

ĒTERNITĒ

A FILM BY
TRAN ANH HUNG



NORD-OUEST PRESENTS

ÉTERNITÉ

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TRAN ANH HUNG

WITH
AUDREY TAUTOU BÉRÉNICE BEJO MÉLANIE LAURENT
JÉRÉMIE RENIER PIERRE DELADONCHAMPS

RUNTIME: 115 MINUTES – FORMAT: 2.40 – SOUND 5.1

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SYNOPSIS

At the end of the 19th century, Valentine, aged 20, marries Jules. Around a 100 years later, her granddaughter runs across a bridge in Paris and into the arms of the man she loves. Over the century in between, men and women meet, fall in love, embrace, and fulfil their destinies, creating a family tree and a life-force that goes on for eternity...

TRAN ANH HUNG

DIRECTOR

Director Tran Anh Hung was born on December 23rd, 1962 in Vietnam. He came to France as a refugee in 1975, and in 1987, studied filmmaking at the École Louis-Lumière, where he made his first short film as part of a study project, followed by a second with Christophe Rossignon, who went on to produce his next three features.

THE SCENT OF GREEN PAPAYA, his first feature-length film, is a carefully crafted portrait of a young girl taken from her home at a very young age to work in a tumble-down aristocratic house in the center of Saigon during the 1950s. The film was shot in a studio in Paris, earning its director the Caméra d'Or at the Festival de Cannes in 1993, a César for Best First Film in 1994, and an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Language Film.

CYCLO, a stylized thriller set in the streets Ho Chi Minh City, won a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival in 1995. Tran Anh Hung was one of the youngest filmmakers ever to earn this distinction.

THE VERTICAL RAY OF THE SUN, released in 2000, was his last film to be set in Vietnam.



I COME WITH THE RAIN, shot in Hong Kong and released in 2009, is a baroque action film, a fascinating, intense, and poetical thriller.

In 2011, he made NORWEGIAN WOOD, based on the work by Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami. The film was entirely shot in Japan and tells the story of the impossible love between two students during the 1960s and 1970s.

His latest film, ETERNITY, was adapted from the novel "L'Élégance des Veuves", and is his sixth film.



INTERVIEW WITH TRAN ANH HUNG

ETERNITY is your most French film: A saga that plunges us into the tumult of one family's life over the course of a century. This might seem a surprising theme. What guided this choice?

I was born in Vietnam in 1962, and I came to France in 1975 with only my parents and my brother. The other members of my family were scattered by the war. When I read "L'Élégance des Veuves" by Alice Ferney, of which my film is an adaptation, I was knocked out. I was blown away by this story of a big family, of parent-child relationships and genealogy, as someone who felt they didn't have any solid roots because the sum total of

my family experience was three people. That's why I found the book's theme so moving. When I see a large family, I have a feeling of solidness, of lastingness which I find amazing.

Is being moved by a subject what triggers the urge to make a film?

No, a story or a theme is never enough on its own. It has to suggest to me the possibility of an interesting cinematographic approach, something new for me. Alice Ferney's book is built around an exhilarating formal adventure. I realized that this story, which is almost without dialog, and which flows in a fluid way

like a stream, would allow me to attempt a very particular film. Obviously, the aim of any film project is to inspire a profound emotion in the spectator. When I put the novel down, I was very moved and I called Christophe Rossignon, the producer of my first film. It was as if I was floating. I felt that a different and very



moving film could emerge from this book. It's extraordinary when you realize that you have a subject matter that allows you to go beyond psychology, beyond exchanges between beings, beyond conflicts between individuals, to reach a poignant feeling of existence.

That's a sentiment that runs throughout the film. How does one film what cannot be seen?

By letting go of the notion of the scene. There are practically no scenes in the film, only sketched situations which pass by, which flow, inexorably pulled along by time. For a cineaste, it was a great risk, because during the shoot I could never fall back on the certainty that at the end of the day, I had a good scene in the can. Strictly speaking, what was in the can were just short, sketchy situations with no beginning or end. It was only by taking that extreme risk that I could hope to recreate in the spectator the emotion I had felt reading the book – a very particular emotion. The film had to be like a single musical movement that lasted 100 years.

