



La Regle du jeu (BFI Film Classics)

V.F. Perkins

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La Règle du jeu was the first and is still the finest of all the films that we see in a director's cut. The work of French cinephiles in the 1950s restored Jean Renoir's work to glory. It had been a disaster at its premiere in 1939, just weeks before the outbreak of war. Its failure, Renoir wrote, 'depressed me so much that I made up my mind either to forsake cinema or to leave France.' Before and after its rejection at the box office, panic cutting savaged the available prints.

In the years after the war, Renoir's film was to become a legendary lost masterpiece, but Renoir had to wait twenty years for his vindication. In 1959, a reconstructed print triumphed in its first screening at the Venice Film Festival. Since then it has claimed its place among the cinema's most profound and fascinating achievements. François Truffaut was just one of a host of directors inspired by *La Règle du jeu*: 'the credo of film lovers, the film of films, the most despised on its release and the most valued afterward.'

V.F. Perkins traces the movie's fortunes from the time of its production. He offers a nuanced account that explores its shifting moods, the depth of its themes and the uniqueness of its style. *La Règle du jeu* is renowned for its construction as an ensemble piece with a large cast of principal characters. Perkins follows this cue and frames his analysis as a discussion of four key actors and their roles in the film – Roland Toutain (André), Marcel Dalio (Robert), Nora Gregor (Christine) and Renoir himself as Octave. Exploring characterisation becomes a means to shed light on the subtlety of Renoir's direction. Casting, composition, décor and cutting are seen to work with the complex organisation of shots in deep focus to develop a challenging perspective on the bourgeoisie of 1939, in Renoir's words, 'dancing on a volcano'.

This special edition is published to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the BFI Film Classics series.

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