

A movie poster for the film 'A Monkey on My Shoulder'. The background is a photograph of a man and a woman in a romantic embrace. The man, on the left, has dark, wavy hair and a beard, wearing a blue button-down shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the woman. The woman, on the right, is wearing a coral-colored button-down shirt and has her head tilted back, laughing joyfully with her mouth open. Her hand is raised to her forehead. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with trees and a bright sky.

THEMA FILMS, MANCHESTER FILMS and MK2 present

A Monkey on My Shoulder

A film by Marion Laine

Juliette
Binoche

Édgar
Ramírez

mk2



A Monkey on My Shoulder

A film by Marion **Laine**

Mila and Javier, both renowned surgeons and both passionate about their work, have been madly in love for the past 10 years. They have always taken great care to preserve their extraordinary love for each other and refuse to succumb to the routine of everyday living. But Mila's unexpected pregnancy, combined with increasing pressure from work at the hospital, drives Javier to drink more heavily and he ends up being suspended. Faced with his demons, Javier drifts further and further away from Mila. Yet, when their relationship is under serious threat, Javier is ready to do whatever it takes to win Mila back.

Based on the novel by Mathias **Enard** (PUBLISHED BY ACTES SUD)



87 minutes • DCP & 35 mm • Color • Ratio: 1.85 • Dolby 5.1 • France • 2012

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR MARION LAINE

Your first feature-length film A SIMPLE HEART (original title: ‘UN CŒUR SIMPLE’) was released in 2008. What have you been up to since then?

After A SIMPLE HEART was released, I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go back to my other projects. It was then I met the producer Christine Gozlan, who suggested we work together on a film. With my other producer Catherine Bozorgan, Christine and I began by looking for a suitable book, as I always prefer working on adaptations. Meanwhile, I was simultaneously co-writing a screenplay and my first comedy - the adaptation of a novel by Maria Efstathiadi for Arte channel - an incredibly fun and fulfilling experience. For me, it was important to do this comedy and television work before knuckling down on a film project. It was a good training exercise: as people always say, a film made for television is a sprint, whereas a feature-length film for cinema needs the stamina required for a long distance race.

How did you come across the novel *Remonter L’Orénoque* (lit. trans: *Travelling up the Orinoco*) and what elements of the novel appealed to you from the start for the adaptation?

My producers and I chose this novel because we both wanted to work on a love story and we are both fascinated by the world of surgical medicine. I always move away from the storyline of the book that I am adapting. I tend to put a great deal of myself into it and the more I get inside the novel the more I feel a part of it. My version still has visible traces of the original story behind it, like a musical score, but it is my own interpretation. Sometimes, I’ll use a painting as a starting point for the visual imagery. For example, Caravaggio’s painting of *Saint Thomas* and the finger in Christ’s wound made me think of the surgeons’ (Mila and Javier’s) hands inside peoples’ bodies. The skull in this same painting made me think about using a skull in this film as a reminder of the time when they were medical students. It is the receptacle in which they put their keys when at home. It is also a symbol of their union and their separation: the broken skull, the stroke. I explore and weave my film around these ideas.

How did Juliette Binoche and Édgar Ramírez get involved in this project?

In the book, the woman is an immigrant so I began by looking for a Spanish actress who could speak French. But when I saw Édgar Ramírez in Olivier Assayas’s film CARLOS, it was a revelation. I decided to switch it round. I wasn’t used to writing for male characters but he was very helpful when building Javier’s character. It was also his idea to ask Juliette Binoche to play the part of Mila as he had always dreamed of acting in a film with her. So I was lucky enough to meet two extraordinary people. Juliette and I have similar backgrounds, we both trained at the Vera Gregh School of Acting, that in itself was a good sign. They were both really excited by the idea of trying lots of things that they had never done before, like riding a motorbike, driving a motorboat, interacting with monkeys (with all the risks this entails, including being bitten), diving 23 feet underwater (with no training), breaking down walls, cutting open bodies, seeing

a human heart beating and then stopping, diving into the depths of someone else’s most private space.....We had no time to rehearse any of all this before filming began. Juliette and Édgar only met once for the screen tests. For scheduling reasons, we started by filming the very intimate scenes in the apartment. We were really lucky that both actors got on so well and that they trusted me and agreed to let me take them on a free-fall over the next 30 days!