Can you expand on what you mean by foregoing the scene? The film is still made up of moments. What distinguishes these different moments from what one might call a scene?

In the scene, there's the idea of an action shown in the present, even when it's a flashback. A scene might, for example, involve a physical or psychological confrontation between two people. In ETERNITY, there are no scenes that are developed or handled in the usual sense. The film is built around two fundamental notions: birth and death. A sort of stocktaking of souls. And around these notions, themes of love, marriage and friendship are developed, using the codes and descriptive conventions of the time. And all extraneous detail is removed to allow for the inexorable passage of time. This time passing, which mixes the present and the past, leads to clashes of ideas and feelings

and permits a deeper and more poetic reading of the narrative through the immediacy of the passage from one image to the next. As such, Mathilde and Henri do not get engaged at the moment of their engagement, but during their childhood, which we see in the image that precedes their engagement, at a time when, as children, they played on imaginary bicycles and Mathilde blew in Henri's face. Similarly, their marriage didn't take place when they stood before the priest, but in Mathilde's head, during the long promenade of their honeymoon when Mathilde began to formulate doubts and hopes about married life. Gabrielle and Charles were only married the day after their unconsummated honeymoon night when Charles, in a monolog, expresses the kind of bond that ties him to Gabrielle. Whilst following the conventions of their age, the characters find in their private lives a space where they manage to give a deep and personal meaning to social rituals. The strength and honesty of the friendship which links the four of them are such that Henri and Gabrielle succeed in defying the conventions of the day to come together and gather their families under the same roof.

Are you nostalgic for that period?

I have no nostalgia for that period, since nostalgia is linked to a pleasant memory of a moment that one has experienced, and I didn't live through any of that. And I didn't inherit any of that either. I am Vietnamese, and I was born in a place that is so remote that they like to say you can hear the monkeys cough there. My parents are laborers. My mother cannot read or write. My father left school at the age of nine following the death of my grandfather, and was sent to become an apprentice tailor with a poor family. In 1975, after paying for the taxi that dropped my family in Rue Rébéval in the 19th arrondissement of Paris, my father had just \$17 in his pocket. The day after we arrived in France, he started a job. I say all this to show that I've got nothing in common with the bourgeoisie you see in the film.

That said, I rubbed shoulders with those people during my high school years, when my friends included sons of ambassadors, ministers' nephews, and so on – boys with whom I shared a taste for literature and music. What I found moving in the book was not the period, but a vision of the irrepressible flow of time. A man and a woman meet, fall in love, have children, then die. And





those children who survive in turn have children of their own. I don't portray the marital disputes or life's various problems. The film is devoid of the kind of events and information which usually make up a film. I only retained that which can give the spectator the sense of the continuity of life through the death of some, the birth of others, and the coming together of bodies

in an embrace. Montherlant used to say: "Éternité is an anagram of étreinte [embrace]."

Throughout the film, the women have children, while the men work or go off to war. Do you think ETERNITY might lead to any misinterpretations?

The film shows a world that did exist but which no longer does. It's the story of the family of the author, Alice Ferney. It happens that this book does not tackle themes of class struggle or the emancipation of women. I wanted to adapt the book as it is, with the aim of preserving the emotion it inspired in me when I first read it. The film is an ode to life, to love, to the passage of time. And by extension, an ode to conjugal love. We see men and women pledging to live together and trying to build something, or at least to not destroy.

The music plays a key role in the fusion of moments, but so does the narration. Where is that coming from, and whose voice is it?

