



SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2021

ANAÏS IN LOVE

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SEMAINE
DE LA CRITIQUE
CANNES 2021

ANAÏS IN LOVE

(LES AMOURS D'ANAÏS)

A film by **Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet**

With Anaïs Demoustier, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi, Denis Podalydès

98 min - France



SYNOPSIS

Anais is thirty and broke. She has a lover, but she's not sure she loves him anymore. She meets Daniel, who immediately falls for her. But Daniel lives with Emilie – whom Anais also falls for. This is the story of a restless young woman. And the story of a profound desire.

INTERVIEW WITH CHARLINE BOURGEOIS-TACQUET

Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet, who are you?

That's a difficult question. I was born thirty-five years ago in a small seaside town. But with reference to what we're here to discuss, the crucial moment in my life was when I was fourteen-years old and I discovered Isabelle Huppert on stage in *Medea*. I spontaneously combusted: my whole world changed. I told myself that this was what I wanted to do too, become an actress, and I started watching every film she ever made. That's how I fell in love with cinema and became a movie buff. When I first came to Paris, I wanted to do it all: I was a student in a very intense two-year program in humanities preparing me to sit the competitive entrance exams for the best higher education schools while also taking theater classes. As I loved studying literature, I continued my studies at the Sorbonne where I wrote my dissertation on Duras' rewriting of Racine's work. Then,

I inadvertently fell into a job in publishing at Grasset Editions. But around the age of twenty-five, twenty-six, I realized it was really urgent for me to get involved with filmmaking, so I dropped everything from one day to the next. I started writing scripts for short films on my own until someone introduced me to the producer Philippe Carcassonne, who liked what I was doing and advised me to direct the shorts myself. I started with small-scale self-produced films which I directed and played in. That taught me a great deal.

You shot and played in *Joujou*, a self-produced fantasy, then *Pauline Enslaved*, a short film that was selected for the Semaine de la Critique section of the Cannes Film Festival where it met with great success. Is *Anaïs in Love* the follow up to *Pauline*?

Let's say that Anaïs could be Pauline's cousin. The



link between the two characters also comes from the fact that they are played by the same actress, Anaïs Demoustier. In truth, Anaïs (the real one) and I had so much fun with *Pauline*, that we wanted to keep working together and I wrote the screenplay for *Anaïs in Love* with her in mind. But Anaïs the character (the fictive one) isn't as comical as Pauline. She does indeed talk a lot, and very quickly, without taking the person she is speaking to into account, or the questions she is asked: I worked on the excessive traits in her personality, I pushed the limits, which is clearly a feature of comedy. Yet Anaïs has a depth that Pauline lacked.

How would you define your Anaïs' personality?

She's a young woman who follows her sudden impulses and urges, no matter how rash. She lives in the present without asking herself any questions, without projecting into the future. You may think that this side of her personality makes her a selfish person, but for me she's simply a girl who is keenly aware of life's fragility and

who has decided to seize every possible opportunity and occasion to be happy. I love her vitality, her boldness and daring. The key to the character is her ability to follow her desires.

She's also a restless young woman, someone who is in constant motion. Her boyfriend Raoul calls her a "bulldozer" and it's true that this "fireball" side of her personality can be a little overwhelming for the people around her. But whether it is her abortion or her mother's disease, she doesn't feel any sorrier for herself than she does for others. She marches ahead, without ever stopping because it's her survival mode, facing adversity straight on. If she ever stopped to really take a hard look and think about what is happening to her, she'd fall to pieces.

Anaïs is thirty years old: are those the best years?

I wouldn't say that! It can be harrowing to be in your thirties. You suddenly find yourself at a crossroads in your life with many different possible directions and

you can't miss taking the turn that is right for you. It's a moment in your life when you make decisive choices determining the next chapter: career, love life, marriage? With or without children? If you are a woman, you have ten years to build your life because afterwards it is too late. I have a lot of trouble with the heroicized image of the "modern" woman who has a fulfilling career with the ideal partner and wonderful children. Frankly, it seems highly improbable and rather unachievable.

Diametrically opposed to this mythical figure, I wanted to depict the portrait of a complex young woman, caught in a web of material and existential difficulties corresponding with her age and era. The portrait of a young woman who is figuring out who she is.

Why did you choose this first name for her?

For two reasons. Firstly, I wanted a name that was not a social marker. I had a list of three names, including Anaïs, and when I knew Anaïs Demoustier was going

to play the role, I didn't hesitate for a second. And this leads me to the second reason: I very much like confusing fiction with reality. This character is named Anaïs, but she just as well could have been named Charline. It's her without being her, it's me without being me, but it's undoubtedly (and along with others) a mix of her and me!

Is movement at the heart of your directing style?

