

Marguerite & Julien



OFFICIAL SELECTION
COMPETITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES



Rectangle Productions presents
In coproduction with Wild Bunch - Orange Studio
France 2 Cinéma - Scope Pictures - Framboise Productions

Anaïs Demoustier

Jérémy Elkaim

Marguerite & Julien

A film by
Valérie DONZELLI



SÉLECTION OFFICIELLE
COMPÉTITION
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

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SYNOPSIS

Julien and Marguerite de Ravalet, son and daughter of the Lord of Turlaville, have loved each other tenderly since childhood. But as they grow up their affection veers toward voracious passion. Scandalized by their affair, society hunts them until, unable to resist their feelings, they flee...

INTERVIEW WITH VALÉRIE DONZELLI

What was the origin of *Marguerite & Julien* ?

For this project I wanted to make a film that wasn't inspired by my own life, like the previous ones. I wanted to adapt something. When I discovered the screenplay Jean Gruault had written for François Truffaut it was obvious. I was enchanted by the story immediately and wanted it to be my next film. It was an adaptation of a real story - there was a truth to it. I quickly discovered that the Ravalet chateau was still standing in Tournai, so I was able to adopt the working process I always favour: to start from reality in order to make it a fiction. Only this time, I began from a reality that was not mine.

The story is based on true events but the film shifts into something fictional right from the start. It's not at all faithful to historical reality.

I wanted to make a film of a certain breadth, with a fictional dimension. A film of chivalry and adventure - a film for everyone. I felt that this story contained all the themes I hold dear: impossible love, fusion, the idea of treating love as a disease, or like destiny. I wanted to film a real tragedy.

I also wanted to create something new, as regards the form of the film itself - something that didn't exist - so I had absolutely no references on which to draw. From the onset I rejected the idea of historical reconstruction; that really didn't interest me at all. On the contrary, I wanted the freedom to invent a world, but from real elements: the chateau, the Ravalet family, the historical story... The idea was to incarnate a legend rather than to recount historical facts.

How did you conceive the spirit of the film, made from anachronisms and borrowings from different eras?

It was constructed after a very long process. The writing took quite some time, as did the preparation. It came little by little, after long discussions with Charlotte Gastaut, my artistic collaborator, Jérémie Elkaïm, my co-writer and co-director, Céline Bozon, the cinematographer, Manu de Chauvigny, the production designer and Elisabeth Méhu, the costume designer. It was a team effort. I wanted to make a timeless film, not tied to any particular era, rooted in the world of 'fairytales' without belonging entirely to it. It was difficult because there were no pre-existing references. As the story was already there, I wanted to make a film in which form would take a predominant place.

My guideline was from Cocteau: "History is reality deformed, myth the false embodied." I wanted to make something imaginary that would be embodied to the hilt, so that we would feel that these characters are real, would be with them in the chateau, would be able to smell Madame de Ravalet's scent and hear the wind and creaking of the floorboards. A sensory film... 3D without the glasses!

The film certainly deals with this tension - between the real story and the form that tends toward the imaginary - since the story is narrated in an orphanage by one of the young girls, played by Esther Garrel. We're never quite sure if she is recounting the story or making it up.

I thought it was very interesting to play with many different forms of storytelling. Esther Garrel, the orphan leader, recounts real events, but also false ones, simply to keep the others interested, to entertain them by telling a story that is basically true but which she embellishes. Every story, from the moment you tell it, deforms reality since you give your own interpretation of it. Cinema is the same: from the moment you film you deform the truth, but another truth emerges. The film is a sort of Russian doll of storytelling and cinema.

In your way of working, there's a gap between what you plan and what you are going to do on the spur of the moment.

I always question everything. Sometimes it's agonizing because you feel that everything is possible. I love listening to what the people working with me have to say. Sometimes when you're making a film you lack a certain distance, you have to let go and allow your subconscious to talk. I really feel that asking the people working with me to give their opinion helps with this process. I chew over what they say and spit out what doesn't work. Filming was very testing, partly because of that. We had enormous technical requirements since it was an 11-week shoot, yet I liked to feel it was possible to believe that I could re-invent everything at the last moment.

