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OFFICIAL SELECTION 2015

The Fear

by damien odoul



JPG Films, Tu Vas Voir and Transfilm International

present



THE FEAR

a film by damien odoul

Nino Rocher, Pierre Martial Gaillard,
Théo Chazal and Eliott Margueron

93 min - France - 2014 - Scope - 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

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SYNOPSIS

Gabriel, an introverted young man, finds terror and appalling carnage in the hell on earth of the trenches between 1914 and 1918. At the end of his horrifying interior journey through the conflict – full of sound, fury and blood – he will discover his own humanity.

INTENTION NOTE

The novel

I worked for a long time on an adaptation of Ernest Pérochon's *Les Gardiennes* that also takes place during World War I far from the frontline, in Auvergne, while women kept the land. The film didn't get made but producer Jean-Pierre Guérin heard of the project and asked me to adapt Gabriel Chevallier's *The Fear*. I read a lot about WWI, which probably has to do with my childhood – my grandmother told me a great deal about the Great War, and about WWII, and memories were passed on from one generation to the next. In history books the expression "the Great War" should be replaced by "the Great Disaster"... Gabriel Chevallier wrote *The Fear* fifteen years after returning from the frontline – time had passed and despite his best efforts, something got toned down in the process. I had to come back to the time when he should have written the book, as a diary of sorts. Because of my own history I also wanted to include a scene in dialect – in Occitan to be precise, a language I've heard since childhood. In that war, guys would come from all over the country with their own dialects, and some of them were illiterate and may have had trouble understanding the orders that this or that Parisian officer would give them... That's a connection with my film DEEP BREATH (LE SOUFFLE).

Otto Dix and Syria

I had read a lot about World War I and also seen daguerreotypes that showed nothing of combat, but rather soldiers at rest, far from the frontline. So they had it easy after all – food on the table and a room to sleep in, artillerymen posing with gas masks, the fetching of water, a cannon blown to pieces, ruins, an airship in the sky... I found the flipside of this in the drawings of German painter and engraver Otto Dix with whom I was already acquainted with whose work I rediscovered in a fascinating exhibition in Belgium. Whenever you bring up the topic of war, Goya's sketches come to mind – the nightmare is all there. I watched films on WWI, but my reference was rather Syria. On the shoot I talked only about Kobane, about how the fighters built small trenches and cobbled weapons together...

"Lice, rats, barbed wire, fleas, shells, bombs, caves, corpses, blood, liquor, mice, cats, gas, cannons, shit, fire, steel: that is what war is all about! It is all the work of the Devil."

- Otto Dix's war diary

Guts

I envisioned the film as human guts, complete with all its organs, more or less healthy or damaged. I envisioned it in my script as a great maze with its bowels, its trenches and veins. In fact, I made an organic movie. The whole set is a stomach – the stomach of Gabriel, the main character, but also the stomach of the other characters. It is within the confines of this male stomach, violent and muffled, that Gabriel lives with "butterflies in his stomach". The mother's protective womb is gone forever. I was obsessed by the idea that these men's stomachs – their innards hanging out of their bodies, their guts fouled up by disgusting food and burning hooch, their vital organs ruined by so many ordeals – could create a vast maze where you could "get

worried sick". It's the belly of hell, nothing less. Where there is hell, there is "Katabasis", the descent into the Land of Shadows in Greek mythology, as a rite of passage. The great destruction we're talking about, the disaster and its traumatic, hallucinatory manifestations – that's what I wanted to show.

Sets

The opening scene functions as a little theatre of cruelty, tipping the film over into the grotesque from the outset. I had no choice: in Canada where we shot the film, there are no cobbled streets or old towns reminiscent of French villages. I came up with the idea of creating this theatre. Slow motion creates a discrepancy between the characters' nationalist chant and the fact that they're lynching a pacifist. These men call for war – three days earlier, half of them probably favored peace but in the meantime Jaurès was murdered... The 4K Red Epic Dragon camera provides beautiful high-definition images and allows great precision in wide-angle shots: I'm thinking for instance of the shot of the dragoon on horseback getting stuck, that meant a lot to me. Because WWI marks the end of a world and also the death of a certain aristocracy – with his armor, this guy seems straight out of Napoleonic wars.

Survival

Every day I would think to myself: "How do you come back from such a hell? What does it mean to be a survivor? How can you move on after all that?" With its worldwide reach, its duration and its impact, the Great War has become a case in point for what history is all about – the impact of the dead on the living.

The Look

In cinema, I have no use for History with a capital H or for historical recreation. The falsehood bores me. I'd rather refer to literature. I personally go for history with a small h, the little history of the living and the dead. Throughout the film, the picture changes. Its monochrome textures and impoverished colors get washed out (as opposed to the colored archive footage of the Great War). I'd rather speak of visions. It's a monochrome world that contrasts with the situation behind the lines, the illuminated towns, nature and its seasonal colors. The film is in "camouflage" colors but not in black and white. In terms of sound - a symphony of noise and silence, and the spinning effect, caused by explosions, in the infantrymen's helmets.