How would you define the relationship between Mila and Javier that appears to be so natural and impulsive?

People often say that such a carefree spirit is associated with youth and that when you become an adult, such behaviour belongs to the past. I wanted to show the opposite: that you can go through big challenges in life and still retain a certain carefree spirit, and even use it for protection. I also wanted to show a couple who have been together for 10 years, and still love each other, and still experience the same thrill as on the first day they met. I find it really sad that it is the generally held belief that love fades out over time. This pattern of thinking results in people giving up on their relationships.

The film is called “A MONKEY ON MY SHOULDER”, how did you develop the animal characteristics of the characters?

I liked the idea of using the expression which means an addiction (“to have a monkey on one’s back”) and to visually reinforce it in the film in the guise of Mila’s tattoo, the logo on the motorbike, the nickname “Monkey”, the soft-toy monkey, the zoo, the chimps... I got Juliette and Édgar to work together using how a pair of monkeys would interact as their model. The actors took their inspiration from documentaries about chimpanzees. In A SIMPLE HEART, Sandrine Bonnaire and I also worked on animal characteristics. Her character, Felicity, was very base and her reactions and impulsive behaviour were very animal-like. I like to go via the animal first to get closer to the human being.

The interior colours of the hospital to the rooms in the apartment are filmed as if they are living organisms. They echo the underlying inward progression of the film: inside the body, inside the heart, inside a relationship, inside a home...

Yes, the idea was to give each location an organic treatment. I imagined the apartment as a third character. At first it is furnished and full of life. Then, when Mila and Javier decide to move house, it is left empty and bare. In the final part of the film there is work going on in the apartment, it is falling apart. Simultaneously, there is Mila’s pregnancy and Javier’s descent into alcohol. Even the soundscape follows this progression: at first it is summer and there is the sound of the outdoors: children playing, birds singing, boats, cars, life. Then autumn sets in, the windows are closed and we become more and more confined to the silence indoors. The interior starts off very colourful in spring, but becomes paler and paler until it ends up looking very clinical, like the hospital (the only colour being the dashes of red where they are testing paint colours). The hospital decor is monochrome throughout, as are the hospital staff. The only dash of colour is that of the patients’ hearts as they are being operated on (these scenes show live operations). Both the apartment and hospital interiors are in stark contrast to the “exotic” exterior locations (the zoo, the park, the palm grove, the river) which represent what is out of reach, paradise, El Dorado.



Javier is a very sensual character. You constantly film his hands, his skin. This is almost a film about touch....

Exactly! I instinctively feel close to the actors I work with and, in this film, I wanted the camera to be right up close to the actors so that the viewer would feel very involved.

For example, in the love scene, I wanted us to be inside the bodies, I did not want just caresses. I wanted, like in Bernini's sculptures, to show fingers pressing into flesh. I wanted to film the desire that makes one person merge with another, to be in a state of osmosis, like in the shot when Mila starts trembling as she buries her fingers into Javier's beard, as if she wanted to draw him in and eat him up.

Death is present throughout the film: Javier and Mila perform open-heart surgery, they drive a fast motorbike, Javier's alcoholism puts their relationship in danger. How did you approach this theme?

For me, death is not taboo. But in this film, what I really want to say is that love is stronger than death. My intention was for us to always feel frightened for them. Like in real life when you are very happy and you think this won't last, that something is bound to go wrong, that someone will call to say that the person you love has been knocked down...

What was your angle on treating the theme of addiction and alcoholism?

What I really liked about the book was that there was no explanation as to why the male character was an alcoholic. I had absolutely no wish to delve into the psychology or explain the reasons why he was ill. At the end of the film, the reasons are touched upon but in a very roundabout way. It is a subject that the protagonists avoid. I was only interested in looking at the consequences. Alcoholism exists in all areas of society. It is a subject that touches us all, I think. But, it is more complex in the world of surgical medicine, than in a business like ours, where an alcoholic artist can still hold down a career (like in the rural environment I come from too) whereas for a surgeon, or an airline pilot, it's slightly more complicated than that.

Did you use any particular films or literature as inspiration for the treatment of this theme?