Did you have any difficulty finding the film in the edit?

Yes and no. It's hard to say. The edit was fascinating. The material was good, we just needed time and distance, to be able to understand that the film is after all quite cerebral.

At the beginning of the film the children are doing a piece of theatre where they dub the lines of an old film. This scene could be seen as a

sort of miniature version of the film itself: you're acting a piece that isn't yours (since this is not an original screenplay), as well and as precisely as you can, but in your own fashion.

You're absolutely right, but it wasn't conceived that way. It was Jérémie's idea to start with. In the script the children were putting on a play for their parents. I was thinking of using one of La Fontaine's fables and Jérémie suggested this idea of dubbing, saying it would be astonishing to hear the children talk with old-fashioned adult voices. The idea stayed. I called André Rigaut (my sound engineer) and gave him the mission of tracking down some old films. There was a process of inventing anachronisms and modern intrusions. He found an old 60s film with characters called Margaret and Julian.

Wherever it's *The Queen of Hearts*, *Declaration of War*, *Hand in Hand*, *Just Love!* - all very different films, some drawn from your own life, others adapted from true stories or plays - we always find the same subject: you don't choose love, it chooses you, love descends on you like fate.

I think a journalist once told Pauline Gaillard that couples in my films are like weapons of mass destruction. This time, it's true!

In *Marguerite & Julien*, love truly acts as destiny. The same principle is at work in your earlier films. In *Just Love!*, what emerges from your adaptation of *The Game of Love and Chance* is that the characters are predestined to love each other, far beyond the social determinism that Marivaux intended.

The social dimension of *The Game of Love and Chance* got on my nerves: the fact that the rich end up loving each other, as do the poor do. I wanted Arlequin and Lisette's love to be real, a real love at first sight, beyond any social dimension.

It's no coincidence that Gruault wrote the screenplay for François Truffaut, a director with whom you have a strong connection. There are numerous references to Truffaut's cinema in all your films: filmed letters, narrators....

I love Truffaut but it doesn't stop me making films. He's not an overpowering reference. In fact, in *Marguerite & Julien*, there are many more references to Rappeneau than to Truffaut. I see Truffaut more as my lucky star. For example, I never thought about him when I was writing *The Queen of Hearts*, I thought more of Rohmer, in the sense of making an inexpensive film and also in the old fashioned "refinement" of certain affected situations. But it's clear that

subconsciously the notion of the narrator arose from my having watched Truffaut's films. The films we make are always enriched by the films we love. I think Truffaut said that a screenplay always contains one part reality, one part invention and the rest is the unconscious. But of course I like the fact that Truffaut was interested in this story. The fact that someone you respect values something sharpens your desire.

But Truffaut didn't want to make this film. Do you know why?

There are several theories. He thought the subject was a little too trendy at the time. The screenplay was written in 1973 (the year I was born). Louis Malle had just made *Murmur of the Heart*, on the theme of incest. Gruault also told me recently that the historical reconstruction of the late Middle Ages also put him off, which I completely understand. When I read the screenplay, I immediately thought that the film shouldn't take place at a precise time. Hence the idea of making it into a musical - which was the first idea - and imposing a form that would free me of the historical context.

When you mention a musical, one automatically thinks of Demy's *Donkey Skin*, another film with no fixed era - and not only because of the helicopter. It's not quite the same thing here: each element of the set or costume is real but doesn't correspond to one era only. We can't even really speak of anachronisms since there is no clearly defined era. By the way, in which era is the film set?

It's a period film. A story set in the past but which I have imagined like a science fiction film. Because we don't know what the past was like (even if we have books), any more than we know the future. It had to be approached like science fiction: about feelings, about the way people react, we don't really know much... The idea was to construct a world: the policemen's uniforms are World War I soldiers' uniforms, the costumes of the nannies (Catherine Mouchet and Alice de Lencquesaing) were designed by Charlotte Gastaut. Madame de Ravalet's costume was invented. For Monsieur de Ravalet I had a fairly precise idea... When the boys come back from high school I wanted them to be in a sort of uniform, so we had them wear kilts. The guards at the end wear bowler hats and look like characters in *The King and the Mockingbird*. I wanted to make a stylised film.

