

Synopsis

France, 1865... a young vagabond, Timothée, arrives in a village. He is given food and lodging by Doctor Hughes, who lives with his daughter Joséphine. During dinner, Timothée expresses himself via gestures and strangely foreboding words which he writes on a piece of paper. Joséphine is immediately struck by his presence. The next day, he leaves the village and returns only once Joséphine is alone. He puts her into a state of lethargy and rapes her. When he leaves, Joséphine runs after him, leaving home and father, driven by an uncontrollable force. Distraught, she follows this young man for whom she seems to feel only fear and disgust. Yet, their pilgrimage will reveal another truth...

Cast

Joséphine	Isild Le Besco
Timothée	Nahuel Perez Biscayart
Captain Langlois	Jérôme Kircher
Paul	Mathieu Simonet
Doctor Hughes	Bernard Rouquette

Credits

Director	Benoit Jacquot
Screenplay & dialogues	Benoit Jacquot Julien Boivent

Editor	Luc Barnier
Image	Julien Hirsch
Sound	Henri Maikoff Francois Musy Gabriel Hafner

Set designer	Sylvain Chauvelot
Costumes	Christian Gasc
Music	Bruno Coulais
Production Manager	Marie-Jeanne Pascal
Producers	Philippe Carcassonne Matthieu Tarot Jens Meurer

A French/German
co-production
Associate Producer
In co-production with
With the support of

Ciné@ / Passionfilms /
Egoli Tossell Film
ALBERTINE Productions
ARTE France Cinéma
la Région Rhône-Alpes /
Ministère de la Culture
et de la Communication
(Centre National du Cinéma
et de l'Image Animée) /
Filmförderungsanstalt /
CANAL + / CINECINEMA
Cofinova 6

In association with

France/Germany 2010 - Length: 102'

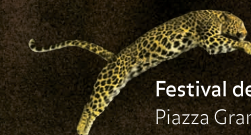
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Festival del film Locarno
Piazza Grande

DEEP IN THE WOODS

A film by Benoit Jacquot



Interview with Benoit Jacquot

Deep in the woods is your 19th feature film – where did you find the idea?

I came across a newspaper article written by the law historian, Marcela Iacub, whose work has always interested me. In her articles, she writes about judiciary court cases from the more or less distant. The historical news items she chooses always have a singular, partially novel-like quality to them. But in the specific example that inspired the film, which is the Timothée Castellan case, I immediately had the idea, in its quasi-totality, for a possible film.

Did you remain close to the actual facts of what occurred in 1865 or did you take liberties with the story?

At first with Julien Boivent, co-writer the screenplay, we wrote a treatment without looking at the extensive archives that Marcela Iacub had given me concerning the actual case. Then, using the archives as a base, we used our imagination to flesh out and develop the story in particular, more so than its basic elements: for example, we entirely imagined Joséphine and Timothée's daily life; the type of dialogue they may have exchanged, Timothée's native lan-

guage, of which we know almost nothing. We also added important elements like the fact that Joséphine ends up with a child at the end of the story...

In your eyes, what is the film's story?

It's the story of a young upper middle-class girl who lives with her father, the local doctor, and who is apparently led astray, kidnapped and raped by a vagabond who has decided to make her his. She follows him deep into the woods during a period of several days, and in my eyes, the question raised by the film is simply to know whether she has gone of her own will or by force. In the film, the notions of free will and acting against one's free will are intimately mixed, woven and tangled together. These notions are depicted as ambivalently as possible in a manner that to my thinking, had to be vertiginous.

How did you choose the actors who played the two leading roles, both of which are particularly difficult?

When I read about this affair, I instantly linked the character of Joséphine to Isild Le Besco, with whom I had already

worked on 4 films (Sade, Princess Marie, Right now and The Untouchable); for Isild, as a person and as an actress, has a lot in common with Joséphine. As a result, we very quickly drafted the role with her in mind. Her temperament and her way of acting nourished the character we were writing. For the masculine role, after having considered several more or less well-known French actors (who in reality were very disconcerted by this radical role that would evidently put their image to the test), the idea came to search for a foreign actor and in particular one who spoke a Romance language as the film takes place in the south of France. I then thought about this young Argentinean actor I saw in Pablo Fendrik's film La Sangre Brota (Blood Appears) which received the public choice award at the Cannes Semaine de la Critique 2 years ago. What I liked about Nahuel Perez Biscayart (he was turning another film for which he had a cherub's face, the opposite extreme of the Timothée character), is that he was willing to delve into Deep in the woods like the foreigner who is the main character.



