

THE SOWER

A film by Marine Francen

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France | 2017 | 98' | 1.66 | French

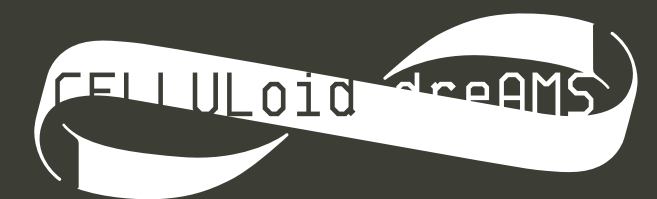
Cast

Violette	Pauline Burlet
Marianne	Géraldine Pailhas
Jean	Alban Lenoir
Rose	Iliana Zabeth
Blanche	Françoise Lebrun
Louise	Raphaëlle Agogué
Jeanne	Barbara Probst
Joséphine	Anamaria Vartolomei
Philomène	Margot Abascal
Elisabeth	Mama Prassinou
Emilie	Sarah Fourage

Crew

Director	Marine Francen
Scriptwriters	Marine Francen, Jacqueline Surchat and Jacques Fieschi
Based on «The Seed Giver»	Violette Ailhaud
Producers	Sylvie Pialat and Benoît Quainon
Cinematographer	Alain Duplantier
Costumes	Pascaline Chavanne and Oriol Nogues
Set design	Mathieu Menut
Editing	Minori Akimoto
Sound	Paul Maernoudt, Benjamin Rosier and Mikaël Barre
Composer	Frédéric Vercheval
Production Manager	Claire Trinquet

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Synopsis

Violette is old enough to marry in 1852 when her mountain village is brutally deprived of all its men following the repression of the Republicans ordered by Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. The women spend months in total isolation. Desperate to one day see their men again, they take an oath: if a man comes, he will be for everyone. Life must continue in the belly of each and every one of them.







WHAT INSPIRED YOUR FILM?

The Sower began when I discovered *The Seed Giver*, a text written by Violette Ailhaud. This school teacher writes her own story in the village she lived where a series of events affected its inhabitants. It's a mysterious short novel and I really fell in love with the book, so I immediately contacted the publisher.

WHAT MOVED YOU ABOUT THE STORY?

I was drawn to the book by its theme as well as its powerful poetic vision. It immediately made me want to come up with a cinematic version. The story is more like a long prose poem than a short story. It works by suggestion. So everything had to be built from the ground up. I felt very free. That's another thing I liked about it.

I felt the text expressed an incredibly realistic and powerful vision of women's desires. Outside of its historical context, it tells a story of what it is to be a woman, once you have removed social references, culture and nationality... once you have stripped away everything that dresses up a woman, in a way!



HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THE STORY'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT?

I didn't make myself stick to absolute historical precision, but I was fascinated by the context. I thought it was very rich - not very well known, but incredibly pertinent today. What Ailhaud is talking about is protecting freedom in all its forms.

That theme goes beyond borders or time periods, and I also wanted to transcribe that contemporary aspect. The story strikes a powerful chord with what's going on today, especially the struggle of ordinary people who are fighting back, endangered because they are defending the values of the French Republic, which were still new at that time. What the women are defending is first and foremost their freedom - to think, exist and stand up for their convictions, which they incarnate with their entire being.

The struggle they lead is an extension of the battle the men led at the time of the government overthrow. But their rebellion is expressed with a kind of primal necessity to love and bear children, in order to continue to believe in the future and hand on their values.

THE LACK OF MEN IS PRIMARILY EXPRESSED WITH REGARDS TO SEXUALITY AND DESIRE.

The men's absence persists, and as the months go by, it troubles the psychological and physical survival of the characters. To fight against death, which looms - most likely the death of their husband or sons, but also the death of their village - the women follow their instincts. Like animals. The force of life takes over. And I think that is the incredible strength of women - to carry that primal instinct that guides our lives so much more than we think. I grew up in the country and I felt comfortable with the women there. I love their modesty, and in certain moments their surprising crudity. In all societies, whether occidental or oriental, I think women have a freedom of expression amongst themselves that is much greater than men. I wanted the film to reflect that.