To go back to Truffaut, who didn't want to make the film in 1973 - why was it interesting to make it in 2015?

I thought it was interesting that this love is so forbidden that there is no solution

other than death. If they manage to resist it, they prefer to follow the "life drive" rather than the death drive. But their love is so strong that they can't help but live it, and hence to die. I'm going to draw a parallel, which might seem odd, but it's like being gay in a society that forbids it. Those who live their homosexuality despite that do it at the cost of being subjected to humiliation, imprisonment, even death.

Today, in our more permissive society, it was difficult to find something equivalent. But incest between brother and sister is still forbidden - without being punishable by death, of course.

That said, at the time during which the story takes place, they were not sentenced to death for incest but for adultery. The real problem was that she was married, and a woman was her husband's property. This too is still the case in some societies. It's a reflection on freedom. At what point do you decide to live your love, to follow your nature, even if death results?

And yet we don't really get the feeling that Marguerite and Julien are rebels, or that they want to transgress the law.

But that's what I find interesting. Disobedience doesn't necessarily have a clearly defined face. You can be the disobedient son of a good family. They don't disobey for provocation's sake; they do it almost despite themselves. That's why I didn't want the actors to be too young. If that had been the case, it would have been easy to blame their innocence, immaturity, and insouciance. I wanted the actors to be older so that we would understand that they are completely aware of what they are doing.

Particularly in Julien's case, we feel that he has really thought it through.

He goes through terrible phases. When he realises the desire he feels for his sister, he is ashamed. He tries to resist. They're not on the same level in the story. Marguerite ploughs ahead more instinctively.

I thought it was interesting to tell the story where the premise is a given: they are in love. This isn't an "encounter, conquest, break up" love story. It's very hard to tell a love story when love is never questioned, because there is no conflict. The conflict comes from the outside. The story is told through others' eyes: by the orphan girl, the parents, by what others project onto them.

In fact Marguerite and Julien speak very little to each other.

They almost never talk. This is a film in which the heroes don't talk to each other, because they are in fact one. The other doesn't exist. When they are together they don't need to talk because they are alone, face to face with

themselves. It's total fusion. This is a form of love that touches me deeply. There is no embarrassment about not talking, no need to fill the void.

There's an instant understanding.

They are simply happy together; they feel good with one another. It's something almost animal-like.

This is a film that makes no moral judgement on the question of incest.

Yes, but we must be careful here, my intention was never to film an apologia for incest... absolutely not. At the same time, I didn't want it to be condemned in the film. It was very important to me that there should be opponents. When I watch the film, it's great to see Marguerite's father admonishing her. I want the audience to be with them and with the others as well, going back and forth, so that everyone can be understood.

And you succeed: the opponents are not obtuse, they are even rather understanding, perhaps too much so, whether it's the parents or the priest. It's interesting because we are not faced with people who forbid their love because they are idiots. They are the ones who are right. We are really torn.

Yes, it's the others who are right. But all the same, our children's lives don't belong to us. We can keep on telling them not to do something and they'll do it. But it mustn't be seen as capricious. It was important that we didn't dislike them. We had to feel empathy for them, even if it's not easy.

Did you approach the directing of *Marguerite & Julien* very differently to your other films?

Yes, completely. There was a lot of machinery, unlike my other films. I wanted to make a film that would look very different. And I wanted a bigger film: there were horses, lots of extras...

The film is visually beautiful. How did you work with cinematographer Céline Bozon?