Absolutely. For the most part, the direction I give to my actresses and actors has to do with movement and rhythm. I do a great many sequence shots which are always based upon a very precise choreography. It's quite technical for the actors, but the obvious goal is that it isn't felt on screen and that everything seems to flow naturally. For both *Pauline Enslaved* and this film, my cinematographer Noé Bach and I had an important reference in mind: Eric Gautier's work on Arnaud Desplechin, Olivier Assayas, and Patrice Chéreau's early films. Meaning energy, speed, and movement. Thanks



to sequence shots, the life and energy aren't really created afterwards in the editing room: they come from dialogue, the acting, the movement – thus from within the scenes.

A word concerning the dialogue: It is often said that everything in cinema should only be expressed through images, but I don't agree with that. I think that dialogue can "drive" a film, giving the work its own identity and guiding its direction. Anaïs' logorrhea thus immediately gives the film its whirlwind quality. The direction relies on this energy of language and on the actress' movements, which for me are physically linked to her words. The energy of the words is also the energy of the bodies.

The editing's rhythm is boisterous...

I hate getting bored at the movies and so I always dread the possibility of boring my audience. Chantal Hymans, my editor, and I scrapped a lot of scenes that slowed down the action. After the first screening we cut twenty

minutes from the film! I wanted to quicken the pace. My gold standard is Jean-Paul Rappeneau, and in particular his film *Le Sauvage*, whose effervescence delights me. I more or less consciously followed in his footsteps.

The connection with Rappeneau is striking indeed. And if I mentioned Rohmer?

When I called my short film *Pauline Enslaved* it was a veiled reference to Rohmer, of course. *My Night at Maud's* is one of my favorite films in the world. I recognize myself in Rohmer's relationship with language and literature. And also the importance he gives to love, desire and how attentive he is when observing romantic feelings and games of love. Marivaux is our godfather! But I don't think that *Anaïs in Love* is a Rohmerian film. In truth, the films I thought about the most and watched again while writing the screenplay are Sautet's *César & Rosalie*, Pialat's *Loulou*, Desplechin's *My sex life or how I got into an argument*, Valeria Bruni Tedeschi's *A Castle in Italy* and Woody Allen's *Manhattan*.

You just mentioned bodies: can we talk about desire, and the sensuality that permeates the film?

Desire is the film's overarching theme. I'm speaking about desire in the largest sense of the term, of course. The thing that generally impels us, gets us moving and propels us towards others and towards the world. When Anaïs starts becoming interested in Emilie (played by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), she herself doesn't know what is pushing her towards this woman: curiosity, a blind attraction and desire to be closer to this person. An intuition as well. The intuition that they have something to live through together. I wanted to explore this kind of magical thing that desire provokes within us, this force that imperiously and mysteriously spurs us forward despite the obstacles. The fact is that after a while, things take shape and an entirely unexpected erotic, carnal and deeply-moving desire appears between Anaïs and Emilie. So yes, sensuality of course. In comparison with *Pauline Enslaved*, it's something new I wanted to explore. Something that is

extremely cinematographic: the slow and irresistible attraction of bodies.

Bodies but not in just any scenery... Nature plays a central role in your film.

It was very important for me to shoot this film for the most part in nature (green countryside, the seaside) and in summer's natural light which is conducive to sensuality and eroticism.

As we get deeper into the story, the scenery becomes more and more wild, natural landscapes increasingly dominate the scenery, opening everything up: we leave Paris, arriving in a castle in Brittany in the middle of the countryside and finally find ourselves at the wide-open sea. Without lapsing into overly simplistic symbolism, there is a sort of trajectory heading towards liberty.

There is also a kind of appeasement coming from the countryside. I like reminding myself that the trees, ocean, and natural elements will outlive us all. It's at once a breathtaking thought and reassuring. In this





film, the peacefulness exuded by nature works as a counterpoint to Anaïs' torments and restlessness.

How did you choose your actors and actresses?

As discussed above, for Anaïs it could only have been Anaïs Demoustier, and this was an understanding between us since the short film. Then, I had to find an actress in her fifties to play Emilie, who was at once beautiful, sensual, and believable as an intellectual, a writer. It didn't take me long to think of Valeria Bruni Tedeschi. I sent the script to her through her agent, she read it and then left me a message in which I had no idea if she liked the project or not. When I called her back, she spoke to me of her first impressions. She said many wonderful things about the character, the script, the story, and the dialogue, but she didn't tell me whether she was going to accept the role! I finally asked her, and she said: "of course I am," and I almost fainted with joy. Her pairing with Anaïs revealed that they had miraculously complementary natures: Anaïs, virtuosic

and very precise with an innate sense of rhythm and space, and Valeria who gives herself entirely over to a role, who can pierce right through you with a single look, magnificently expressing a mix of power and fragility – indeed the pinnacle of sensuality.

