

# Ne touchez pas la hache

DON'T TOUCH THE AXE



## CAST

Antoinette de Langeais.....**JEANNE BALIBAR**  
Armand de Montriveau.....**GUILLAUME DEPARDIEU**  
Princesse de Blamont-Chauvry.....**BULLE OGIER**  
Vidame de Pamiers.....**MICHEL PICCOLI**  
Le Duc de Grandlieu.....**BARBET SCHROEDER**

## CREW

Mise en scene.....**JACQUES RIVETTE**  
Adaptation.....**PASCAL BONITZER, CHRISTINE LAURENT**  
Based on.....**“DIE HERZOGIN VON LANGEAIS”**  
By.....**HONORÉ DE BALZAC**  
Photography.....**WILLIAM JUBTCHANSKY**  
Sound.....**FLORIAN EIDENBENZ**  
Set Design.....**MANU DE CHAUVIGNY**  
Costumes.....**MAÏRA RMEDHAN-LEVI**  
Editing.....**NICOLE LUBTCHANSKY**  
Producers.....**PIERRE GRISE PRODUCTIONS (France), MARTINE MARIGNAC & MAURICE TINCHANT, CINEMUNDICI (Italy), LUIGI MUSINI, ROBERTO CICCUTO, ERMANNO OLMI AND ARTE FRANCE CINEMA.**

With the participation of **CANAL+, CINECINEMA, CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA CINEMATOGRAPHIE AND THE ITALIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND PROGRAM MEDIA PLUS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, PROCIREP, RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE ZUSAMMEN** and the **CNC**

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## SYNOPSIS

**H**andsome young general Armand de Montriveau has searched across the seas for the woman he fell madly in love with five years ago. He finally finds Antoinette, the Duchess of Langeais, living chastely in a Majorcan convent...

It was love at first sight for Montriveau upon meeting Antoinette, a married coquette who frequents the most extravagant balls of 1820s Restoration Paris, where hypocrisy and vanity reign. Flattered by his attentions, the alluring Antoinette orchestrates a calculating game of seduction, but she repeatedly refuses Montriveau. Despite his sincere romantic declarations, Montriveau's passion remains unfulfilled. When the humiliated Montriveau eventually seeks his revenge, Antoinette's love awakens. But it may well be too late for the star-crossed lovers.

## JACQUES RIVETTE

LE COUP DU BERGER (short) • PARIS NOUS APPARTIENT • LA RELIGIEUSE • JEAN RENOIR LE PATRON • L'AMOUR FOU • OUT 1 : NOLI METANGERE (duration 12h40min - co-directed with Suzanne Schiffman) • OUT 1 : SPECTRE (short version) • CÉLINE ET JULIE VONT EN BATEAU • DUELLE • NOROÏT • MERRY-GO-ROUND • LE PONT DU NORD • PARIS S'EN VA • L'AMOUR PAR TERRE • HURLEVENT • LA BANDE DES QUATRE • LA BELLE NOISEUSE • DIVERTIMENTO (short version of "La belle noiseuse") • JEANNE LA PUCELLE : LES BATAILLES • JEANNE LA PUCELLE : LES PRISONS • HAUT BAS FRAGILE • UNE AVENTURE DE NINON • SECRET DÉFENSE • VA SAVOIR • VA SAVOIR + • HISTOIRE DE MARIE ET JULIEN • NE TOUCHEZ PAS LA HACHE