The narration is of a similar kind to that in *Barry Lyndon*. It is omniscient and allows distanciation. It is not the voice of one of the characters, but that of a narrator. Since I read Alice Ferney's book with a female inner voice, it's only natural that the voiceover is spoken by a woman. The music and the narration serve the same function, that of casting a well-meaning and empathetic gaze on these people as they live out their dramas, and who overcome their difficulties to be reconciled with life. For the voiceover, I wanted to stay as close as possible to Alice Ferney's original text, because she has a wonderful way of expressing things. It's more a book of expression than of experience, in the sense that the book's emotion doesn't come from a good plot with fascinating adventures, but comes directly through the literary expression, from the writing, in other words, from a particular way of formulating life.

The musicality of the voice and the words is just as important as what she says. One might suppose that this attention to the music of the language is linked to your own experience of French.

That's right. When I arrived in France, I didn't speak the language. I remember crying in front of teachers, it was so difficult to master. For the first few years, there was the boredom of successive summers when we didn't go on vacation – my parents were glued to their sewing machines – and that boredom gave me a taste for reading. I learned French through reading. I would memorize sentences whose construction intrigued me, and which I thought were beautiful. I still know certain sentences by heart that I learned at the time because I was interested in the structure of the phrase which is the result of a very different way of thinking than my native tongue. At the time, we lived on the outskirts of Paris at Villeneuve-le-Roi. The odor of books was always mingled with the sad poetry of the banlieue, the narrow alleys between the kitchen gardens of the flint houses. In cinema, I always prefer the French language when it is spoken in a rather literary way, like in Truffaut's films, or a bit sing-song like in certain Godard movies, or else completely disembodied, like in the work of Bresson.

How did you choose the music?

As a teenager, I was passionate about opera and chamber music. I think I learnt a lot about filmmaking from music. For *ETERNITY*, I decided to draw on the repertoire of classical music that I know well. Because the images in this film are not there to tell a story but to create a flow of sketched situations, pulled along by the inexorable passage of time, I discovered that certain pieces of music that I used have a "narrative" role and were a good reflection of the inner feelings of the characters, and at the same time maintained the spectator at the correct distance from the tragedy he or she is witnessing. The music



works in concert with the narration; together they produce a narrative that unfolds in an unusual and deeply moving way.

How did you cast your actors?

Very simply. I have an idea of what the characters are like, and

when I meet the actors, if they correspond to that idea, they are the right people. There was a wonderful harmony on set, even though the shoot was very disconcerting for the actors because they couldn't base their work on scenes to bring their characters to life, given that due to its very nature, the film doesn't have any scenes. The presence and humanity that emanate from the actors are essential for the film. We held a big meeting before the shoot. In exchange for the trust they placed in me, I had one promise to offer them: That what they delivered on set would have an expressiveness that would overwhelm us all once all this stuff would be put into some order through the cinematographic writing of the film. I hope I haven't failed in my promise. The commitment of Audrey Tautou, Mélanie Laurent and Bérénice Bejo, their perseverance in staying with the project despite the vicissitudes involving the financing, allowed the film to be made. It goes without saying that it was an immense pleasure to work together after enduring all the difficulties which preceded the shoot.





INTERVIEW WITH AUDREY TAUTOU

We feel like we know Valentine. How did you make her so tangible when we only see her during moments that, despite being essential, are somewhat furtive?

I tried to feed every moment with this character – during her youth, when her first child is born, when she first experiences grief – with every intimate detail I could. Each shot is such an esthetic composition that I felt if I lacked in authenticity, I'd simply become part of the set. I didn't dare pretend. As such, managing long waiting periods and the concentration required was pretty tough in order to be ready when it came to shoot, especially as some shots required hours of preparations.

In the film, we see you at every age in life. How did that feel?

It is kind of strange to see yourself across a whole life in the space of one film. The special effects were so subtle that I was quite disturbed to see myself as an old woman. Seeing myself young was less shocking, probably because I recognized me from 10 years ago, with my lips a little poutier and my cheeks a little fuller!

What special effects were used?

They combined two techniques, prosthetics and digital. I had these markers, little white dots placed on the main axes of my face which matched exactly with my “skin double”. There were three different ones, depending on what age I was meant to be in each scene. The first one was for my youth, and the two others for when I was older. I’d shoot the scene, and my double would then reproduce my movements exactly. For each period, we defined which parts of my face, neck, and hands would be transformed, either using make-up or digital. Afterwards, it took months in post-production to harmonize these two processes for the magic to be complete.

