the admired American model, with Catherine Hessling as a virginal innocent pursued and haunted—in a sexually symbolic dream sequence—by a lecherous uncle, until she finds refuge with a gypsy family, is abandoned, encounters the uncle again, and finally has her essential goodness redeemed by the son of the local squire, who carries her off to Algeria with his family (a very capable plot synopsis can be found in Raymond Durnat's *Jean Renoir* [see no. 218], pp. 31-32).

If Renoir was at the mercy of an unpropitious scenario, he nevertheless used the occasion to direct some promising scenes, and the natural exteriors at "La Nicotière," on the banks of the Loing River, and in the Forest of Fontainebleau are especially well captured. Artificial lighting was used for all the exteriors, and the film's opening sequence on the barge was lit by lamps which were mounted on the barge and connected by cable to a generator carried on a truck following along on the tow-path. Much of Renoir's energy seems to have been reserved for the special effects he engineered for Catherine Hessling's dream sequence, a technical apprenticeship whose value he acknowledges in his "Souvenirs" (1938). In *My Life and My Films*, p. 56, Renoir describes how he constructed a large cylinder some twenty metres in diameter with a revolving platform at its centre upon which the camera stood. The interior of the cylinder was painted black, and Catherine Hessling was dressed in flowing white garments, riding a white horse around the circumference while the camera followed, executing 360-degree pans. Because she was to be represented riding across the sky, shots were obtained by a superimposition in the camera before the film was printed. Double exposures, slow motion, reverse motion, rapid cutting, the use of miniatures (for the firing of the gypsy caravan), tracking, panning, were all devices employed by Renoir to create the world of dream and fantasy.

Apparently the film previewed in December, 1924, in a 1700-metre version; but by the time of its public premiere in April 1925, it had been cut back to 1632 metres. Since the only print of the original version is reported to be in the archives of Gosfilmofond, Moscow, one cannot identify the footage which is missing from the release print with any confidence. But the additional 100 metres may have opened the film on a more sombre note, with its title rising up from the depths of a woodland stream on whose surface is reflected the passing clouds, a pastoral calm which is rudely shattered by a violent wind, followed by a night shot and a drowned body floating in the stream. (See Claude Beylie, *Jean Renoir: le spectacle, la vie* [no. 219], p. 104.)

The film was never popular, and Renoir did not recoup his investment. In despair,

he even opened an art gallery for a time near the rue Madeleine. New incentive came from the discovery that Jean Tedesco was showing the dream sequence from *La Fille de l'eau* to the avant-garde film crowd at the Théâtre Vieux-Columbier (this would have been some time in 1925: see *My Life and My Films*, pp. 78-80). Renoir went on to *Nana*.