I wanted the script to be full of suspense, from beginning to end. Tense because of the missing men, fear and the unknown. For the tension to play out through the expression in their eyes, their bodies bursting with desire. My motivation to make films springs from wanting to find a way to express sensations without words. That's why I was interested in this story. What those women experience is very physical. What is going on in the body, when it can sometimes surpass what you think you understand in your head?





YOU FILM A TRANSGRESSIVE SITUATION, BUT IT IS NEVER PROVOCATIVE.

I wanted to feel the tension, lack and desire, but I didn't want the cliché of women "cat fighting" over a man. Sexual need and desire can be very powerful, but that's not dirty or negative, it's just an urge of life. The challenge was to show what you can feel in a situation like that, without adding any moral judgement.

Beyond the strangeness and transgressive side of that pact, all the women manage to find their place in it because they respect the other women's rights to have their sexual needs. And for some, to be mothers. I wanted to express these different levels of understanding and acceptance of that new way of living. The scene where they all advance together with their sheep, and Jean in the middle, is emblematic of that life of possibility that they have succeeded in building, despite a situation that may seem completely unlivable.

They prove that it can work. Maybe not for years, but in a moment of survival, yes. A lot of taboos can be overlooked when they are part of a larger dynamic of necessity.

THE BURGEONING LOVE VIOLETTE FEELS FOR JEAN PUTS HER IN A NEW DILEMMA BETWEEN BEING FAITHFUL TO HER FEELINGS, OR TO THE PACT SHE HAS WITH THE OTHER WOMEN.

Those feelings of love that arise are precisely what is beautiful about this story. Violette made a pact with the other women; she understands their needs. But having to share Jean becomes incredibly torturous. Despite their jealousy, the other women respect their love relationship. I also think it's magnificent that these women, who slept with that stranger, are still every bit as in love with their husbands when they return. Just because they had needs and felt despair doesn't mean they don't love their husbands anymore.

WE KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT JEAN.

I insisted on preserving an aspect of fantasy in his character - so that we never really know who he is. Those women dream him up, and then the moment comes when the dream becomes reality. Jean appears. That confrontation with reality is necessarily more complex than they imagined. What did he really do? Why is he there? Why does he stay? Because he really wants to, or because he is hiding? Is he a creep? I thought it was good to leave that unclear - all the while showing that he, too, finds love without expecting it. And contrary to the cliché of a man dizzy with delight in the middle of all those women, it's really not easy for him, either. As a matter of fact, Alban Lenoir experienced that himself when we were filming.

VIOLETTE AND JEAN BOTH LOVE TO READ. THAT WAS A CRUCIAL POINT OF CONTACT BETWEEN THEM.

Beyond their purely physical attraction, they do in fact share their unique sensitivities. Books and reading are also what set Violette apart from the rest of the village and allow her to develop a special bond with Jean. Reading plays a double role: it is a vehicle for the socio-political cause of handing down knowledge to the children, as well as a catalyst for love.





HOW DID YOU ENVISION THE CINEMATOGRAPHY?

I wanted the cinematography to be beautiful and powerful, but not picture-postcard perfect. The choice of using a hand-held camera close to the actors and 4:3 format helped me avoid certain traps. I was obsessed by the idea of always going beyond illustration and staying on what the women feel, on the inside. Filming a group when you have very little time to get the shots is also a challenge that makes you question yourself. The work of Artavazd Peleshian, especially on "Four Seasons" really helped me express the moods I was looking for. The strength and power of the narration in those images was the through-line that guided my writing. I asked the whole crew to watch his films. I, too, wanted to express what was essential to the characters, simply by putting them in situations: how they live, how their desire emerges out of isolation and need, how they feel about a male presence coming into their lives.