Your scenes with the newborns are very striking. How does one perform with such little babies?

You don’t act, you just look at them and you love them! Because Valentine gives birth to eight babies during the film, there was a new one every day. Depending on their age, they were more or less apprehensive and you had to adapt to each to reassure them. That was also part of my role, to create a bond, and ensure they felt confident during the shoot. But I love kids so it wasn’t like work. Before becoming an actress, I did consider becoming a child psychiatrist!





INTERVIEW WITH BÉRÉNICE BEJO

How does one get to grips with such a special project as this?

I was on holiday in Vietnam when I read the script around two years ago, but I have to confess I didn't read it in one go. Almost devoid of dialog, incessantly moving back and forth in time, and with so much description, it was quite hard to take in. I didn't really understand the project until I met with Hung. It was a different kind of meeting to those you normally have with filmmakers because there were long moments of silence during which Hung just looked at me. Thirty seconds of silence

can feel like a pretty long time when you're sitting face to face with a filmmaker, but I was quite relaxed about it. I understood that he needed to observe me and see what these silences said to me, but I still went away with some doubts. It was during our second meeting that Hung convinced me to put the shoot in my diary. I knew that getting the finances together for a film with this scope would take time.

During the screening, you were enthusiastic, but it seems during the shoot, you had your doubts...

I was really thrown! It was ridiculous. I was probably the most unyielding of all the actors but I don't mind saying it now because I love the film and I'm really proud of it. I think Hung's gamble



totally paid off. But when I arrived on set, I'd just made a film in English, very carefully written, with lots of dialog and scenes requiring some intense concentration, whereas on ETERNITY, I was asked for "nothing". And doing nothing is perhaps the most difficult thing for an actor. Every morning, I'd say to nobody in particular, "What's the plan for today? Moving a vase? Learning to hold a fork?" I struggled to keep my sarcasm in check. And it was even more complicated for me because I really like Hung. That said, there may not have been much to help us understand what we were shooting, but there were colors, flowers, fabrics, and materials. There was so much care over every single detail that their beauty became reassuring.

Why was the role of Gabrielle so difficult to grasp?

Because it was about not acting, but about being as precise as a machine. Getting the right light on a strand of hair was as important to Hung as the expression on my face. The preparations for a five-second shot lasted three hours. One day, I lost it. We were shooting a "scene" after my marriage in which I had to undo every button on my dress one by one. "Make your arm tenser, make your elbow more arched, faster, slower..." I felt useless, it was never right, even though the performance wasn't overdone. Eventually, I yelled, "Enough, Hung! I'm not an object, I'm a human being. If you're so interested in the angle of my elbow, make an animation and you can control everything!" The whole crew fell silent. I felt completely detached from my character. Then I calmed down and asked him to choreograph each of my movements so I could learn that choreography. We discussed that argument a while ago. He told me, "You were right. In this film, what I asked of the actors was too fragmented for them to understand the whole. Your recalcitrance was the most logical reaction." My roots are Latin so when Asia meets South America, things are always going to go off! I like confrontation. And I like understanding, too. I don't expect a director to be in my head telling me everything, but I do need some direction. If

I'm being asked to hold still, I need to know why. It might have been tricky for Hung because Mélanie, Jérémie, Pierre, and me were a real gang. We got along very well and had a tendency to get distracted. I could see him suffering. His connection with Audrey was different because her character is there throughout the film. We had very few scenes together.

How did you feel when you saw the film?