We've never seen Valeria Bruni Tedeschi like this.

That is the greatest compliment you could ever give me. I really had to fight to elicit this result – it was a real challenge. Valeria tends to get frustrated if she can't be the clown and make people laugh. Early in the shoot, I was afraid that she wouldn't enjoy playing this character at all. And then once we started coming out of our shells, getting to know and understood each other better, she accepted to follow me to the place I wanted to take her – towards this powerful, solidly grounded, beautiful, and touching woman.

Earlier you spoke about your first meeting with Denis Podalydès, the third member of this threesome.

Well there again, it was a miracle! Denis Podalydès, the busiest man in France right after Emmanuel Macron, this dazzlingly talented and fascinating actor. I barely dared to ask him to play this supporting role. I gathered my courage and gave the script to his agent with a short letter declaring all my admiration for his work. He answered me the next day and that was to say unreservedly yes. I couldn't believe it. I was stunned. Only he could give Daniel this mix of strength and weakness without ever making him appear ridiculous. He also brought all of his subtlety, intelligence, and his fabulous sense of comedy to the character. He was extremely generous with me and the film.

What can you say about the men in this film whose characters are essentially women?

Anaïs has a lot of them around her! Daniel/Denis, this publisher who is in a relationship with Emilie/Valeria and who is going to have an affair with Anaïs, is at once the archetype of a bourgeois

male who is sure of himself and what he feels he is entitled to, and a man whose naivety, fragility and awkwardness are very touching. Next to these two flamboyant women, he ends up touching us because he is so clueless as to what is actually playing out. It is true that this character also serves to bring comic relief during the Brittany section of the narrative. There, in the château, he is what Molière meant as "The Bore": he arrives in the wrong place at the wrong time, like a dog trampling through a flower bed.

Anaïs' first boyfriend, Raoul, played by Christophe Montenez, is on the contrary, the embodiment of reason, someone who asks the right questions: who is this adorable but crazy person I'm in love with? He is there to make Anaïs face the truth, and I think it is a cathartic for us. He is in a way the audience's voice inside the film: he has an outer perspective on who she is.

As for Balthazar, Anaïs' younger brother played by Xavier Guelfi, he clearly serves as a comical counterpoint: he is as sluggish as Anaïs is highly charged. And dons his pet lemur Gilbert, which I also

thought up to maintain a comic thread throughout the film.

Finally there is Yoann, the handyman marvelously played by Jean-Charles Clichet. It is perhaps in the confrontation between Anaïs and Yoann that we get closest to Rappeneau and his film *Le Sauvage* that I mentioned earlier.

Your film unabashedly mixes levity and seriousness.

Yes, it was my deepest wish, from the beginning. I wanted different registers to coexist in the film: comical, tongue-in-cheek humor and literal feelings and emotions (whether it be her love for Emilie or the painful reality of her mother's illness). These tones are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary, life constantly mixes everything, and I love films that resemble life, that recreate life's complexity.

It is also that I abhor pathos, so I make sure to defuse "heavily loaded" emotions by moving on quickly to something else.

More than anything else, *Anaïs in Love* is about a passionate love story that is going to link a young woman to a mature woman.

Yes, but I didn't want to make a "niche" film. My movie isn't about a young woman's discovery of her homosexuality. Even if this new desire troubles Anaïs, she never questions her sexual orientation. And it is important to me that this shouldn't be an issue here, in a time period when people are finally allowing themselves to love differently. It is purely a matter of desire which shatters all boundaries meaning social codes, genres assigned by society and age differences. Anaïs and Emilie's story is the narrative of an extremely powerful encounter between two subjectivities. A story of love and desire that also encompasses the mind and intelligence.

The last line of the film is very beautiful: "I disagree."
She disagrees with what?

With everything! Living is a problem; the world is a problem... But if you want me to give you one specific answer, I would say that I do not agree with giving into fear and resignation. I agree entirely with Anaïs (and Annie Ernaux): Giving up on a passion is criminal, it's an insult to life.

Interview by Gérard Lefort in May 2021.





INTERVIEW WITH ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER

In 2008, you were already in a short film by Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet, *Pauline Enslaved*. Is *Anaïs in Love* its continuation?

The link between the films is a love of cinema, the desire to pursue a working relationship with Charline after working together on her short film and in particular, how the character has evolved from the short film to the feature film, which is fascinating for an actress. From Pauline to Anaïs is indeed a continuation, but in the musical sense of the term. We have taken the same themes, but they are interpreted in a different fashion. Naturally, Pauline and Anaïs are very close. Girls who speak with a machine-gun delivery, overwhelmed by their feelings and insufferable at times. But above all else, what links Pauline to Anaïs is their free-spirited nature, singularity, taking full responsibility for their choices

and acting in consequence. It was important to me that Anaïs keep the comic side of her personality that she had in the short film and Charline was open to speaking about it during the writing stage.