Cast

I wanted to work with first-time actors that hadn't even been in short films. Except for Patrick de Valette who plays Ferdinand. He's a different case – he's a clown and I guess the character's name pays homage to Céline's *Cannon Fodder*. Nino Rocher, who plays Gabriel, had never been in a film before. We spent a great deal of time together, getting to know each other and working with a few psychological references. But once on set I kept him from "acting" - I didn't want him to become theatrical; I asked him to give his best and I kept him from acting. I had no use for a professional actor expecting to be taken care of like a little child, I didn't want him to be in character 24 hours a day, and because I hired physical guys, it worked fine. Besides it's more interesting to work with actors who grow tired, you capture different things. For instance I found Pierre-Martin Gaillard, who portrays Nègre, in Montréal – he's a cook from Grenoble and had never seen a camera before!

DAMIEN ODOUL

Damien Odoul wrote two poetry collections (*19 pour rien* and *Fake haikus by a not very orthodox occidental*) before working on *Poems of the middle, 1 to 39*, which he performed on French public radio station France Culture as part of the Creative Radio Workshop. In 2010 he completed *Poems of the middle, 40 to 88*, the culmination of work begun in 2004. Readings of his work were held at the Bouffes du Nord Theater as part of the Paris en toutes lettres Festival in 2010, at the Avignon Festival in 2011, on France Culture and at the Marseille Centre International de la Poésie in 2012. Since 1988, Damien Odoul has written and directed 10 short films, 4 art documentaries, 1 made-for-TV movie and 7 feature films, including MORASSEIX (1992) selected in Venice Days in 2004, ERRANCE, starring Laetitia Casta and Benoît Magimel, and DEEP BREATH (Grand Jury Prize and the Fipresci Award at the 2011 Venice Film Festival).

His fourth feature AFTER WE'RE GONE, starring Pierre Richard and Anna Mouglalis, was screened in Directors' Fortnight, Cannes 2003; THE STORY OF RICHARD O., starring Matthieu Amalric, was selected at the 2007 Venice Film Festival. LA FOLLE PARADE, a documentary on the mentally disabled, was broadcast on France 2's *Short Stories* during a special program dedicated to Odoul.

In 2011, he produced, wrote and directed THE REST OF THE WORLD, a TV movie coproduced by and broadcast on Arte in 2012, and selected in a dozen international festivals including Rotterdam, Hong-Kong, Shanghai, Edinburgh, Durban, Melbourne, Namur, Sao Paulo, Kaohsiung (Taiwan), Goteborg and Vilnius.

In October of the same year, he created and directed *Mefauti* at the Bouffes du Nord Theatre. In 2012, after 6 years of shooting and one year of editing, he completed RICH IS THE WOLF, which was selected at the Marseille FID and the Locarno Festival.

In 2013 Damien Odoul produced the documentary ENFANTS DE SOURDS directed by his companion documentary filmmaker Marie-Eve Nadeau, and selected at the Festival des Films du Monde in Montréal. In 2014, the director wrapped his seventh feature THE FEAR, loosely based on Gabriel Chevallier's novel. He won the Jean Vigo Award in 2015.

FILMOGRAPHY

2015 **The Fear** – TIFF 2015 – Contemporary World Cinema; Prix Jean Vigo

2012 **Rich is the Wolf** – Locarno Film Festival

2011 **The Rest of the World**

2006 **Story of Richard O.** – Venice Film Festival

2003 **After We're Gone** – Directors' Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival

2002 **Errance**

2000 **Deep Breath (Le Souffle)** - Venice Film Festival - Cinema of the Present -
Special Jury Award; FIPRESCI Prize.

1992 **Morasseix** - Venice Days

CAST

Gabriel Nino Rocher

Nègre Pierre Martial Gaillard

Théophile Théo Chazal

Bertrand Eliott Margueron

Lespinasse Frédéric Buffaras

La Gaufre Jonathan Jimeno Romera

Fouchet Charles Josse

Marguerite Anioula Maidel

The Captain Miro Lacasse

Ferdinand Patrick de Valette

CREW

Written and directed by Damien Odoul

Based on the novel "The Fear" (aka "La Peur") by Gabriel Chevallier

Director of Photography Martin Laporte

Camera Operator Damien Odoul

Editing Marie-Ève Nadeau

Sound Frédéric Dabo
Mathieu Beaudin
Piste Rouge

Production Designer Raymond Dupuis

Art Director Michel Beaudet

Costumes Henri Aubertin

Original Music Colin Stetson

1st AD Pierre Magny

Production Manager Mario Nadeau

Postproduction Patrice Monier

Executive Producers François-Xavier Decraene
Jonathan Vanger

Produced by Jean-Pierre Guérin
Gérard Lacroix

Coproduced by Claude Léger
Sylvain Proulx

**Based on the novel "The Fear" (Aka "La Peur") by Gabriel Chevallier,
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