HOW DID YOU PUT TOGETHER THAT GROUP OF WOMEN?

Above all, I was looking for actresses who would be believable as women from a rural area. I also wanted physical diversity - not stereotypes out of magazines.

In parallel to *Violette*, the group had to express different facets of femininity. Each one of them experiences need in her own way, according to her desire, age, and what it means to her as a stage in her life. How does physical need show up for a woman who is already married, with children? Or for a young, inexperienced woman who has a strong desire to discover sex? And after that physical discovery, how can feelings that she never even expected begin to emerge?

My casting director thought, and rightly so, that since I had to put together a group, it was useless to meet actresses individually. So we cast them by groups, which we refined, little by little, mixing them together. After that, I worked with the actresses on the living conditions of these women, so that they could feel them in their bodies. The costumes helped, especially wearing corsets and the fact that some of them wore real historical pieces, so they could really feel the physical limitations as well as prepare for working the land. All the actresses learned how to use the tools; none of them had doubles on the shoot. They were fully experiencing the living conditions of their characters!

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE PAULINE BURLET TO PLAY VIOLETTE?

When I write, I don't let myself think about casting. I prefer the character to impose itself on me, instead of casting someone who will determine the character. When the writing was done, I started getting obsessed by the question, of course. But I couldn't see Violette being played by the actresses in the age range I knew.

A Belgian director who is a friend of mine told me about Pauline. She came to Paris, and for me, the choice was obvious. Like love at first sight. I hadn't even started casting. We were just putting together the financing. I couldn't promise her anything.

She took part in different group casting sessions. She was willing to play any role. Actually, she was a little apprehensive about playing Violette. But I didn't hesitate a bit.

For the role of Rose, I used Pauline as a starting point, because I wanted the two young women to be different and complementary. I chose Iliana Zabeth pretty quickly, and I love what she brings to the character. When it came to casting the mothers, I didn't think in terms of physical resemblance to their daughters. I chose actresses who, above all, embodied the power of those women.





LIKE GÉRALDINE PAILHAS.

Géraldine is one of those actresses who has a realist and sincere vision of femininity, who lives with who she is, at the age she is at. Géraldine was very enthusiastic about the project. She really got into the group dynamic. And even though it wasn't the main priority, there was something in her personality and physical appearance that made her work really well as Pauline's mother.

As for Françoise Lebrun, she had exactly what I wanted to express: tenacity and mystery. That magnificent face, that powerful yet gentle presence. Her character has authority over the others; she has natural powers, gifts for healing and understanding what is going on in the bodies of the young ladies, which their mothers refuse to see.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHOICE OF ALBAN LENOIR FOR THE ROLE OF JEAN?

I was looking for a 35-to-45-year-old actor with a strong presence, who could be intriguing. Alban is above all a physical person. He is handsome, but not too handsome, with a powerful presence. And his acting was spot on.

I wanted to go with him because I could feel he was really dedicated. I needed that commitment even more given that it was an ensemble film, which can create tension between actors who are sometimes difficult to deal with.

JEAN WRITES TO VIOLETTE: "TELL THIS CHILD THAT HE WAS BORN OF THE LOVE OF A FREE MAN AND WOMAN."

That letter isn't in the book, but it condenses what is at stake in this story: the women have started a rebellion to defend their freedom. And Jean participates in that rebellion by accepting their pact. Through those words, Violette understands Jean's freedom and takes on her own. She is responsible for her land, her mother, the kids who she has to teach to read, and the group of women bonded by that pact. She is a free woman, autonomous and modern.