Céline and I talked a lot. I was very happy to be working with her again. I gave her some pretty conflicting indications: I wanted the film to be Technicolor and very modern at the same time, very rock and roll... but also something very intimate. I was convinced the film shouldn't be realistic. For nights we used a

massive spotlight as the moon; we had to resort to day-for-night. We mixed film and digital. We shot all the interior day shots on film. All the rest was shot in digital. I wanted flesh to be filmed in such a way that you'd feel you could touch it. I wanted to avoid the highly defined digital image.

I wanted to make a sensory film. It was important that the film had character. I didn't want it just to be prettily lit, I had no interest in that. I wanted a pictorial film, yet full of life, not frozen.

Yet, at times, there are certain tableaux that come to life little by little...

Yes, the idea was a picture book. These scenes always indicate a dramatic shift.

There is something weighty about these scenes. We feel there is a commentary about the society you are describing. The dinner, for example...

Yes, in this scene we are in social lie since they want her to marry against her will. She uses her suitor to make her brother jealous. Her brother is hurt. The parents talk for the sake of talking...

How did you work with the actors?

It was very difficult because no scene was really dialogued. The film is narrated, like in a children's book. The actors couldn't rely on the text either, unlike if they were performing a Marivaux piece, for example. A kind of politeness in the way it was played had to be maintained, it couldn't be either naturalistic or theatrical. It was difficult to find a middle ground. When you make a film set in the 18th century you play according to the codes; here we had to invent the codes.

How did you choose the cast?

For Julien, it was quick and easy. Jérémie Elkaïm was very much an obvious choice to me. There is a kind of melancholy and sweetness about him that Julien needed, while also being sensual, desirable. Julien had to be seductive but not a Don Juan. We had to look for Marguerite; we needed a good match for Julien. So I organised a casting. I auditioned about ten actresses. I didn't want to see too many. I knew Marguerite would be one of these ten. We did some filmed tests, American-style, but low budget. Céline Bozon filmed them and André Rigaut did the sound. I knocked up some costumes. It was like a shoot. Each actress played the same scenes. We edited the tests and then watched them on a big screen. Anaïs Demoustier was the obvious choice. She was Julien's (Jérémie's) Marguerite.

Antoine Boulat and I thought and talked a lot about the different characters.

We had to create a credible family. Frédéric Pierrot came on board early on; he plays the reassuring father perfectly. I wanted Madame de Ravalet to be young. In real life it's impossible for Aurélia Petit to be Jérémie and Anaïs' mother, but on film it works.

Frédéric Pierrot has a good-natured, sweet quality, which does make him seem very reassuring; there is also an unexpected eccentric side to him. He is a bit of a hippy lord with his long hair and beard, his huge bow ties...

This was a reference to certain American western heroes. He dresses a bit like a character in a western. Sami Frey came on because I wanted the priest to have natural authority, to be incredibly charismatic, and to have a real voice. For the nanny I wanted someone surprising. Catherine Mouchet is great because you can imagine things about her, there's a real intelligence there... She's not only a nanny.

The character of the brother, played by Bastien Bouillon seems at first to have a small supporting part. He even seems a bit bland but little by little takes an important place.

That was a way of showing that everyone is contaminated by this story. The brother is the lame duck of the family at first, but comes into his own and isn't as lame as the others after all. In the end it's he who holds the fort, and he who survives this wounded family. I find it interesting to imagine that the character of the brother, who is thought to be not as smart as the others, is the one who will end up being less of a problem. Bizarrely, he gathers momentum: towards the end, he dresses like his father and we feel he is going to take over... whereas Julien, who seems fine in every respect, ends up taking a catastrophic turn. He disobeys when he doesn't seem to be doing so.

What are the differences between Jean Gruault's original screenplay and yours?

Jean Gruault's screenplay doesn't bear much resemblance to the final one. His was much more rooted in an era. It had a medieval quality, more realistic, more chivalric. It was a 20 million euro film, 140 pages long, a real epic. I wanted Marguerite and Julien to be stars, characters on whom you project a real fascination. Because they live something extraordinary... we imagine that what they experience must be more intense, more painful. Whereas seen from the inside, it's just the same. It's only because people project something onto them. It was Jérémie who thought of having the film narrated by others. That was when we were really able to make the story ours. They had to be seen,

from the onset, as circus freaks. That's where the idea of the orphans narrating the story came from.

