



UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE (A DAY IN THE COUNTRY) is a July, 2016 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library. Below is Kino Ken's review of that short film.

8 of a possible 20 points

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France 1936 black-and-white 41 minutes subtitled live action feature drama Les Films du Panthéon Film Producer: Pierre Braunberger

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance

(j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

- 0 Direction: Jean Renoir**
- 0 Editing: Marinette Cadix and Marguerite Houlle Renoir**
- 2 Cinematography: Claude Renoir**
- Stills: Eli Lotar**
- 2 Locations**
- 0 Screenplay: Jean Renoir, adapted from the story by
Guy De Maupassant**
- 0 Music: Joseph Kosma**
- 2 Set Decorations: Robert Gys**
- Costume Design: Luchino Visconti***
- Makeup: Vladimir Gajdarov**
- 2 Sound: Joseph de Bretagne and Marcel Courmes**
- 0 Acting**
- 0 Creativity**
- 8 total points**

Cast: Sylvie Bataille (Henriette), Georges D'Arnoux (Henri), Jane Marken

(Madame Dufour), André Gabriello (Monsieur Dufour), Jacques Brunius (Rodolphe), Paul Temps (Anatole), Gabrielle Fontan (Grandmother), Jean Renoir (Père Poulain, restaurant owner), Pierre Lestringeux (Old Priest), Georges Bataille, Jacques Becker, Henri Cartier-Bresson (Seminarians), Alain Renoir (j) (boy fishing)

An abandoned bagatelle by filmmaker Jean Renoir, this 1936 short has an odd history of complications and neglect. Originally intended as the anchor for a portmanteau film, UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE was planned to total about fifty-five minutes. Its running time at completion comes to a mere forty-one minutes. What happened?

An unusually stifling and humid July of 1936, with rain nearly every day, created delays in production. These led to producer Pierre Braunberger's decision to shut down shooting. Such a hiatus was partly to let tempers cool down, for depression and disappointment about the weather generated acrimony between director and performers. With the schedule stretching out indefinitely, Jean Renoir finally had to leave to begin preparation for his next picture, LES BAS FONDS (THE LOWER DEPTHS). Roughly forty minutes of coherent film narrative had been shot. That footage included neither beginning nor conclusion.

Early attempts to edit what was available proved futile. Renoir had relocated to the United States. He was no longer accessible to Braunberger. The movie appeared headed for abandoned project status.

World War II broke out. Jewish Braunberger had to evade Nazi roundups. During one of his dodges, while hiding on an island, the thought occurred to him he might finally release UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE commercially without further additional scene shoots. Two title cards, one strategically placed at the beginning and a second inserted to explain the transition from picnic to later reunion, would suffice to prepare the film for theatrical screening. Those he could shoehorn in himself.

Peace having returned to France, the Renoir black sheep finally emerged in 1946 for public viewing. After a rocky start, critics and public began taking notice of it. Over subsequent decades, the picture's reputation grew steadily, though not so much as to expedite its appearance on digital versatile disk. That omission has only recently been rectified by a Criterion release.

This putative classic is overrated and dissatisfying, a minor achievement by a major film director.

Part of the problem is a discrepancy between original author Maupassant's acidic view of the country and scripter Renoir's ardent passion

for pastoral scenery. The author's focus is on characters and their relationships. Renoir is intoxicated by beauties of the natural world. He's inclined to relegate human beings to a secondary role.

Both film and story begin the same way, Monsieur Dufour having borrowed a milk delivery wagon to bring his family on an excursion to the countryside outside Paris. The two versions remain parallel until arrival at Poulain's restaurant. From that point on, each develops somewhat uniquely.

Since the director casts himself as proprietor Poulain, someone who has no embodiment in de Maupassant's tale, he generously allows himself screen time for witticisms. Renoir gifts his wife with the key role of serving-maid, someone never individuated in the original. Yet another family member present is Alain Renoir, Jean's son. He doubles as clapboard operator and fishing youngster in the opening bridge scene.

The two boatmen in de Maupassant's account never switch seduction targets. Nor do they discuss aloud strategies for prevailing over partner objections.

In the story, their potential conquests are vulnerable due to intoxication. However, in Renoir's version, the teenage daughter retains sobriety.

A divergence also occurs with respect to the boy accompanying the Dufours. De Maupassant makes him utterly oblivious to feminine charm and courtship rituals. He eats, sleeps, and feebly makes the motions of exercising. Virtually anything else requires too great an effort to undertake. Renoir preoccupies him additionally with fishing, a sporting activity de Maupassant assigns exclusively to Monsieur Dufour.