I was overwhelmed and exceptionally moved. ETERNITY tells the story of the cycle of life, and the way this cycle continues, despite the deaths, the grief, and the pain. They move through two wars and plenty of social conflict, yet the tumult of the world has little effect on this family. The pivot in the film is love and how it continues and is constantly reborn. They love one another, they have children, they raise them as best they can, some die, some enter a convent, and others get married. There are no relationship break-ups but the couples that form are sometimes unconventional. A new couple comes together soon after the death of Mathilde, the character played by Mélanie (Laurent). Each person's passage through life is told through almost anodyne moments and I found that very moving because it makes you think about your own life with your children. How girls do their hair when they're seven years old and then how they do it when they're 12. The feeling of eternity one has in watching the film is made up of all those little gestures that are impossible to describe on set, and so much so that it led me to understand even more why Hung couldn't explain his film to us, and could only describe what we did and how our scenes would combine into a whole. When I watched ETERNITY, I felt an almost paradoxical sensation of speed, linked to the passing of decades between two shots. I was overwhelmed by some very powerful emotions. We are so busy that the beauty of this world can pass us by. For me, the film is an ode to the most beautiful things life has to offer.



You perform in one of the few scenes with dialog in the film, when your future husband makes a unique declaration...

Yes. Pierre Deladonchamps and I rehearsed a great deal because we really liked this crucial moment. It's what you might call an arranged marriage and my husband says to me, "I don't love

you yet but I will learn to love you. When I decide something, I do it and I devote myself to it heart and soul.” It was often like that back then, and the beautiful thing about this relationship is that you see the love growing between them and becoming strong.



The women are central in the film. They give birth, they take care of their children and their husbands. But they don't really seem to live for themselves. What is your take on that?

Yes, women's lives were very different a 100 years ago. Moreover, the film doesn't seek to be naturalistic or speak the truth. Above all, it's a film about life in the most animalistic sense of the word. You are born, you grow up, you die, and that's all that matters. You try to create something. There are tragedies, but life goes on. I like this film because it's deeply poetic and timeless. The values it conveys are essential and still valid: It's about the need to help one other and the importance of passing things on to the next generation, which tend to be neglected today. Family solidarity has been lost, it's hard to hand things on to your children, there's a kind of constant delegation in education. What is more important than what connects us, love and friendship, that you can count on until the end? That's ETERNITY and that's what counts in life. It's the story of the destinies of these three women, one of whom, Valentine, lives a very long life and witnesses the deaths of some of her children and her husband. There is an intense pleasure in following Audrey Tautou until the end of her character's journey. In this film, the men are like foils. The actors took that on board, and that's sufficiently rare to deserve to be highlighted!



INTERVIEW WITH MÉLANIE LAURENT

How did Tran Anh Hung present ETERNITY to you?

The first time I worked with my very close friend Marie Denarnaud, I asked her at the end of the shoot what her five favorite books were. They included “L’Élégance des Veuves” by Alice Ferney, which I immediately bought, read, and loved. When I met Hung and he started to tell me about his project, the book gradually came to mind as he spoke. “But isn’t that ‘L’Élégance des Veuves?’” I asked. The answer was yes, and he was pleased that I already knew the book. The casting wasn’t

yet fixed, and with all my heart, I wanted Hung to give me the role of Mathilde. I was eight-and-a-half months pregnant. It was funny that he should be talking to me about this woman, a mother of 12, when my belly was so swollen. At that first meeting, we spoke for three hours, about cinema and how it is crafted... I have a magical memory of that.

Why did you want to play the role of Mathilde?

Mathilde is the character who struck the biggest chord with me

in the book. Firstly, because she and her husband are a very modern couple. They have a genuine complicity; they chose each other, and that wasn't so common back then. Her husband Henri – played by Jérémie Renier – has this kind of rigor which never hides the love he has for his wife. You get the feeling they have a loving and passionate sexual relationship. When I



was playing her, I guessed she was happy in her sexuality. The subject is conjugal love, not passion, which is something much rarer and much less explored in movies. But they still have a life to share together. Back then, people didn't split up, or at least if they did, it was exceptional. I really enjoyed playing Mathilde, this woman who never steps outside of the family and yet who is free. ETERNITY is a film about handing things down, and about certain values. But above all, it takes you back to another era. It's incredible how the lives of these bourgeois women have changed.