Marine Francen

Biography

Marine Francen grew up in the countryside and moved to Paris to study literature and history. She first discovered the film industry with a job in production (company of J. Ivory and I. Merchant MIP) and then worked as a director assistant from 1999 to 2012. Marine Francen was mainly involved on long features (M. Haneke, O. Assayas, R. Berry, T. Marshall, J-F Richet, G. Le Bomin, M. Leclerc), while writing and directing 4 short features : a documentary and 3 fictions. She also made a photography coverage about Shanghai published in renown French magazine *Telerama* in 2005.

Filmography

2011 *In my eyes* – Mini-series of short documentaries

Histoire de Pierre et Pierrot – Scriptwriter with O. Cena of feature film

2009 *Les Voisins* - 20min, 35mm, starring Marie Kremer, S. Kechiouche

2006 *Ad « Axe »* - 35mm

2005 *Photo-reportage on Shanghai* - For *Télérama*

2001 *L'Accordéoniste* - 13min, 35mm, starring Denis Lavant

2000 *Céleste* - Documentary, 14min, video, autoproduced

1999 *D'une rive l'autre* - Fiction, 12min, video, autoproduced





Cast

Pauline Burlet – Violette

2016 *Jailbirds* by Audrey Estrougo
2014 *The Connection* French by Cédric Jiménez
2013 *The Past* by Asghar Farhadi
2012 *Dead Man Talking* by Patrick Ridremont
2007 *La Vie en Rose* by Olivier Dahan

Iliana Zabeth – Rose

2016 *Mercenary* by Sacha Wolff
2015 *Les Cowboys* by Thomas Bidegain
2014 *Fort Buchanan* by Benjamin Crotty
2014 *Saint Laurent* by Bertrand Bonello
2012 *Young & Beautiful* by François Ozon
2011 *House of Tolerance* by Bertrand Bonello

Anamaria Vartolomei – Joséphine

2016 *The Ideal* by Frédéric Beigbeder
2014 *Jacky in the Kingdom of Women*
by Riad Sattouf
2011 *My Little Princess* by Eva Ionesco

Alban Lenoir – Jean

2015 *French Blood* by Diastème
2014 *The Sweeney: Paris* by B. Rocher
2013 *Goal of the Dead* by B. Rocher
and T. Poiraud
2013 *Les Gamins* by A. Marciano

Raphaëlle Agogué – Louise

2014 *Summer in Provence* by Rose Bosch
2013 *The Informant* by Julien Leclercq
2012 *Le Chef* by Daniel Cohen
Blind Man by Xavier Palud
La banda Picasso by Fernando Colomo
2010 *La Rafle* by Rose Bosch
2008 *Modern Love* by Stéphane Kazandjian



Les Films du Worso

Production

Feature Films

2017 *The Guardians* by Xavier Beauvois

2017 *The Sower* by Marine Francen

2016 *Staying Vertical* by Alain Guiraudie

2016 *After Love* by Joachim Lafosse

2016 *The End* by Guillaume Nicloux

2016 *Evolution* by Lucile Hadzihalilovic

2016 *The Treasure* by Corneliu Porumboiu

2016 *The White Knights* by Joachim Lafosse

2015 *Rabin, the Last Day* by Amos Gitai

2015 *Valley of Love* by Guillaume Nicloux

2015 *Jauja* by Lisandro Alonso

2014 *The Kidnapping of Michel Houellebecq*

by Guillaume Nicloux

2014 *Timbuktu* by Abderrahmane Sissako

2013 *Stranger by the Lake* by Alain Guiraudie

2013 *The Nun* by Guillaume Nicloux

2012 *Our Children* by Joachim Lafosse

2012 *Maman* by Alexandra Leclère

2011 *Last Screening* by Laurent Achard

2011 *Forbidden House* by Hélène Angel

2009 *The King of Escape* by Alain Guiraudie

2008 *Bouquet final* by Michel Delgado

2008 *Cortex* by Nicolas Boukhrief

2007 *Nuage* by Sébastien Betbeder

2006 *Blame it on Fidel* by Julie Gavras

2006 *Murderers* by Patrick Grandperret