They are mythical heroes in their lifetime.

Yes, and the film plays on the question of making them live again. Through film, they come back to life. Since this film was made, Marguerite and Julien have never been so popular. They have their own Wikipedia page, whereas when we wrote the screenplay there was nothing, it was difficult to find any information about them. It seems that they have been reincarnated.

It is your first really tragic movie.

It is a tragedy. It's a sad film, a heavy film to carry. It's a tragic story, in which an entire family is destroyed. But I also wanted to show that a human being, rooted in life, has a phenomenal ability to regenerate. At the end, when the children die, we finish on the father and the brother, the baby in the carriage: it's a way of showing that despite everything, they go on. They have gone all the way to the end but something else is beginning. It might seem a bit naïve but it is the cycle of life: birth follows death. There is a mystical dimension to the film. That is what is said at the end when we hear their voices saying: "We return... we become bark.... we are rocks..." Some things cannot be killed. The spirit, the soul can't be killed. A feeling can't be destroyed. You can certainly try to kill the bodies, but something will outlive them.

The abstract shots at the end are beautiful.

The last words of my screenplay were: "Spirits fly away..." When we shot the film Céline Bozon asked me what these spirits were, and how were we to film them. I couldn't find an answer. I couldn't film them because you can't film spirits. A spirit only exists because something was embodied before. So we had to make the film in its entirety to be able to understand that it was impossible to film that. I did these shots of 'matter' thinking I'd use them later, somehow. During the editing I asked Pauline Gaillard to edit them as if Marguerite and Julien's souls were now a part of all the elements.

Where does the text come from?

It's a poem by Walt Whitman that the production designer sent me on the last day with a note saying: "Thinking of you." As soon as I read it I thought, this is Marguerite and Julien. We recorded it that day and it was integrated during the edit.

INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÉMIE ELKAÏM

What interested you most in Jean Gruault's screenplay?

What mattered most to me was to make a truthful film. Up until now we have been using elements of our lives because we feel that there we have material that shows something real. We are sure of one thing, this truth exists, and even if we move away from it in film, even if we add playful, comic elements, if we add form, something true will remain. It's like a guarantee. It is interesting to find a subject close to Valérie's obsessions, that contains the truth, but which isn't her own story.

What was particular about the way she handled the screenplay?

A director more inclined to classic cinema would have been keener to recreate the historical details of that world, which would have produced a classic film whose purpose would be to objectivize the story and its issues. In such a context it would have been difficult to place our secret. By getting rid of this problem, by making the decision that this is a period film without a fixed period, that anachronisms aren't anachronisms since there is no reconstruction and therefore everything is allowed, we come back to a basic guaranteed truth, and the form comes afterwards, freely.

What did your work on the screenplay involve?

First we had to make Jean Gruault's work our own, to reclaim it; there was also the slightly silly aspect - which I like - because I think Valérie's work is that of a craftsman. Writing a screenplay is like writing a 'shopping list' for your ideal film. A bit like a singer who would say: "I want this one to be a dance album because I want to dance with the audience when I play live." In this case it's a list of what you want to do on set, what you'd like to try... with a secret, the film's secret.

What is this secret?

I think films always carry a secret that isn't explained in the script. In *Marguerite and Julien* it's about freedom - the freedom to be yourself, absolutely, to the point of death.

The story of *Marguerite & Julien* is very transgressive.

Yet in the film, the opponents, as much as the protagonists who transgress the

law, have no ideological position. We strove to avoid making caricatures of any of the characters, so that we can identify with all of them. You can identify with those who defy what is prohibited because they are not doing it as provocation. It's not a case of provocation on one side and alienating social fetters, with obtuse and narrow-minded characters hell-bent on respecting the law without taking the human factor in consideration on the other. In both cases we are confronted with the confusion that this true story represents, this passionate and incestuous love between a brother and sister. What do you do with two people who want to live something consensually, even if the law of man forbids it? If these two people aren't hurting anyone, how do you justify that it is forbidden? It's as naïve a question as that. I think Valérie's cinema represents all this. Her approach in the way she builds and directs a film is simple, fresh; however much she admires classic films, it's not in her nature to make one. When it comes to telling a story that moves her, like this one, I think she breaks the laws without meaning to. Her cinema touches on the same questions posed by incest in the film.