Did you know how the moments you were shooting would fit into the story?

No. There was no way of knowing what Hung was going to do with all those extremely precise shots, those traveling shots on flowers or furniture. You had to imagine a voiceover for each of our gestures and movements – that's the sense of it. And as for the rest, the screenplay was just one long voiceover. We shot to music. Hung asked me what I wanted to hear and I said Chopin's Nocturnes. I had no doubt with regard to the beauty he was creating. It required a kind of passiveness. You had to accept being these bodies that fit into a set and not mind being manipulated as such. Hung knows what he wants so precisely that there was no doubt. It was very gentle film to make and the shoot could have lasted months more.

Where did that gentleness come from?

Partly from sophistication. The few times we had any dialog, it was very pleasant to have these precious lines to speak. I really loved putting on those period dresses, paying attention to my gestures, making sure they were graceful. Just the collars made us stand up straight. I usually play strong women who don't wear make-up. I think this was the first time I've played a feminine woman.

Don't you think you're feminine?

Not really. That's probably why I loved playing Mathilde, and why I was so touched to be offered the role.

Who do you think the voice of the narrator represents, washing over the whole film?

It's a timeless voice, that of the story itself. If I had to give it an age, it would be very old, and that of a woman. A foremother of the family.

Playing Mathilde, who never stops being pregnant, you were frequently filmed with very small babies.

Working with those babies was wonderful. I loved acting with them, smelling their skin and their breath. I had also just given birth myself, so all those gestures were like a continuation of those I was using in my private life.

Were you worried the film might be wrongly interpreted? The main action of your character is giving life.

Mathilde is constantly pregnant but you can definitely feel there is a shared desire between her and her husband in her successive pregnancies. He forces nothing on her. Mathilde wants a daughter, and she will continue to have babies until she gives birth to a girl. When Louise is born, she is exhausted, but her wan look and her fatigue are immediately wiped away by the joy of bringing this infant into the world. Of course ETERNITY could be wrongly interpreted, but I think it is a magnificent film about women. And not about the bourgeoisie or about housewives in a time when they had so few rights. Hung portrays his female characters as very powerful mothers who are, in the end, very free. There was a moment during the shoot when I almost felt jealous of their lives. Nobody has 10



children anymore, at least not in Europe. And when you have 10 children, they are rarely so well brought up! These women read, they have no access to culture. The friendship between Mathilde and Gabrielle (played by Bérénice Bejo) is extraordinary. These two couples who live in the same building see each other all the time, day and night, but at the same time, they totally



respect each other. When Mathilde's husband asks Gabrielle to marry him after Mathilde dies, he does it out of love for his lost wife. It's all very healthy. Whereas today, this would be seen as a betrayal or as something smutty. Bérénice's and Jérémie's characters get together, in a secret that is never spoken.

Would you say Gabrielle acts out of love for her friend?

Yes. Out of a desire to pass something on. After all, she's going to raise all these kids and she knew their mother better than anyone. I think ETERNITY is a deeply feminist film, which reveals female solidarity and friendship in a way rarely seen on screen. And all the actors got along so well. I didn't really need to fabricate the tender relationship for the film. And I loved shooting with Audrey [Tautou], but we had very few scenes together.

It would seem that the waiting time between scenes was huge...

I stopped being impatient a long time ago. You get a lot of time to reflect on shoots. I use that time to write, to do all kinds of things. To observe.

What did you think when you saw the finished film?

I've rarely cried so much in a film. And right from the beginning! Hung is an absolute genius because he manages to make you feel very emotional about characters you see very little. He makes you feel attached to them, and as if you miss them. His images are like caresses.

You are also a director. Will this experience influence your own work?

Of course. On this film, I learned to trust the story. It didn't require convoluted camera movements. Hung's shots are beautiful because all his camera movements are necessary.

Which shot from the film symbolizes that for you?