Grandmother's pursuit of the kitten is rewarded by Renoir but portrayed as futile in de Maupassant.

In the story, Henri pays the Dufours a visit two months later in Paris. He speaks to Madame Dufour. Henriette isn't present. This episode is missing from the incomplete Braunberger release version of Renoir's film. It could account for some of the gap between the director's intended fifty-five minutes of narrative and the current running time of UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE.

Where both tales coincide are the river scenes, with Renoir preserving dialogue in the boats and Henri's private love nest, complete with overhead singing nightingale. Each version incorporates a violent act throwing a shadow over courtship between Henri and Henriette.

In the movie, a climactic seduction scene is depicted as virtual rape, Henriette's resistance crushed by her companion's sheer strength. Presumably a tryst follows.

De Maupassant is more discreet. All Henri obtains is an ardent kiss. Even that is begrudged by a sobering Henriette.

Motion picture and short story share an ending, Henri and Henriette meeting one last time in the spot where their previous encounter resulted in sudden unfriendly parting. Renoir unites the two as lovers; de Maupassant divides them according to background. Henri is no gentleman. His creator's sympathy lies with Henriette, whose romantic choices are restricted by circumstances to two suitors. One is a predatory experienced wolf, the other only a dispassionate, immature boy incapable of giving love to another.

Renoir's comment about this miserably mismatched trio is obvious in the scene depicting Henriette rowing a skiff carrying herself and a distracted husband back to their waiting transport. She does all the work while he distracts himself with a floundering fish. Henri is reduced to passive spectator. This is life's reality, in Renoir's view. What people want and what they obtain are two different things.

For De Maupassant, the culprit is not Reality or Nature. It is society, which separates people into categories. Individuals from two different classes may intersect and interact, but never unite. A settled shopkeeper's daughter is no lifelong companion for a journeyman loafer, merely an amusing bauble for his momentary pleasure.

Joseph Kosma's relentlessly repetitive music theme tires the ear well before forty-one minutes have elapsed. It is trite melodrama, lacking momentum and depth, fit enough as a descriptor of Henri, but deficient in conveying the more complex character of Henriette. She is supposed to travel from childhood innocence to adult disillusionment. That journey is not mirrored in the score.

Editing, hampered by lack of input from the director and further constrained as a result of absent continuity segues in the final ten minutes of footage, begins with a promising pace. Eventually it fares less well, slipping into rough waters in the storm section before regaining a semblance of firm footing in a bittersweet second encounter between Henri and Henriette. That passage trails off at too extended a length into a final exit.

More richly satisfying is Claude Renoir's cinematography, capturing optimally interplay of sun, shadow, and water. Several planes of action frequently occur simultaneously, lending realistic ambience to a tale often lapsing into stereotyped, exaggerated buffoonery. Roving like a sightseer intent on documenting every new observation, the camera glides along beside a river, through doors, into thickets. Nothing is hidden.

Unfortunately, a screenplay larded with bantering quips and acting derived from exaggerated posturings of stage melodramas mire the movie in a swamp of shallowness. No insight into the character of Henriette surfaces, despite frequently charming efforts by Sylvia Battaile to humanize her. The girl remains a mystery. It is far from clear why someone with her sensitivity and independent turn of mind would consent to marry a dolt like Monsieur Dufour's apprentice. Why does she allow recollections of Henri's caddish, self-serving behavior to haunt her?

Kudos should go to costume designer Luchino Visconti, according to www.dvdbeaver.com, who not only outfitted performers in appropriate period clothes, but also distressed them in a thoroughly realistic manner, insuring they look worn, not just displayed, with creases, frays, and rips all abundantly evident.

Lighting and sound are of the highest caliber throughout the picture, restored to their former full clarity.

This Criterion dvd release comes with an accompanying booklet which includes Gilberto Perez's informative background essay, nine minutes of screen tests, a boringly overextended ninety minutes of outtakes, six minutes of producer Pierre Braunberger's 1979 remembrances about Renoir's movie, Jean Renoir's own rambling six-minute introduction to his movie, a very revealing sixteen-minute video essay showing film procedures Renoir actually employed on location, and a twenty-five minute interview with scholar Christopher Faulkner detailing the complete history of *UNE PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE*.

Considering the significant act of aggression which climaxes it, *A DAY IN THE COUNTRY* is suitable viewing only for individuals eighteen years of age or older. More notable for cinematography than for screenplay or acting, it's nonetheless a fascinating souvenir of an important director's earlier, still immature work.