What is the strange language that Timothée speaks in the film?

It's a mix of Provençal, of Languedoc dialect, Spanish and Italian: a Southern language where French appears from time to time to make the language sound to the French audience like something familiar, audible, that they could make out, but at the same time be something foreign, elusive, indiscernible that comes from the beginning of time.

As in Villa Amalia, nature plays a very important role in the film. Where exactly did you shoot the film? What types of spaces and scenery did you seek out and why?

I was hoping to find a location that was as large and well-preserved as possible, an area that was partly forest as for me this person was literally a man from the woods. Beyond these large, seemingly never-ending open spaces, I above all wanted a landscape that was never flat, in short, that the characters should be confronted with a geography that was endlessly rising and falling, that their path should always be steep, and that the idea of rising and falling should always be present like a leitmotiv. Thus

for both contextual and production oriented reasons we mainly shot the film in Ardèche.

We are aware of your attachment to characters that are vagrants, thieves or outlaws as expressed through your love for certain films and certain of your own films. How does Timothée's animal-like character resemble your own?

When I direct, not only do I need to feel an affinity with the characters, but I must also at a given moment and almost in turn, fully identify with each one of them; I have to be them, no matter whether they're male or female! I feel quite close to both Timothée and Joséphine, for in my mind, they constitute a double faced beast or a two headed beast with which I perfectly identify. They end up achieving a strange level of oneness, a bonding, that is for me – and this, I admit, may be surprising when you have seen the film – a veritable ideal, and possibly, love itself.

Why does hypnosis play such an important role here, just as it did by the way, in Seventh Heaven?

Even if I'm reticent, resistant to and unsuited for all types of hypnoses, I'm very interested in it and have been for a

quite a while, long before I started making movies, having attended a number of very impressive sessions. It is undoubtedly no coincidence that I am so fond of Hollywood films from a specific period where hypnosis was very present (from Lang to Hitchcock to Preminger...). Also 20 years after the events depicted in the film, towards the end of the 19th century, just before psychoanalysis was truly established and started to have a social impact (Freud having practiced hypnosis a lot), hypnosis was a cause for commotion in both the legal and medical worlds and we have no idea to what extent! Two schools of thought were in direct opposition: Bernheim's Nancy school, which held that suggestion is inherent to the human psyche, and Charcot's Paris school, which held that suggestion could only work on pathological subjects. Freud never really made clear where he stood on the question, and today we still don't know what hypnosis can truly achieve. In the film Joséphine is someone who, from the beginning, was inclined to vertigo and sleepwalking, and that she would undoubtedly be someone who is receptive to hypnotic suggestion.

Whether we are talking about hypnosis or cinema (which may also be a type of hypnosis?), isn't it essentially, from your point of view, simply a matter of believe and make believe?