Not really, even though certain pieces of literature have always been very important to me over the years such as *Under The Volcano* by Malcolm Lowry, *Journey To The End Of The Night* by Celine and *Ulysses* by James Joyce. And there are certain films I love like *THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN ARM* by Otto Preminger and *DAYS OF WINE AND ROSES* by Blake Edwards, a tale of the downward spiral.

Interview by **Juliette Reitzer**



FILMOGRAPHIES

Marion Laine (AS A DIRECTOR)

- 2012
- A MONKEY ON MY SHOULDER
with Juliette Binoche and Édgar Ramírez
- 2008
- A SIMPLE HEART
with Sandrine Bonnaire, Marina Foïs and Noémie Lvovsky

Juliette Binoche (SELECTIVE)

- 2012
- CAMILLE CLAUDEL by Bruno Dumont
A MONKEY ON MY SHOULDER by Marion Laine
COSMOPOLIS by David Cronenberg
THE LIFE OF ANOTHER by Sylvie Testud
- 2011
- ELLES by Malgorzata Szumowska
THE SON OF NO ONE by Dito Montiel
- 2010
- CERTIFIED COPY by Abbas Kiarostami
- 2008
- SUMMER HOURS by Olivier Assayas
DISENGAGEMENT by Amos Gitai
PARIS by Cédric Klapisch
- 2007
- FLIGHT OF THE RED BALLOON by Hou Hsiao Hsien
- 2006
- BREAKING AND ENTERING by Anthony Minghella
- 2005
- MARY by Abel Ferrara
HIDDEN by Michael Haneke
- 2004
- IN MY COUNTRY by John Boorman
- 2002
- JET LAG by Danièle Thompson
- 2000
- CHOCOLAT by Lasse Hallström
CODE UNKNOWN by Michael Haneke
THE WIDOW OF SAINT PIERRE by Patrice Leconte
- 1999
- THE CHILDREN OF THE CENTURY by Diane Kurys

- 1998
- ALICE AND MARTIN by André Téchiné
- 1996
- THE ENGLISH PATIENT by Anthony Minghella
- 1995
- THE HORSEMAN ON THE ROOF by Jean-Paul Rappeneau
- 1993
- THREE COLOURS: BLUE by Krzysztof Kieslowski
- 1992
- DAMAGE by Louis Malle
- 1991
- THE LOVERS ON THE BRIDGE by Leos Carax
- 1988
- THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING
by Philip Kaufman
- 1986
- BAD BLOOD by Leos Carax
- 1985
- RENDEZ-VOUS by André Téchiné
- 1984
- HAIL MARY by Jean-Luc Godard

Édgar Ramirez (SELECTIVE)

- 2013
- CORPUS CHRISTI by Richard Kelly (pre-production)
- 2012
- ZERO DARK THIRTY by Kathryn Bigelow
A MONKEY ON MY SHOULDER by Marion Laine
WRATH OF THE TITANS by Jonathan Liebesman
- 2010
- CARLOS (film and TV mini-series) by Olivier Assayas
- 2008
- CHE - Part 1 by Steven Soderbergh
- 2007
- THE BOURNE ULTIMATUM by Paul Greengrass

CAST

- Mila
Javier
Marc
Christelle
Sylvie
Masson
Nurse
David
- Juliette Binoche
Édgar Ramírez
Hippolyte Girardot
Amandine Dewasmes
Aurélia Petit
Bernard Verley
Elsa Tauveron
Romain Rondeau

CREW

- Author & Director
Original Score
Production

Photography
Set Design
Costume Design
Editing
Sound
1st Assistant Director
Production Manager
Set Photographer
- Marion Laine
Bruno Coulais
Christine Gozlan (Thelma Films),
Catherine Bozorgan (Manchester Films)
Antoine Héberlé
Pierre Queffelec
Olivier Bériot
Luc Barnier, Mathilde Van De Moortel
Laurent Lafran
Dominique Furgé
Ludovic Naar
Marion Stalens



INTERNATIONAL SALES

Juliette Schrameck - juliette.schrameck@mk2.com
Dorothee Pfistner - dorothee.pfistner@mk2.com
Victoire Thevenin - victoire.thevenin@mk2.com
www.mk2pro.com

mk2
www.mk2pro.com