A kind of transgression without revolt?

It has to do with this question of disobedience. Valérie literally applies to the letter the idea that there are no rules to making a film, that in the end there are as many ways to make a film as there are directors. So she has to find her place. To find your place is also to find the strength to put one foot in front of the other. To carry the weight of your elders on your shoulders paralyzes you. To destroy this paralysis you need the truth. Valérie would like to be as obedient as possible (like someone who'd like to speak as clearly as possible but who has a stutter - this stutter is her charm, her singularity). She wants to tell things in a classic way but her stutter makes her say things differently. Her irreverence is a similar thing. This script appealed to her in part because Gruault wrote it for Truffaut, whom she admires, but that's not why she did it; nor was it to make an imitation or pastiche or to gain credit. She has no desire to make a film *à la Truffaut* or against Truffaut. Her success lies in adapting this story with who she is. She ends up making her own film, very remote from the world of Truffaut. This could be seen as a betrayal, but it isn't.

This disobedience isn't intentional. There is no opportunism with Valérie. She couldn't do anything other than what she does. This is the cause of a great solitude. She strives to make classic movies for large audiences and ends up making singular films, very much her own. Valérie's work is like that of a craftsman: ideas surface from the work process, they don't precede it.

What did you find interesting in *Marguerite and Julien's* love?

In this film love is passionate because it is forbidden. If it weren't, it would be

an almost boring love (from a cinematographic point of view): mutual, simple and fulfilling for both characters. The fact that they are brother and sister makes their love impossible. Impossible love returns everything to the self, to the struggle you have trying to get rid of this feeling beyond your will, the impossible love you have to live with. In the story itself, love doesn't contain death. In the context it is society that leads them to it.

But by choosing to love each other they choose to die.

Of course, but it's not a choice. They are subject to their feelings. They try to fight them but they can't: it's their truth. The whole question is whether to decide to allow yourself to follow your truth or not. But it's not a considered choice. There is no will to transgress.

As an actor have you noticed an evolution in the way Valérie directs?

Absolutely, even if this was due to the parts themselves. I was inhabited by the part, before we started shooting the film. For three whole months I vibrated to Julien's rhythm. The film being a picture book and the characters as if filmed in a puppet theatre, I'm not sure what traces are left in the film.

There is a concrete aspect of physical preparation but also the idea of playing someone who is consumed. Julien is aware; Valérie gives me a part a bit like that I have in life. He is more reasonable. More than Marguerite, he is aware of what's at stake but he goes for it because he can't help himself, not because he wants to assert something. The character of Marguerite on the other hand goes with the tide more instinctively.

This film answered my hunger for the absolute. To wash the dishes only once, but once and for all! It is something I have in me, that can evolve, with absolutes succeeding one after the other, because life is renewed and all the better for it. I think this character has this dimension. He burns up from the inside through hunger for absolute and also because he is conscious of the power of the forbidden and of social representations. He can't leave it aside. He is torn. It is a complete nightmare for him. But it is his truth.

The film reveals something about the way Valérie and I work. I feel as if she is moving around with a stack of crockery balanced on her head, and I'm standing by her side trying to catch the plates that fall. But I'm also here to protect what we called her 'stutter', her singularity; sometimes against her will... because there is a constant hostility to this 'stutter' from the system of filmmaking. The organisation of the shooting, the hierarchy on set, the method of preparation all serve an enterprise of standardisation, particularly on a big budget film.

How do you manage to maintain your course in this context?