## JEANNE BALIBAR

NE TOUCHEZ PAS LA HACHE by Jacques RIVETTE • J'AURAIS VOULU ÊTRE UN DANSEUR by Alain BERLINER • CALL ME AGOSTINO by Christine LAURENT • CLEAN by Olivier ASSAYAS • CODE 46 by Michael WINTERBOTTOM • SALTIBANK by Jean-Claude BIETTE • JE SUIS VOTRE HOMME by Danièle DUBROUX • 17 FOIS CÉCILE CASSARD by Christophe HONORÉ • UNE AFFAIRE PRIVÉE by Guillaume NICLOUX • AVEC TOUT MON AMOUR by Amalia ESCRIVA • VA SAVOIR by Jacques RIVETTE • LE STADE DE WIMBLEDON by Mathieu AMALRIC • LA COMÉDIE DE L'INNOCENCE by Raoul RUIZ • ÇA IRA MIEUX DEMAIN by Jeanne LABRUNE • SADE by Benoît JACQUOT • TROIS PONTS SUR LA RIVIÈRE by Jean-Claude BIETTE • FIN AOÛT, DÉBUT SEPTEMBRE by Olivier ASSAYAS • MANGE TA SOUPE by Mathieu AMALRIC • J'AI HORREUR DE L'AMOUR by Laurence FERREIRA BARBOSA • DIEU SEUL ME VOIT by Bruno PODALYDÈS • COMMENT JE ME SUIS DISPUTÉ (MA VIE SEXUELLE...) by Arnaud DESPLECHIN.

## GUILLAUME DEPARDIEU

LES YEUX BANDÉS by Thomas LILTI • NE TOUCHEZ PAS LA HACHE by Jacques RIVETTE • LA FRANCE by Serge BOZON • CÉLIBATAIRES by Jean-Michel VERNER • PROCESS by Christian LEIGH • UNE CLÉ CHEZ ELLE by Marie-France PISIER • PEAU D'ANGE by Vincent PÉREZ • AIME TON PÈRE by Jacob BERGER • LE PHARMACIEN DE GARDE by Jean VEBER • ELLE & LUI AU 14<sup>ÈME</sup> ÉTAGE by Sophie BLONDY • AMOUR, PROZAC & AUTRES CURIOSITÉS by Miguel SANTESMASES • POLA X by Léos CARAX • MARTHE by Jean-Loup HUBERT • COMME ELLE RESPIRE by Pierre SALVADORI • ALLIANCE CHERCHE DOIGT by Jean-Pierre MOCKY • LES APPRENTIS by Pierre SALVADORI • CIBLE ÉMOUVANTE by Pierre SALVADORI • TOUS LES MATINS DU MONDE by Alain CORNEAU.

PIERRE GRISE PRODUCTIONS PRÉSENT

JEANNE BALIBAR

GUILLAUME DEPARDIEU



# Ne touchez pas la hache

DON'T TOUCH THE AXE

MISE EN SCÈNE

JACQUES RIVETTE

BASED ON

“La Duchesse de Langeais” by HONORÉ DE BALZAC

WITH BULLE OGIER MICHEL PICCOLI

JACQUES RIVETTE - PASCAL BONITZER - CHRISTINE LAURENT

Screenplay and Adaptation  
Photography WILLIAM LUBTCHANSKY SET DESIGN MANU DE CHAUVIGNY COSTUMES MAÏRA RAMEDHAN-LEVI EDITING NICOLE LUBTCHANSKY SOUND EDITING DOMINIQUE VIEILLARD  
FIRST ASSISTANT SHIREL AMITAY PRODUCTION MANAGER CHRISTIAN LAMBERT LOCATION MANAGER VALÉRIE MENGUY MUSIC PIERRE ALLIO SOUND FLORIAN EIDENBENZ  
MIX BERNARD LE ROUX SCRIPT LYDIA BIGARD PRODUCERS MARTINE MARIGNAC AND MAURICE TINCHANT COPRODUCTION PIERRE GRISE PRODUCTIONS (France) CINEMAUNDICI (Italy)  
WITH ARTE FRANCE CINEMA AND WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CANAL +, CINECINEMA, DU CENTRE NATIONAL DE LA CINEMATOGRAPHIE AND THE ITALIAN MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND WITH THE SUPPORT OF PROGRAM MEDIA PLUS DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ EUROPÉENNE, DE LA PROCIREP ET DE LA RÉGION ÎLE DE FRANCE - DISTRIBUTION AND WORLD SALES LES FILMS DU LOSANGE

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“She wasn't in love,  
she had a passion.”

Balzac, referring to the Duchess.



