



Curiosa Films

presents

BOTH SIDES OF THE BLADE

Avec amour et acharnement

A film by **Claire Denis**

Vincent Lindon

Juliette Binoche

Grégoire Colin

France – 116' – 2022 – Scope – Dolby 5.1

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SYNOPSIS

Paris, and already winter. Sarah and Jean love each other. They have lived together for several years. Their love makes them happy, strong. There is mutual trust, and the desire never died down. One morning (by chance?) Sarah crosses paths with François who introduced her to Jean. And it is François she left for Jean without hesitating.

INTERVIEW WITH CLAIRE DENIS

This is the second time you've worked on a script with Christine Angot since *Let the Sunshine In* in 2017.

Yes, but this time working with Christine was different. We weren't starting from scratch. We were adapting *Un tournant de la Vie*, one of her novels. Another difference – and it's a big one – is that this project took shape during the beginning of the pandemic. Since we were in lockdown – under house arrest, like most of the world – Christine and I decided to work on something. It's strange to say, but it's sort of true: this film exists thanks to the lockdown.

How do the two of you work?

Christine is pretty bleak, and I'm more the anxious type. The collision of our torments was at times explosive. Like a battery, positive pole, negative pole, sparks flying. The writing process was lively. Things kept moving, happening fast. There was no inertia, lots of merriment. Christine always has me on the verge of laughter. She's always open to humor.

Can you sum up *Both Sides of the Blade*?

It's a simple story: Sara and Jean live together as a couple. One day by chance, Sara sees François, a former lover. But in both Christine's novel and the film, the simplicity is deceptive. It's a way of foiling clichés.

What clichés?

Clichés about behavioral patterns we all know: the ménage à trois, the woman torn between two men and suffering from it, etc. With Christine, there was no risk that we could fall into these conventions. It's a fine line, and the film is this line, a balancing act, a tightrope walk. For me a script is like soft clay that gradually fashions itself. Silhouettes coming out of the fog, starting to move, to speak, to take shape...

The three protagonists live in the present, and we never know much about their past.

This is intentional of course. Sara works at Radio France Internationale, RFI, a French public-service station that covers news from around the world. For me it's important that Sara hears voices from all over saying that things are not going well. She also says, almost as an aside, that she has always loved and always will love her daughter's father. In her distant landscape, she is also a mother. We understand that Jean is unemployed, that he

did time in prison, that he used to play rugby and is now struggling to get back to work. He is also trying to reconnect with his son Marcus, who lives with Jean's mother. François is perhaps a thug, or maybe he's out for revenge. These details are kept minimal, but they are, I think, sufficient. If only because they allow the spectators the freedom to use their imagination.

A film is like a house. The way I built this one, I didn't need to add on extra rooms to make it livable. The texture of the characters is not in their biographies. It is in the moment. Their fleeting present – a few days in Paris in the winter – suffices to set up the storm of sentiments that will leave them ravaged. It is also for this reason that there are few outdoor scenes. Their own interiority serves as a slightly mysterious exteriority. They are like aliens teleported out of their habits.

***Both Sides of the Blade* is also a means of reuniting with actors you've already worked with: Juliette Binoche (Sara), Vincent Lindon (Jean) and Grégoire Colin (François).**

It was a reunion like no other. Juliette Binoche, for example, is capable of everything! Comedy, like in *"Let the Sunshine In,"* and here, a sort of tragic gravitas. She is brave. She confronts everything head-on, stands up to any challenge. It's not just show. It's organic. Juliette is totally Sara: beautiful, rebellious, full of love and tenacity.

Vincent Lindon offered me his masculine power which is also gentle and soothing. Once he trusts his character, he gives it his all. His Jean is distraught but not ridiculous when, for example, he talks about why he loves the supermarket. There is a delicateness and a fragility to him. I really like one of his scenes, where he goes out onto the balcony to smoke a cigarette. Everything is said silently: his desire for a smoke must not stink up the lives of others.

Grégoire Colin offers another kind of masculinity. I was looking forward to filming him again with his wolf-like face. François, his character, is intuitive, a rogue who gambles on his life as if he's at a casino: all his chips on black, on red, one more time, one last time and we'll see... For him, the thrill of the game matters more than winning.

What do these three actors have in common?

Beyond the fiction of the film, what attaches me to each of them is that we've gone on loving one another. We never left one another. Each actor was murmuring to me: "Here is my character. I love it and I want you to love it in return." Of course, we can discuss costumes, hair, sets, blocking. But the one thing I can't negotiate with them is their commitment. Once they are there, really there, they invade everything. And what a sweet invasion! There is no room left not to like them. This goes for the other actors as well: Mati Diop, Bulle Ogier. I insisted that they be part of the project. I needed them. They gave me confidence, they showed me other doors – freer ones, more personal ones – by which I could enter the film.

This was your first time working with Eric Gautier. How did you two decide on the frame?

I've known Eric Gautier for years, but we never had the opportunity to work together. The pact we made was that we'd both get as close as possible to the intimacy of this trio. It can be very uncomfortable, getting close to such intimacy. But in the apartment we were shooting in, space was relatively tight. This made me and Eric get even closer to them. And during the night shoot when Sara and Jean have their big fight, we got so sucked up in their brawl that we all went home pale and bloodless.

Does the character of Sara embody a kind of freedom?

