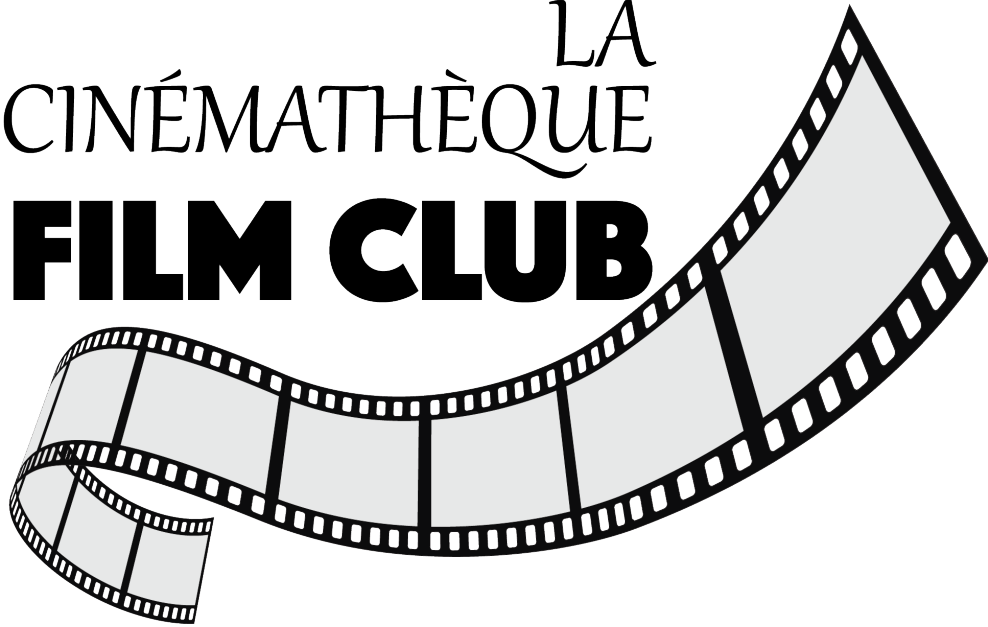


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Jean Jacques-Beineix
b. 1946

Diva
1981

REVIEW: “BETTY BLUE” (1986; Directed by Jean-Jacques Beineix)

Raymond Benson • November 20, 2019

Article sourced from CinemaRetro: <https://cinemaretro.com/index.php?/archives/10656-REVIEW-BETTY-BLUE-1986:-Directed-by-Jean-Jacques-Beineix;-CRITERION-BLU-RAY-SPECIAL-EDITION.html>

REVIEW: “BETTY BLUE” CRITERION BLU-RAY SPECIAL EDITION

“SEX, EYES, & MENTAL ILLNESS”

What made the 1986 French picture, *Betty Blue* (also called *37° 2 le matin*, aka *37.2°C in the Morning*) so striking were three things—the explicit sex on display, the mesmerizing eyes of lead actress Béatrice Dalle, and the film’s frank depiction of mental illness and its devastating effect on a relationship.

Director Jean-Jacques Beineix had burst onto the scene with the superb, quirky, and new New Wave crime picture, *Diva* (1981) that embraced not only the French New Wave of the early 1960s, but the early 1980s pop New Wave of music and visuals that were exploding in all mediums at that time. *Diva* was a critical and commercial hit with Western audiences, although Beineix’s follow-up, *Moon in the Gutter* (1983), was not. The filmmaker bounced back, though, with *Betty Blue*, which received a deserved Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film.

Based on a popular French novel by Philippe Djian, the story concerns a writer named Zorg (Jean-Hugues Anglade) who works various odd jobs to support himself while he struggles to pen a novel. He meets and falls in love with the fiery, unpredictable, and incredibly sexy Betty Blue (Dalle). Throughout the tale, we witness the ups and downs of their relationship through the couple’s nomadic moving around France, meeting and befriending colorful characters, getting into fights, and slowly spiraling toward tragedy. This is because Betty is seriously mentally ill (probably bi-polar, although that term was not much in use in the 1980s). Betty’s mood swings can be violent and shocking, and it’s a challenge for Philippe to continually cover for her, as well as care for the woman and keep her safe.

Both Anglade and Dalle deliver courageous and dynamic performances, and Jean-François Robin’s cinematography exhibits vibrant colors and painterly images. This is a gorgeous-looking picture, made even more attractive by the (often full-frontal nude) physicality of the two leads. While the picture is an exquisite examination of a passionate love affair, it’s also a disturbing scrutiny of a mental affliction that few people understood in those days.

When *Betty Blue* was first released, it was a two-hour movie. Beineix released a “director’s extended cut” in 2005 that runs three hours—and that is the version presented in the Criterion Collection’s new Blu-ray release. It’s curious why Criterion did not also include the original shorter cut, for I’m not sure the extra hour of runtime added anything of special value.

