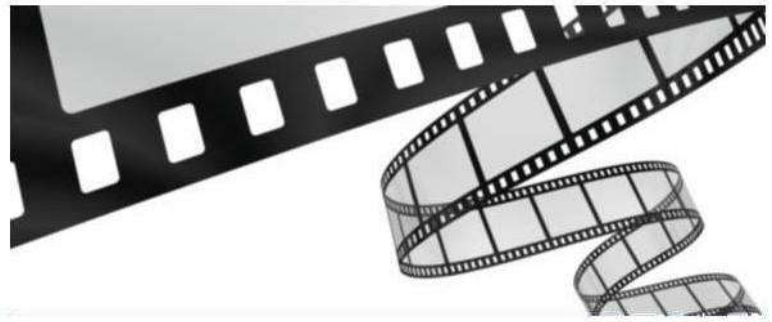


# CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

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## The Green Ray (Le rayon vert)

(Eric Rohmer, France, 1986)

**Cast:** Marie Rivière (Delphine); Béatrice Romand (Béatrice in Paris); Rosette (Françoise in Paris); Vincent Gauthier (Jacques in Biarritz)

Now almost 30 years old, Eric Rohmer's mysterious and beautiful film *The Green Ray* is re-released in cinemas as part of the director's retrospective at London's BFI Southbank. The movie is set in, indeed drenched in, the time of its filming, 1986, and for me it conjures the 80s more powerfully than any number of yuppies or padded shoulders. It features characters with cigarettes instead of mobile phones; there is aimless dialogue about what to do over the summer (Woody Allen is the only other director to give his characters quite so much leisure in the middle of the year), frizzy and studenty hair, and allegedly straight guys wearing the most extraordinary clothes. With its improvised dialogue, and walking-pace narrative, *The Green Ray* looks like a documentary about a fictional character. Marie Rivière gives a wonderful performance as Delphine, a shy, sensitive young woman who has just broken up with her boyfriend; the realisation that she has nowhere to go for the summer, and no one to go with, triggers a profound, poignant depression. Hectoring, insensitive friends make things worse with their strident advice that she should get out more. Delphine keeps crying, devastated at her own sadness and humiliated at being seen to be sad in a world of couples. After various unhappy attempts at getting away, there is a kind of miracle: Delphine hears about the phenomenon of the green ray, a flash of green light sometimes visible at sunset. She might witness it, and even have someone to witness it with. A lovely, gentle film.

**Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 1 January 2015**

This 1986 film from the late new wave veteran Eric Rohmer is the penultimate chapter of his six-part series *Comedies and Proverbs*, and arguably the best. Written in collaboration with its lead Marie Rivière, it's a remarkably slender, even flimsy-seeming story about a young woman, Delphine, who finds herself unsure how to spend her summer holiday and ends up drifting from friend to friend, resort to resort, increasingly disconsolate and at a loose end. Still, she clings to her faith in destiny, which eventually seems to reveal its design in the form of an obscure Jules Verne novel chatted about by a group of senior citizens on the Biarritz beachfront.

Shot on 16mm with a skeleton crew, the film features a number of Rohmer regulars, including Béatrice Romand and Rosette as Delphine's pugnacious and coquettish friends, respectively, together with assorted non-professionals. They bring the tang of uncooked reality to a story that at times resembles a documentary on the French cult of the summer holiday. Some moments suggest an inconsequential comedy about people talking nonsense; the wonderful scene in which Delphine holds forth to mystified friends about her

vegetarianism (“Lettuce is more like a friend”) has an almost Seinfeldian ring, as she babbles away with impassioned incoherence.

But *The Green Ray* – the centrepiece of the BFI’s current Rohmer retrospective – is also a serious film, and a sad one, a perspicaciously empathetic study of solitude, depression and anxiety. Delphine has recently split up with a never-seen boyfriend, a fact subtly kept as background information, although it informs everything we see. But the payoff, at once simple and utterly miraculous, will send you out of the cinema floating, and a little puzzled about how Rohmer pulls off this modest but immensely potent emotional sleight of hand.

**Jonathan Romney, *The Observer*, 4 January 2015**

What was utterly characteristic was Rohmer's feel for what the real life of a young person – albeit a certain type of middle-class, educated, young person – was like: that is, not shiny and sexy or grungy or funny in the Hollywood manner, but uncertain, tentative, vulnerable and more often than not dominated by a quotidian type of travel: bus travel, subway travel, train travel; travel to get somewhere for the summer, or to see a girlfriend or boyfriend.

The first Rohmer film I saw was *Le rayon vert* (*The Green Ray*), with my girlfriend, when we were both students, at the old Cambridge Arts Cinema in the 80s. I thought then and think now that Rohmer's films are quintessentially studenty – in the best possible sense. Young, callow-ish people do a lot of talking, in the way we all did, about what was wrong (or right) with their lives and relationships, and about the perfect place to go for the summer. In this film, a young woman is unable to think what to do for the summer. She tries various places with various people, but always finds herself heading back to Paris, drawn perhaps to a place in which possibilities have not been thinned and options narrowed. Eventually, she finds herself at the beach, about to experience the legendary “rayon vert”, or flash of green light you can see at the moment the sun sets.

Perhaps other twentysomethings, from a later era, would be more excited about finding the perfect beach in Thailand or Vietnam, but to us impecunious 1980s students, the idea of witnessing the “rayon vert” in Biarritz was a fascinating, exotic notion, and eminently plausible. It was as fascinating as absinthe. Yet everything was filmed in such a straightforward, realist way, and for someone in his mid-60s, Rohmer himself had a remarkable sympathy and un-patronising interest in young people.

**Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*, 11 January 2010**

**Our next film: *Whiplash*, Thursday 21 January, 8pm**