## MARTINE MARIGNAC (\*) IN CONVERSATION WITH JACQUES RIVETTE AND PASCAL BONITZER

**Martine Marignac:** How did you approach adapting Balzac's short story *La Duchesse de Langeais*?

**Jacques Rivette:** Our first decision was to be faithful not only to the spirit but also the letter of Balzac's text. What happens between the Duchess and General Armand de Montriveau illustrates the errors in the ways of a tiny clan from the Saint-Germain neighborhood in Paris at a particular time, the Restoration. Very early on, we decided to stick as close as possible to the context of the story.

**Pascal Bonitzer:** Yes, staying faithful to Balzac, unlike Giraudoux's script for the film by Jacques de Baroncelli (made in 1941, starring Edwige Feuillère and Pierre-Richard Willm) which, in the end, told a totally different story than the one Balzac had written.

**M.M.:** It has to be said that none of the Duchess's arguments for rejecting Armand can be stripped of their political context and adapted to modern times.

**J.R.:** Quite so. From the very beginning, our aim, even if it may seem fanciful, was to transpose Balzac's writing into the grammar of film. His writing plays on contradictory forces that generate a kind of system of contained explosions. Long sentences interspersed with parentheses, surprising changes of speed, a way of recounting events almost by missing out the most important things. That's why Balzac has to be read word by word. It's three-dimensional writing.

**M.M.:** Although the adaptation is faithful to Balzac's text, dialogue was needed for scenes that weren't in his short story.

**P.B.:** Actually, there aren't that many. The only thing we added - and the idea comes from Christine Laurent - is the small scene in the servants' quarters. In the book, the servants probably have a lot to say but they keep their own counsel. Everything else - the dinner conversations between Montriveau and his friends, for example - is taken from other texts Balzac wrote around the same period. He called them “physiologies” because they dealt with the mores and clichés of the period.



**M.M.:** A few words about Jeanne Balibar and Guillaume Depardieu...

**J.R.:** We broke with usual practice by not looking for actors to play the leads, but by writing a project for Jeanne and Guillaume, for which we didn't yet have funding. There was a desire to make a film around them facing off. After considering the whole of Western literature, we once more came down to Balzac, with the only condition for this choice, as we said earlier, being respect for his story.

**M.M.:** And the title, *Don't Touch The Axe*?

**J.R.:** Actually, that was the short story's original title. It was only ten years later that Balzac changed it with a view to including it in his *Human Comedy* collection, in which this story is the centerpiece of the Treize (Thirteen) trilogy, between *Ferragus* and *La Fille Aux Yeux d'Or*.

**P.B.:** The trilogy deals with a secret society called the Treize, but in an elliptical way. They are never in the foreground, which is very fitting for a secret society. From time to time, they come out of hiding to perform some glorious deed of derring-do. And sometimes, they arrive too late, as in *La Fille Aux Yeux d'Or*. The notion of being “too late” underpins *Don't Touch The Axe*. The role of time is an essential element in the story.

**M.M.:** You mentioned staying faithful to Balzac's writing. His sentences are similar to long takes, one of your trademarks as a filmmaker.

**J.R.:** It's amazing to think that Balzac is a writer I had great difficulty reading. I tried for over thirty years without getting anywhere! In the early 50s, Rohmer had said to me, “If you want to make movies, there are two writers you need to read - Balzac and Dostoyevsky.” I came to Dostoyevsky very late. As for Balzac, I “discovered” him one sleepless night when I came across *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*. That novel converted me and opened the lock to the rest of his work.

**M.M.:** The serial element is one of the fascinating things about Balzac's work.

**J.R.:** It was a very gradual development. He first used characters from previous stories when he was writing

*Le Père Goriot*. According to legend, at the time, he wrote his sister a letter, exclaiming, “My dear friend, I'm am becoming a genius!” Whether the anecdote is true or not, what it says is true! During the shoot, I was particularly aware of the very elliptical, brutal nature of our work. What we were trying to do with this text was not an adaptation, and even less an illustration. It was, if I can put it like this, a “compression”, like one of those sculptures by César (French sculptor, 1921-98).

(\*) Producer of the film