I encourage her to be herself, but I sometimes had a hard time as actor. Because she needs to concentrate on other things during a shot: on a hand grasping fabric, on something that appears beside the action itself... She'll turn her attention to certain things, details in her *decoupage* that will create an intentional rupture with naturalism. In French *auteur* cinema, we live in an era of the overvalued sequence-shot as the access to a form of actors' truth... a sort of documentary about actors. This is not at all Valérie's ambition. She tries to be very first degree. This is a musical film on every level: as much for the way feelings are developed as the way they are dealt with. There is no irony and for me this is almost a political gesture.

It's a common debate in the world of cinema: to claim sincerity when in fact there is a degree of irony lurking. And everybody is reassured because we are not completely fooled. Valérie takes the risk of being all on her own with her feelings. Like the sad song you listen to on your own and makes you cry. It seems to me that she has made a film you'd want to return back to. If this film would make only one claim it should be this: in order to love it you have to agree not to take any distance from it, to accept its tenderness. When she says she wants to make a film for everyone, that's what she means. What is left afterwards is much more complex...

What was your experience of working with Anaïs Demoustier?

From as early as the filmed tests, she seemed to contain all the elements of the character - her purity as well as her madness. And there was a sort of visual alchemy between us: we looked credible as brother and sister. It was a real joy to be opposite someone so embodied by her character. Anaïs has a vibration that helped playing the part. I felt we were really looking at each other, really talking, we were strong together when we acted.

At times it could be complicated for her to be between Valérie and me, but we did our best to welcome her as much as we could so that Marguerite and Julien would be one, right from the start.

The shoot lasted a long time. It was both testing and moving to be in the real chateau, to feel the shadows of the real Marguerite and Julien. Our trio was filled by the characters' feelings, the intensity of their love. During the making of the film, that's what was left for us: to love, understand and live with them.

INTERVIEW WITH ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER

How was your first meeting with Valérie Donzelli?

Valérie gave me the screenplay before having me make some tests. I remember very precisely the words she used to talk about the character: “Marguerite is determined.” I immediately felt that the way Valérie addressed me was stimulating, and made me want to act, that I was going to be sensitive to her energy and would want to turn it into performance. Reading the script I thought Marguerite’s part was incredible but above all, I was curious about the form the film would take, about what Valérie was going to do with it. I knew her films; I knew this would be a different kind of period film, that she would offer something else. Reading the script really made me want to go to the tests.

And the tests?

Valérie was looking for her Marguerite in the best possible way... it was a particularly exciting casting, like a shoot, with crew, and playing opposite Jérémie Elkaïm... it’s not always like that, believe me!

For me these tests were an opportunity to discover Valerie’s approach to work. I found her incredibly sharp and playful. She had brought clothes that belonged to her and it felt as she was playing dolls with me. She would dress me up in one costume, then another... In fact she was already building the character. When I left the tests it was very obvious that I really wanted the part. I felt close to Valérie and to Marguerite.

What did you like about Marguerite?

Playing Marguerite was for me the opportunity to play a lyrical character. Romantic. I love the fact that we’re dealing with great feelings here. The absolute. She has great strength - a savage strength - savage because she has purity and ingenuousness. She is very simple-minded when it comes to the way she approaches things. She is capable of destroying everything for love. To play such a character is liberating, it’s a breath of fresh air. I’m crazy about Marguerite!

Marguerite is also in love with her brother...

When acting I only had in mind the love story and the claustrophobia that such an impossible love causes. The simplicity of the feelings that bond Marguerite

and Julien is disarming. But the fact they are siblings prevents them from being at one with their truth. That’s the contradiction of the characters. That’s what is tragic about their destiny and the question about Marguerite’s freedom that is posed throughout the film. It is this complexity that was wonderful to play. To be an actor is to look for the space between your own intimacy and that of the character, a space of complicity. And here, the terrain appealed to me more than anything: the search for freedom, for life.

The film is very romantic...

Yes, it’s a pleasure for me to be part of a film that is neither quotidian nor naturalistic. Valérie’s cinema is highly stylised. It allows so much in terms of acting, costumes... and that creates something very special. The film is sensual, it erupts... *Marguerite & Julien* is a film you have to experience.

