



Pauline at the beach

Director: Eric Rohmer

Country: France

Date: 1983



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A review by Vincent Canby for *The New York Times*:

It is late summer on the coast of Normandy where the beaches are broad and the weather unpredictable. As always, the North Atlantic is far too cold for anyone used to swimming in the soothing warmth of tropic seas, but the afternoon sun is bright and hot and the breezes are bracing. This is the halcyon setting of "Pauline at the Beach," Eric Rohmer's effortlessly witty, effervescent new French film that opens today at the Lincoln Plaza 1. "Pauline at the Beach" is a comedy of romantic manners about six civilized people, each of whom works stubbornly, and at cross purposes, to enlighten someone else about the true nature of love. It's a sunny month in the country.



Marion is a young, beautiful, successful fashion designer from Paris, currently in the process of divorcing a husband because she couldn't respond to his slavish devotion. Not unkindly she says of her marriage: "That wasn't love. It was fidelity." Marion is waiting to fall in love for the first time. She wants an all-consuming love, one, she says, "that burns." Henry, somewhat older (that is, somewhere in his 30's), is an ethnologist who lives most of the year in the South Pacific. He is divorced and vacationing in Normandy with his small daughter. Passion, says Henry, is behind him. He enjoys his freedom. He lives "without luggage, physical or moral." He is initially amused when Marion falls into bed with him the night of the day they first meet. Then he becomes uneasy.

Pierre, young and athletic and a perpetual student, is a former beau of Marion's. As gravely humorless as he is good-looking, he sets out to talk Marion into loving him instead of the unreliable Henry. Pauline, Marion's 15-year-old cousin, has never been in love, unless one counts a flirtation when she was 6, or her passing thoughts about a 17-year-old boy she saw in a restaurant in Italy the year before. Pauline watches her elders as if she were witnessing the incomprehensible rites of a tribe of aborigines. On the beach she meets and becomes pleased with Sylvain, a young man her age who shares her skepticism with the others. The sixth member of the group, who is not socially a part of the group, is Louise, a lusty "local" girl who sells candy on the beach by day, has two boyfriends and enough time to give herself to anyone else who pleases her.

"Pauline at the Beach" is not a farce, but it has many farcical elements as Marion, Henry, Pierre, Pauline, Sylvain and, from time to time, Louise meet, eat, drink, dance, talk, make love, swim, windsurf and argue about love. The desires are erotic, but the talk is high-toned until they try to straighten out misunderstandings about who was in bed with whom and why. Innocent couples are caught hiding naked in bathrooms. Feelings are hurt, pride is wounded, hopes dashed and, in the end, only the resolute, all-seeing Pauline is a tiny bit wiser.

Mr. Rohmer opens the film with a quote from Chretien de Troyes, the 12th-century French romantic poet: "A wagging tongue bites itself." Never for a minute do the tongues stop wagging in "Pauline at the Beach." As the comedy accelerates, they wag more and more desperately as each character, acting, he or she thinks, with the purest of motives, attempts to convince someone else why he/she should/should not

love her/him. Marion, played by the spectacularly lovely blonde, blue-eyed Arielle Dombasle, who had a small role in Mr. Rohmer's "Le Beau Marriage," attempts to snare Henry by adopting the same tactics her boring husband used with her. After being unfaithful to Marion, Henry is worried, but only for a minute. "I hate making people cry," he says as if admitting it to be his worst fault. "I'm too nice."



The lugubriously honest Pierre almost wrecks everyone's vacation by telling the truth, which turns out to be false. In "Pauline at the Beach," as in almost every other Rohmer film, self-deception is the basis of the comedy. Though Miss Dombasle's is the film's most enchanting performance - she could become France's next major film personality - they are all quite marvelous. As Pauline, the sage teenager, a character that is virtually an axiom in Rohmer comedy, Amanda Langlet is both charming and steadfast. Pascal Gregory is sternly comic as the curably pompous Pierre and Feodor Atkine excellent

as Henry. An actress named simply Rosette is delectable as the easygoing, no-nonsense Louisette. As usual, Nestor Almendros's photography perfectly serves the Rohmer vision, which, this time, is not idealized but rather more realistic, the colors being comparatively muted compared to the abundant richness of those that defined the midsummer comedy of "Clair's Knee."

I hope that "Pauline at the Beach" will win new admirers for Mr. Rohmer, one of the most original and elegant film makers at work today in any country. Though his films depend a lot on talk, don't be misled. They are literate but not especially literary, even if the English-language subtitles reinforce this impression.

Mr. Rohmer's works could not exist in any other form. Their particular character would float off any printed page. They combine images, language, action and cinematic narrative fluidity to create a kind of cinema that no one else has ever done before. "Pauline at the Beach" is another rare Rohmer treat.

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