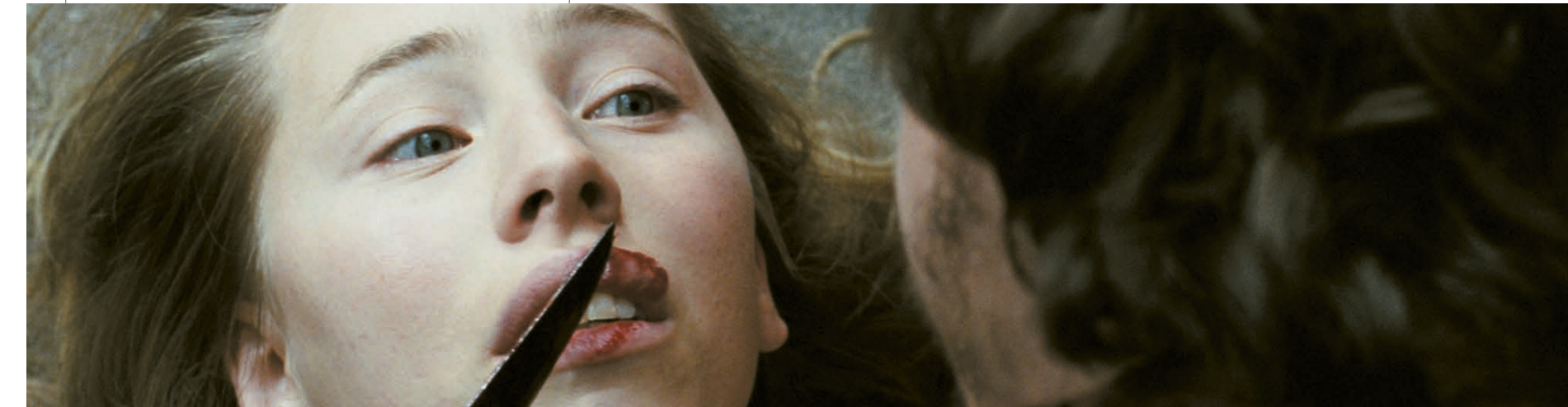
Indeed, at the heart of the film, is what we call belief : the absolute, irrational belief, the unquestioning and paradoxical belief of a young woman who frenziedly follows in a type of trance someone who is meant for everything except her. At a given moment, she comes up against someone on her life's path - this young man, who forces her to take a step aside instead of continuing on her way. This boy is going to fundamentally change her life. There are in reality two meaningful aspects to take into account: belief in the bond of love on one side, which is to believe the person who says "I love you," this belief is fundamental, it is the source of romantic love, of all its joys and tragedies, for it is never certain; and then on the other side, there is the belief of the audience in reference to what we are showing them, which in cinema is the most defining belief, for it is impossible to watch a film without believing!

So you believe that love and cinema have the same foundation, which is belief?

Exactly, and the movie is playing specifically with that concept: it folds and unfolds entirely around this idea. Shooting the film, which is for me the most important moment for it is the instant when the images are captured, must also be the moment when the filmmaker has to believe in what he is doing, the moment when the actors must believe it themselves, and, to transmit that belief and make others believe, they have to be in state that is more or less hypnotic or one of sleepwalking. The physical dedication of the entire team, which moreover I had never experienced to this extent, participates in making this wish real, to fully believe in the fiction.

Doesn't the film's strangeness come from the definition it gives of a love void of amorous feelings, and which is similar to Lacan's famous definition (on whom you made a documentary in 1974): "Love is giving something one doesn't have to someone who doesn't want it?"

Yes, the film is a development of this maxim by Lacan: Timothée gives something he doesn't have (or something he isn't conscious of having) to Joséphine who apparently doesn't want it! The film highlights the fact that love is often, almost always, a matter of bewitching, hypnotizing,



having a hold over someone, and that loving someone means necessarily to haunt that person and to be haunted by that person. Furthermore, the child at the end of the film specifically embodies the definition of this love: one can first ask the question if everything that this girl experienced wasn't experienced precisely to untangle herself from her father's hold on her; but one can also say that she got herself pregnant by someone with whom she can neither intellectually nor socially remain. As a result, denying the child's paternity, she makes herself immaculate; she is now faultless and renders herself - because it happened against her will – acceptable in the face of social law. She is white as snow in the eyes of the law, a virgin. Taking this into consideration, I filmed the scene where she goes to show Timothée the baby like a presentation scene, like the Virgin and child. It could be said that at this very moment Timothée knows, without having to understand, he knows everything.

About this rather eloquent title, Deep in the woods, do you believe, like Bunuel used to say, that "cinema has been invented to express the life of the subconscious?"

As it is for the surrealists, manifestations of the subconscious interest me a great deal; cinema and the subconscious undoubtedly share a natural bond. Yet even if the

7th art and psychoanalysis were born at the same moment, more than anything else they have in common is to have come from so far, from the beginning of time, from cave paintings, and it is this link that arouses my curiosity as a filmmaker. What I am also passionate about, undoubtedly because the spectator is always both alone and with others in a movie theater, is what cinema is able to do, perhaps more than any other art, in a more personal and singular way that is at the same time universal. The more one is truly in tune with oneself, the more the film, when it is successful, speaks to the greater number. In fact, what I'm looking to achieve through cinema is a shared solitude.

*Interview by Xavier Lardoux
author of the book Benoit Jacquot's Cinema.
(Foreword by Isabelle Huppert. Editions PC)*