The high-definition digital restoration, approved by Beineix, is terrific, though, and it comes with an uncompressed monaural soundtrack (and the quirky musical score by Gabriel Yared is a highlight). There is a new English subtitle translation.

Supplements include an hour-long documentary on the film from 2013 with Beineix, Dalle, Anglade, associate producer Claudie Ossard, DP Robin, and composer Yared; a vintage featurette on the making of the

picture that includes an interview with original novelist Djian; *Le chien de Monsieur Michel* (“Mr. Michel’s Dog”), a short film by Beineix from 1977; a vintage TV interview with Beineix and Dalle; Dalle’s screen test; and trailers. The booklet contains an essay by critic Chelsea Phillips-Carr.

Betty Blue may not be the perfect date movie, but it does serve to illustrate in believable and visceral tones a passionate but volatile man/woman relationship that will fascinate any lover of cinema.

Jean-Jacques Beineix

Filmography as Director ([IMDb](#))

- **Les Gaulois au-delà du mythe** (2013) TV movie documentary
- **On bosse ici! On vit ici! On reste ici!** (2010) short
- **Loft Paradoxe** (2002) TV movie documentary
- **Mortel transfert** (2001)
- “Locked-In Syndrome” episode of **The Works** (1997) TV series documentary
- **Assigné à résidence** (1997) TV movie documentary
- **Otaku** (1994) documentary
- **The King of Ads, Part 2** (1993) documentary, segment director
- **IP5: L’île aux pachyderms** (1992)
- **Roselyne and the Lions** (1989)
- **Betty Blue** (1986)
- **The Moon in the Gutter** (1983)
- **Diva** (1981)
- **Le chien de Monsieur Michel** (1977) short

[Watch Betty Blue online on Mubi with Amazon Prime Video.](#)

BETTY BLUE

Roger Ebert • December 25, 1986

Article sourced from RogerEbert.com: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/betty-blue-1986>

1.5/4 Stars

Love is not the same thing as nudity. This may seem obvious, but I feel it ought to be explained to director Jean-Jacques Beineix, who has made a film that he thinks is about romantic obsession, and I think is about skin. The name of the movie is "Betty Blue," and it is the third work by the Frenchman whose first film was the electrifying "Diva" and whose second was the baffling "The Moon in the Gutter." Now comes "Betty Blue," which opens with a shot of two people sideways on a bed, making love beneath a portrait of the Mona Lisa, while the narrator says: "I had known Betty for a week. We made love every night. The forecast was the storms." This is the kind of opening scene where everybody would have been a lot better off if they had just gone back to the beginning and started over.

The narrator turns out to be the man on the bed. His name is Zorg, and he is in love with Betty Blue, and they are living in one of apparently thousands of beachfront cottages in an out-of-season resort area. They get along just fine in bed. But you can't stay in bed forever, although they try. Zorg does odd jobs for the man who owns the cottages. Betty Blue does not like the man, and violently insults him before eventually burning down several of his cottages, and chasing him around the beach while she is naked.

She also is not too easy on Zorg. In one remarkable scene, Zorg, in the foreground, keeps his cool while Betty, in the background, throws everything he owns out of the windows. Eventually, however, she has a change of heart about him: She finds a manuscript he has written, determines that he is a genius, and types it up, tens of thousands of words. (Typists will enjoy the typing scenes, in which she makes typing errors, causing her to throw away countless copies of Page 1, and then has the whole manuscript typed in no time. This is the way typing is thought about by people who always use yellow legal pads themselves.) What is Beineix trying to say in "Betty Blue"? I am not sure. The behavior of the characters is senseless and boring. We lose interest in Zorg because anyone who could tolerate Betty Blue would scarcely have the discrimination to write a good book. One scene follows another senselessly, like in a soap opera, until Betty goes mad and we can go home.

And yet the movie has made millions in France, where it will not have escaped anyone's attention that Betty is played by an attractive young woman named Beatrice Dalle, who is naked as often as not. Have you ever had the experience of going to a movie and trying to make sense of the plot, and trying to figure out why anyone has wasted his life and money on the project, only to suddenly have a dazzling insight? That's what happened to me during "Betty Blue." Reviews have been written debating the movie's view of madness, of feminism, of the travail of the artist. They all miss the point. "Betty Blue" is a movie about Beatrice Dalle's boobs and behind, and everything else is just what happens in between the scenes where she displays them.

This is not altogether a bad thing. In the old days, there used to be such a thing as "skin flicks," and, yes, they did have a certain basic animal appeal. But they were driven out of business by porno on the one hand, so to speak, and "Dynasty" on the other. Now comes a throwback to the old days when the phrase "French movie" did not mean art, and "art film" didn't mean art, either, and everybody knew exactly what they did mean, and had their exact change counted out before they dashed up to the box office, so nobody would see them going into a dirty movie. If you can get anything more than that out of "Betty Blue," consider it a bonus.