



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
COMPETITION
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2019

OH MERCY

DIRECTED BY ARNAUD DESPLECHIN



WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS



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OH MERCY

DIRECTED BY ARNAUD DESPLECHIN

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SYNOPSIS

Christmas night in Roubaix. Police chief Daoud roams the city in which he grew up. Burned-out cars, altercations...

At the station, Louis Coterelle is the new arrival, fresh out of the academy.

Daoud and Louis will be confronted with the murder of an old woman. Two young women are questioned. Claude and Marie - destitute, alcoholic, lovers...



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“Already a film buff as a child, from the playground on, I rejected society. But I think that cinema helped me come to terms with the world.” Here I transpose imperfectly the voice of Serge Daney, heard on the radio. For a long time, this quote has been my *vade mecum*.

Nearly all my films have been romantic. Too much! It’s this “too much” I desired.

Today I want a film that sticks to reality, in every way. That returns to raw material and which, through the art of the actor, can burn.

As the screenplay’s prologue suggests, I didn’t want to surrender anything to the imagination here, I didn’t want to invent a thing, rather, I wanted to rework images seen on television ten years ago, that have haunted me ever since.

Why wasn’t I able to forget these images? Because generally, I can only identify with the victims. I don’t much like torturers. And for the first and only time in my life, in two criminals I discovered two sisters.

I wanted to consider the raw words of the victims and the culprits, as the purest poetry. I regarded it as sacred material, a text we will never exhaust.

As a spectator, I remain dizzy before the culpability and the childhoods of these two murderesses.

I thought of “Crime and Punishment” each day while transcribing and putting together this material. Raskolnikov’s torments are those of the deprived.

Yes, more than we can say, pity lies at the heart of love.

As a director I am now looking into how to film and direct – that’s to say, how the actors will play such roles. I believe the position of the camera and the actor’s performance can show the worst torments of the soul.

This is the power of incarnation specific to cinema.

I think that fiction gains from being a possible mirror of reality.

What probably struck me the most while I was discovering the images that are at the origin of my film, were the faces of women. Culprits and victims. Old Lucette, the young





rape victim, the girlfriend accompanying her, the young runaway and finally the two murderesses, who led me into a vortex of terror...

Thus, through life in this police station in Roubaix, we have a portrait, necessarily incomplete, of the feminine condition today.

Only one film guided me: Hitchcock's *The Wrong Man*. A news item returned to its brutality, its nakedness, and its enigma. The enigma of truth.

We know how Hitchcock pushed his obsession with realism as far as filming in the very places where the actual events took place, and using the real witnesses in their own roles.

Here, I daren't follow the same path as the master. My path is as follows: I trust, when the time comes, that I will be able to direct these words, and to film the actors who will make them theirs before giving them back to us. To render homage to the triviality, or the mystery, of these words. Thus, by means of the specific genius of cinema, to be able to make shimmer the grandeur of the fiction of shattered lives, in a devastated terrain. It is a humble project. Its ambition overwhelms me.

It is this ambition I want to embrace.

At the heart of the film lies the question of the inhuman. What is human, what is no longer human?

Through the eyes of Inspector Daoud, all is profoundly human. Suffering, just as much as crime.



For Daoud, the job of the law is to render human what has first cast us into horror.

...Daoud asks Claude if her child is in a home. *Yes*, she replies. *That's good*, concludes Daoud. Because he believes in the law, in progress, in forgiveness. Perhaps the home will be able to save this child. It is this mad gamble of the law that Daoud embraces.

...The crime isn't shown. But the two murderesses will replay the scene, around an absence. They offer their testimony to Daoud, and by doing so, they return to humanity. Following in Daoud's path I want to offer a face to these two women and to recognize myself in them without judging them. For that there are judges, and I am not one... This is the vertiginous dive I chose to take while I was writing.

I reserved fiction for the portrayal of the cops. I had to describe them in a bit of detail.

Two very different cops encounter each other and get on. Louis, a clumsy young Catholic, lacking in grace. He is forever mistaken. And Daoud, with neither family ties or religion, who can recognize falsehood or truth at a glance. Because nothing is foreign to Daoud.

A stranger in his hometown, despised by his family, Daoud

knows how to identify with everyone he encounters. He shares their humanity. How could he not understand them? If I had to utilize fiction here, I nonetheless had no desire to weigh things down with romanticism. It seems to me that romanticism is everywhere on the small screen these days.

I wanted these policemen to be more iconic than romantic. It seemed to me that their iconic presence, their silence, carried more truths than digressions.

What makes Bourvil keep going in *Le Cercle Rouge*? A statement by his superior: *all men are guilty*. What makes François Perrier keep going in *Le Samourai*? The sheer presence of the actor, his attention to gestures.

It is to this laconicism and this attention that I wanted to dedicate myself.

Daoud is an eye, and an ear. He sees the world, and he accepts it.

Just as Serge Daney taught me.

Arnaud Desplechin



ARNAUD DESPLECHIN FILMOGRAPHY

- 2019** Oh Mercy
2017 Ismael's Ghosts
2015 My Golden Days
Lumière Award: Best Director
Jacques Prévert Award: Best Screenplay
César: Best Director
- 2014** La forêt
2012 Jimmy P.
2008 A Christmas Tale
César Award: Best Supporting Actor
- 2007** L'aimée
Venice Film Festival 2007: Best Documentary
- 2004** Kings & Queen
César Award: Best Actor
- 2003** Playing 'In the Company of Men'
2000 Esther Kahn
1996 My Sex Life... or How I Got Into an Argument
César Award: Best Actor
- 1992** La sentinelle
1991 La vie des morts
Grand Prize of the Angers European First Film Festival
Jean Vigo Prize

CAST

Daoud	Roschdy ZEM
Claude	Léa SEYDOUX
Marie	Sara FORESTIER
Louis	Antoine REINARTZ
<i>Police</i>	
Judith	Chloé SIMONEAU
De Kayser	Betty CARTOUX
Aubin	Jérémy BRUNET
Benoît	Stéphane DUQUENOY
<i>Burned Man Investigation</i>	
Dos Santos	Philippe DUQUESNE
<i>House Fire Investigation</i>	
Kovalki	Anthony SALAMONE
Farid	Ilyes BENSALÉM
<i>Runaway Investigation</i>	
M. Hami (Father)	Abdellatif SEDEGUI
Mme Duhamel (Mother)	Sylvie MOREAUX
Fatia Belkacem (Friend)	Diya CHALAOUI
Alaouane (Uncle)	Bouzid BOUHDIDA
Soufia Duhamel-Hami	Maïssa TALEB

CREW

Director	Arnaud DESPLECHIN
Screenplay	Arnaud DESPLECHIN Léa MYSIUS
Adapted from	<i>Roubaix, commissariat central</i> by Mosco BOUCAULT
Director of Photography	Irina LUBTCHANSKY
Editor	Laurence BRIAUD
Original Music	Grégoire HETZEL
Art Director	Toma BAQUENI
Costume Designer	Nathalie RAOUL
Casting	Alexandre NAZARIAN, Clément MORELLE
Sound	Nicolas CANTIN, Sylvain MALBRANT, Stéphane THIÉBAUT
Assistant Director	Marion DEHAENE
Co-produced by	WHY NOT PRODUCTIONS ARTE FRANCE CINÉMA
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