How did the shooting go?

Incredibly well since Valérie puts pleasure at the heart of what she does. She doesn’t need to lord it over people; she doesn’t care about her role of ‘director’. Sometimes she suggests incredible things, a bit destabilising for people used to a more classic type of cinema. I understood quickly that I had to follow her. I loved being at the service of her ideas, her *mise-en-scène*. I abandoned myself totally but paradoxically, I’ve never felt I had such an important place in a film. Because Valérie is on the look out for what people can bring when they’re going in the same direction as the film. It was enthralling to make a film so rich in ideas, so singular. Also, I felt supported by the strength of this character and that’s why this has been one of the most beautiful shoots of my life. I think my encounter with Valérie as director will mark me for a very long time, the way the energy flew between her, me, the character and Jérémie. It was a virtuous circle.

And acting with Jérémie Elkaïm?

It really had to work between the two of us, there had to be great complicity so our love story would be credible. I felt right away that it was very simple, very fluid between Jérémie and me. It works or it doesn’t, it can’t be explained, it’s the mystery of actors. There was a kind of kinship - even a sort of twinning - between us. It helped me to see that we could look alike, that in Julien’s eyes I could also see Marguerite. Jérémie is the kind of actor who gives fully to the other; he is very available. With him it’s easy to let yourself go...

Did the fact that he was also involved with the direction affect you?

Jérémie was a partner who was more involved than just acting in the film, and of course that makes everything much more interesting. Before the shoot I hadn't fully realised how involved he was in the making of the film. I was surprised when I first got on set but I loved seeing how they complemented each other. And sometimes I benefited from it since I had two people to talk to. There is something very moving about their complicity at work. It's very stimulating for an actor.

The shoot took place in the chateau where Marguerite and Julien de Ravalet actually lived...

I hadn't considered the impact of that before we began, but it was crazy to think I was in Marguerite's actual bedroom! I didn't think about it all the time but there were moments when it would surface. It's strange to think you are walking in the steps of the real people, that they are there a bit, in the atmosphere...

CAST

Marguerite	Anaïs Demoustier
Julien	Jérémie Elkaïm
Jean de Ravelet	Frédéric Pierrot
Madeleine de Ravelet	Aurélia Petit
Lefebvre	Raoul Fernandez
Jacqueline	Catherine Mouchet
Philippe	Bastien Bouillon
Abbot of Hambye	Sami Frey
Mother Lefebvre	Géraldine Chaplin
Nicole	Alice de Lencquesaing
Orphan storyteller	Esther Garrel

CREW

Director	Valérie Donzelli
Screenplay	Valérie Donzelli and Jérémie Elkaïm From an original idea and screenplay by Jean Gruault
D.P. Sound	Céline Bozon André Rigaut, Raphael Sohier Emmanuel Croset
Editor	Pauline Gaillard
Production Designer	Manu de Chauvigny
Costume Designer	Elisabeth Méhu
Casting	Antoinette Boulat
Juvenile Casting	Agathe Hassenforder ARDA Fanny de Donceel
1st Assistant Director	Aurélien Fauchet
Production Manager	Serge Catoire
Post-production Manager	Eugénie Deplus
Original Music	Yuksek
Production Producers	Rectangle Productions Edouard Weil and Alice Girard
In coproduction with	Wild Bunch Orange Studio France 2 Cinéma Scope Pictures Framboise Productions
With the participation of	CANAL + CINÉ +
With the participation of	FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS
In association with	COFINOVA 11 SOFITVCINÉ 2 CINÉMAGE 9 PALATINE ÉTOILE 12
With the support of Made with the support of	LA RÉGION ILE-DE-FRANCE TAX SHELTER DU GOUVERNEMENT FÉDÉRAL BELGE VIA SCOPE INVEST
Developed with the support of	COFINOVA 9 CINÉMAGE 7 DÉVELOPPEMENT
Distributor & International Sales	Wild Bunch – Orange Studio