Was the fact that the character has your first name a handicap or was it helpful instead?

It was a little weird, and at times I was surprised to hear my first name being pronounced... but some of the dialogue touched me even more directly and felt spot on. This confusion between the two identities ended up being more of an advantage for playing the character than a disadvantage. Anaïs is a young woman who at once carefully thinks things through, but also suffers from an absolute loss of control, completely shaken up by an overwhelming desire.

Are you familiar with these ambivalent feelings?

I do feel very close to her. In my own life I have her zestfulness. I'll grant you that for my loved ones, it can at times be disconcerting and even exhausting. Anaïs has a right-in-your face bulldozer side to her. She can be uncompromising with her grand ambitions, her aspiring to absolutes, she truly believes that everything is possible.

And among all these possibilities that life has to offer, there's Emilie, a mature woman...

Anaïs isn't at the least concerned by her burgeoning attraction to a woman. She is sensitive and free, highly receptive to all forms of sensuality, from wherever it may come. In fact, she's a bit excited by this transgression that an affair with a woman could bring about. I'm glad that the film treats the character's sexuality as a non-issue.

Emilie is played by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi and by her side, her husband, Daniel, is played by Denis Podalydès. Were you impressed or intimidated to play opposite two such famous actors?

Not intimidated. Not at all. The relationship I have with my partners never goes into those waters. I so much enjoyed acting with them because they are people I greatly admire, and just like when you are playing tennis, it is easier to be a good player when you are faced with a good player. Valeria is a fascinating actress because she is often fragile, not technical whatsoever and extremely generous. As a person, she is an incredible woman, and it was fortunate and significant for the movie that we had such a beautiful understanding between us. I trusted her wholeheartedly and I think the feeling was mutual. And I haven't even mentioned her sense of humor and her open-mindedness. With Denis also, it was perfect all of the time. His acting is incredibly subtle. He's an actor who pays great attention to detail and is extremely intelligent. It's fascinating to watch him work. Working

with Valeria and Denis is like a bright sunny day.

Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet is very precise and demanding in reference to her instructions for how the actors are to place themselves in the space and the choreography of how they move.

Indeed – down to the nearest inch. But I tend to work well under constraints like these, I like it as much as the long monologues that Charline wrote, and I tremendously enjoyed memorizing them. Charline is a director who is also a writer. What is most difficult for me is to exist in a frame that is at times very tight. But the paradox is that this framing is conducive to letting go and creating surprises as well. In Charline's directing and the way she frames scenes, I had to find the character's spark of crazy and make her come to life. Anaïs tries to understand and theorize everything she can about life events and above all she is aware that sometimes things don't make sense and evade her.

How would you summarize Anaïs?

By the fact that she is precisely someone who can't be summed up. That is what I like about her character and Emilie's. Their complexity. They are two adventurers who embrace uniqueness. *Anaïs in Love* is a simple story about learning and transmission. Emilie, a model of charisma and authority transmits to Anaïs that feelings and sensuality aren't handicaps. You have to try and do something with those things. And on her side, Anaïs teaches Emilie one should never fear desire, despite how inconveniencing it may be.

Interview by Gérard Lefort in May 2021.



About Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet

After having studied literature and theater, Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet worked for a while in publishing. In 2016 she directed her first self-produced short film. In 2018, she garnered positive attention for her second short film, *Pauline Enslaved*, chosen for the Semaine de la Critique section of the Cannes Film Festival and

then at the Clermont-Ferrand Festival where it received a Special Jury prize and the Telerama magazine press award. This same film was also pre-selected for the 2020 César awards and won a number of prizes in international festivals. *Anaïs in Love* is her first feature-length film.

CAST

Anaïs **Anaïs Demoustier**
Emilie **Valeria Bruni Tedeschi**
Daniel **Denis Podalydès, member of the Comédie-Française**
Yoann **Jean-Charles Clichet**
Balthazar **Xavier Guelfi**
Raoul **Christophe Montenez, from the Comédie-Française**

With the participation of **Anne Canovas** and **Bruno Todeschini**

CREW

Director and Screenwriter
Director of Photography
Editor
Sound
1st Assistant Director
Production Designer
Costumes
Script
Production Manager
Sound Design
Mix
Music

Producers

Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet
Noé Bach
Chantal Hymans
Mathieu Villien
Marie Willaume
Pascale Consigny
Léa Forest
Caroline Steff
Kim Nguyen
François Méreu
Vincent Verdoux
Nicola Piovani

David Thion - Stéphane Demoustier
Philippe Martin - Igor Auzépy

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