Male desire is not bad, but female desire is perhaps better. They are entitled to the same lapses as men. Adultery? Betrayal? This conventional vocabulary of bourgeois conjugality is totally foreign to me. Sara is neither submissive, nor a victim. She abandons herself to her desire, but not to anyone in particular. Not to the companion she lives with, not to her lover who passes through.

It takes incredible luck – and it's not common – to come across a former lover. Sara gives it a shot, she tosses the coin, a dangerous game of head or tails. In the end, she doesn't care what side it lands on. For her, life is an adventure, a double-edged sword, like the title of the song Stuart Staples composed for the film: *Both Sides of the Blade*.

Interview with Gérard Lefort in Paris February 1st, 2022.

DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Claire Denis is a French director and screenwriter, renowned for films including *Chocolat*, *Beau Travail*, *Trouble Every Day*, *35 Shots of Rum*, and *Bastards*. Born in Paris, Claire Denis lived in a number of African countries until the age of 12. Having returned to France, she studied at the IDEHEC (Institut des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques), where she met cinematographer Agnès Godard, who would later work on the majority of her films. She began her professional life in the cinema as assistant to major directors like Robert Enrico, Wim Wenders, Costa Gavras and Jacques Rivette. She later worked with Jim Jarmusch on his film *Down by Law*.

In 1987, Claire Denis wrote and directed her first film, *Chocolat*. A semi-autobiographical story of racial tension in the colonial Africa of the 1950s at the moment of independence, the film premiered In Competition at the 1988 Cannes Film Festival, was nominated at the César Awards and met with widespread critical acclaim in the US.

In 1996, she was awarded the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival for *Nenette and Boni*. *Beau Travail* (1999), *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *Vendredi soir* (2002), *35 Shots of Rum* (2008), *White Material* (2009), and *Bastards* (2013) – presented in *Un Certain Regard* at the Cannes Film Festival in 2013 – followed.

In 2017, Claire Denis returned to Cannes when *Bright Sunshine In*, featuring Juliette Binoche, Xavier Beauvois, Nicolas Duvauchelle, Alex Descas and Gérard Depardieu, screened as the opening film in Directors' Fortnight.

In 2018, *HIGH LIFE* is selected at Toronto Film Festival starring Robert Pattinson, Juliette Binoche and Mia Goth.

Selected In Competition in Berlin Film Festival, *BOTH SIDE OF A BLADE* reunites Juliette Binoche and Vincent Lindon for the first time on screen together.

STARS AT NOON with Margaret Quelly et Joe Alwyn is now in post-production after a shooting in Nicaragua.

Claire Denis has co-written the majority of her films with Jean-Pol Fargeau, but has also collaborated on scripts with Emmanuèle Bernheim (*Vendredi Soir*), Marie NDiaye (*White Material*) and Christine Angot (*Bright Sunshine In, Both Side of a blade*).

DIRECTOR SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

2022 **STARS AT NOON**

2021 **BOTH SIDES OF THE BLADE**

Official Competition – Berlin FF

2018 **HIGH LIFE**

Fipresci Prize – San Sebastian FF

Official Selection – Toronto FF

Official Selection – New York FF

2017 **BRIGHT SUNSHINE IN**

SACD Prize at Directors' Fortnight – Cannes FF

2013 **BASTARDS**

Un Certain Regard – Cannes FF

2010 **WHITE MATERIAL**

Official Competition – Venice FF

2008 **35 SHOTS OF RUM**

Out of Competition – Venice FF

2005 **THE INTRUDER**

2002 **FRIDAY NIGHT**

2001 **TROUBLE EVERY DAY**

Out of Competition – Cannes FF

1999 **BEAU TRAVAIL**

Best Cinematography – César Awards

1996 **NÉNETTE AND BONI**

Golden Leopard, Prize of the Ecumenical Jury, Special Prize – Locarno FF

1995 **A PROPOS DE NICE**

1994 **U.S. GO HOME**

1993 **I CAN'T SLEEP**

Un Certain Regard – Cannes FF

1990 **NO FEAR, NO DIE**

1989 **MAN NO RUN**

1988 **CHOCOLAT**

Official Selection – Cannes FF

Nominee Best First Feature Film – César Awards

CAST

SARA

JEAN

FRANÇOIS

NELLY

MARCUS

EMPLOYEE TRIBUNAL DE COMMERCE

GABRIELLE

INVITE INAUGURATION

LOLA

EMPLOYE DE POSTE

JULIETTE BINOCHÉ

VINCENT LINDON

GREGOIRE COLIN

BULLE OGIER

ISSA PERICA

ALICE HOURI

MATI DIOP

BRUNO PODALYDES

LOLA CRETON

RICHARD COURCET

CREW

DIRECTOR

CLAIRE DENIS

DP

ERIC GAUTIER

PRODUCTION DESIGNER

ARNAUD DE MOLERON

COSTUME DESIGNER

JUDY SHREWSBURY

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

JOSEPH RAPP

SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

MELVIN NKOSI

LOCATION MANAGER

IGNAZIO UMBERTO GIOVACCHINI

SOUND

JEAN-PAUL MUGEL

SOUND EDITOR

OLIVIER WALCZAK

ROMAIN OZANNE

MIX

NATHALIE VIDAL

ORIGINAL MUSIC

TINDERSTICKS

SCREENPLAY

CHRISTINE ANGOT ET CLAIRE DENIS

**ADAPTED FROM CHRISTINE ANGOT'S
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