One image haunts me. It's of Audrey, from behind, when her

character hears that her sons died in the war. Hung cut the music. You hear the silence. It's very restrained, and yet you have the feeling of entering a person's heart. And it's the same when her daughter dies and she strokes her foot. It's incredibly powerful. And the same when Bérénice's character loses her husband out to sea in the Calanques. He disappears out of sight. Estheticism is at the heart of the film, yet you're never sick of all this beauty. It's kind of marvelous for an actress to have such a rare opportunity to make real cinema.

What do you think about the final image, a contemporary one, where a young girl runs towards her lover on a bridge?

We finish with this modern woman. And she shows us that eternity is being in love, having the wind in your hair, and being happy. There were all these deaths, yet it's only the love that is handed down from generation to generation that counts. It's a film about handing down love.



A film still featuring Jeremie Renier as the character Henri. He is an older man with thinning grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. He is holding a vintage black and silver camera with both hands, looking through the viewfinder. The background is a warm, dimly lit interior with a fireplace mantel, a potted plant, and a window with white shutters. The text "INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÉMIE RENIER" is overlaid in white, sans-serif capital letters in the upper right corner.

INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÉMIE RENIER

How did you prepare for this unique shoot?

I trusted Hung completely. It was a truly special experience, being this kind of pure presence on set. That's what we worked on, and on the relationships between the actors. But I nonetheless felt like I'd experienced some very powerful moments such as the loss of a much-loved wife and a child, without having to act out the grief.

Did you have any references to help define your character, Henri?

Hung had some visual references. Very early on, he told me

about the dried grasses Henri collects, and the pleasure he takes in sorting them out and arranging them. So that helped. And I like dried grasses too! Hung also talked about colors and materials. I felt like I was in a painting.

One doesn't recognize you in Henri immediately...

He is so stiff and so far from other characters I've played. For me, that's part of the joy of acting, not being recognized, and blending into a set and a story. I think Henri's rigor and uprightness correspond to the era when the film is set. My character observes the male codes of the time. That doesn't stop him from being very much in love with his wife and loving

his children, even if he doesn't take care of them directly. There's that wonderful moment in the film where I sit all the children around the table. They are like extensions of their parents, little particles of my character that grow up, develop, and live other lives. That's the power of the film, more than showing simple filiation.

When you saw ETERNITY, did you think the film could spark a polemic?

Why should it? The amazing thing about art, and cinema in particular, is that ability to transport us into worlds other than our own. ETERNITY talks about having children. Back then, anywhere you went, having children was the most important thing. Bringing your children and grandchildren together, maintaining your family tree was very important. It's perhaps less so these days when families are more dispersed. The film illustrates the power of that link in a very moving way. I thought about my grandfather when I was watching the film. He's from a very different social milieu than that shown in the film but bringing the family together is also very important to him. The film is marvelous because you can always spot something new in each scene, a highlight, a butterfly, etc. Beauty is everywhere. There are no oppressive messages.

What was the atmosphere like on set?

Hung was always taking care of the details which was sometimes unsettling because we were never sure whether a flower was more important than us actors. But we understood that this wasn't just a whim. Plus, there were all those children. In the film, my character is father to 12 of them. Their pictures were on the walls, beside a description of their role in the story, like a family tree. It looked lovely. We navigated by sight through an extremely precise universe.

What did you feel when you saw the film?

During the shoot, I hoped it would be how it has turned out. That it would have that poetic strength. And that it would make us feel the pure passage of time through several generations.





INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE DELADONCHAMPS

How did you prepare for the film?

I learned a lot from “L’Élégance des Veuves” by Alice Ferney, upon which the film is based. It provided a lot of inspiration for getting to grips with the lives of these big French families, but also for the rhythm of the film, its ups and downs, and its framework.

Was there anything that surprised you when you saw the finished film?

It was the same when I read the script as when I watched the

film – I was struck by the dreamlike quality of the script. The construction is very fluid. It’s a fairytale. You let yourself get wrapped up in the lives of these families like in a dream, without there being any particular drama or revelation of a situation or conflict, thanks to the voiceover which, I think, is that of a timeless storyteller. I like to think that we cannot know who it is.

Would you say that ETERNITY is an experimental film?

Yes. To me, it’s a perpetual cycle. It would fit in a museum of contemporary art, where it could be screened on a loop. ETERNITY is an unidentified artistic object that is as much music

video as it is a painting by a great master, as much theatrical as it is cinematographic. It is at the intersection of all kinds of artistic universe. The beauty of the images is impressive, while never ostentatious. There are a lot of shots of flowers, which could be oppressive but never are. The poetry of the film is what is most important.

You appear in the two extremely powerful moments in the film. One might even say in the only two scenes in the film, insofar as the film has any scenes at all.

The scene when Charles drowns, where his wife remains powerless beside the water, is one of the most beautiful death

scenes I have ever seen in a movie. And for an actor like me, it was very strange, because there was a similarity between that death in the water and the drowning in the lake in *STRANGER BY THE LAKE* by Alain Guiraudie, which was my first major movie role.

How did you prepare for the declaration of non-love to your wife, played by Bérénice Bejo?

I tell her, “We are not yet in love but we are learning, because love is never a given.” I put a lot of heart into that scene because I found it very moving. I think that many couples must have been obliged to learn to love one another and to grow



accustomed to one another. I thought it was lovely for them to have a story imposed upon them and then to make it their own. It was a forced marriage but they turned the situation around so it was in their favor. And as they appropriated it, they wrote it. It's the opposite of what usually happens, when people love each other, get together and then end up leaving each other. Bérénice Bejo and I really enjoyed creating this couple.



The men seem to take a back seat in ETERNITY...

I imagine that it comes across that way, but that's not how I felt it was. The brief moments my character had on screen required an enormous amount of sincerity. They were sequences in which you can see the love between my character and Bérénice's growing. In ETERNITY, the women are always at home, but in the end, the men are there too.

Let's talk about the role of women...

I didn't view the film as a manifesto for housewives! Simply because neither feminism nor its opposite are the subject of this movie. The men go through wars without us seeing a single image of that. Nothing from the outside penetrates the film, which I see as an ode to love and life. Once again, one must view it as a fairytale.

CAST

Valentine	Audrey TAUTOU
Gabrielle	Bérénice BEJO
Mathilde	Mélanie LAURENT
Henri	Jérémie RENIER
Charles	Pierre DELADONCHAMPS
Gabrielle's mother	Irène JACOB
Mathilde's mother	Valérie STROH
Jules	Arieh WORTHALTER
Valentine's mother	Philippine LEROY-BEAULIEU
Narrator	TRAN NU Yên Khê

CREW

Directed by	TRAN ANH HUNG
Produced by	Christophe ROSSIGNON and Philip BOËFFARD
Adaptation and screenplay	TRAN ANH HUNG
Based on the novel	« L'Élégance des veuves » by Alice FERNEY , published by ACTES SUD
Coproduced by	Romain LE GRAND, Vivien ASLANIAN and Patrick QUINET
Associate producer	Pierre GUYARD
Line producers	Ève FRANÇOIS MACHUEL and Stéphane QUINET
Art director	TRAN NU Yên Khê
Photography	Mark LEE Ping Bing
Editing	Mario BATTISTEL
Assistant director	Thierry VERRIER
Set design	Véronique SACREZ
Sound engineer	Pierre MERTENS
Sound editing	Alexandre FLEURANT
Sound mixing	Thomas GAUDER
VFX supervisor	Yann BLONDEL
Color grading	Yov MOOR
Casting	Gigi AKOKA
Costumes	Olivier BÉRIOT
Make-up	Kaatje VAN DAMME
Hair styling	Joëlle DOMINIQUE
Script editor	Olivia BRUYNOGHE
Production manager	Angeline MASSONI
Post-production	Julien AZOULAY and Julien MELEBECK
Music supervisor	Elise LUGUERN
Technical and artistic coordinator	Nicolas CAMBOIS
Press	Dominique SEGALL, Mathias LASSERRE and Antoine DORDET

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