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FESTIVAL DE CANNES
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UN CERTAIN REGARD

Vincent Perez

Jérémie Renier

Tomorrow at Dawn

A film by Denis Dercourt



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Tomorrow at Dawn (Demain dès l'aube)

A film by Denis Dercourt

starring Vincent Perez - Jérémie Renier

2009 – 100 min – 35mm – 1.66 – Dolby SRD-DTS

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Synopsis

The relationship between two brothers, the youngest of whom has such a passion for historical battles that he is cut off from reality, only existing through role playing games.

Upon their mother's request, Mathieu, the eldest tries to help his younger brother Paul overcome his addiction to this mysterious, secret world where the lines between reality and role playing are blurred.

To help his brother, Mathieu has no other choice but to become part of this world himself...

Interview with Denis Dercourt

How did you find out about the world of role playing games described in *Tomorrow at Dawn*?

Eight years ago, I discovered in a newspaper article the existence of people who, every weekend, dress themselves in costume and recreate as faithfully as possible certain historical periods. The Napoleonic era is the one that is most often recreated. It's a rather secret phenomenon, yet it exists pretty much everywhere in the world. This milieu isn't that foreign to me as I am a baroque musician by training, which is also a universe where many elements from the period when the music was played have to be reconstituted. Thus, much in the way baroque musicians use antique instruments, participants in role playing games develop a very specific knowledge of Napoleonic times, unearthing the language, costumes, weapons, and battles among other things.

During the last eight years you've made other films...

It took time for me to determine how I could extract something interesting and film-worthy from this world that is admittedly fascinating, but involves people who are wholly turned towards the past, at times bordering on schizophrenia: it is impossible to find out what players do in their everyday lives. The mania for historical detail (these people have generally done a great deal of research and are very well informed) is coupled with a form of imperviousness to others – when they are no longer Hussars no one should know their identity. Yet, this passion often engulfs their whole existence: the apartments of people we visited in order to borrow accessories or costumes were almost museum-like, as if invaded by the Napoleonic world. All of this fascinated me and at a certain stage, after having abandoned and then taken up the project again several times, I understood that the strangeness of this phenomenon was just right for the mechanics of a thriller and the tension of a genre film.

Did you mix with these people?

I often went to see reenactments of battles and their encampments, to observe how all of this works. But I never took the step of getting into costume myself. Moreover, it was a very difficult thing to put across in the narration, the moment when Mathieu slips on his uniform and passes from one world to the other. His reasons for doing it are complex, and may have something to do with the hypnotic dimension of the mask and the costume. It's a moment of oscillation, a shifting, practically a brief lapse of sanity, which in its way involves the notions of what is real and what is virtual.

How did you structure this material to weave it into the mechanics of a genre movie?

As much as it is a thriller, I wanted my narrative to have the atmosphere of a fairy tale, even if it becomes nightmarish. It shouldn't be forgotten that this entire universe is based on a game. And so there is something fundamentally childish about it, this wanting to play at being somebody else. When you ask people what pushes them to blur their identity in order to cast themselves as such into Hussars, you are dealing with vestiges of childhood, repressed but very much there, deep inside. It is expressed here through an inclination that I believe to be the very base of filmmaking, a taste for disguise.

It's a more underlying theme, but we can also see in the film a vague analysis of psychological mechanisms upon which the sectarian machine lies.

Yes. The paranoid dimension of secret societies can also be found in the film. It seems to me that this is particularly resonant in the scene where Mathieu bumps into Rogart at the hospital. He is a surgeon-major in the army, but a simple nurse's aide in real life. He replies to Mathieu: "*Nobody must know we are the Emperor's soldiers.*" He looks around himself with suspicion, and utters this outrageous sentence, while the scene takes place far from the battlefield

reenactment, in a modern hospital. We can clearly see the hierarchy he has established between his two lives: his real life doesn't carry a lot of weight next to his dream life...

As a counterpoint to this dimension in your film, there is a family story.

As the film is about a very strange world, there had to be an easy way to identify with the character we are following in response, a character we can become attached to and identify with, and a family story with simple dramatic mechanisms. The story of the relationship between the two brothers constitutes an elaborate situation that is also common enough for everyone to find something of themselves. Besides, there had to be triggers: the trouble in Mathieu's couple and the mother's illness played this role. All of it makes up a story that I wanted to be simple, practically ordinary, so that everyone could identify with it.

What models guided you in writing your film?

Generally I prefer to speak in terms of musical writing. The outline, the writing of this film has a lot to do with musical composition: it was a matter of alternating tense and relaxed phases over a framework that overall is rather linear, a story that could be carried by a score. I thought a great deal about Ravel when writing, and his hodgepodge of watchmaking mechanics and flavors of childhood, that seep through very simply with a great deal of obviousness. The plot of *Tomorrow at Dawn* is composed around a few salient dramatic touches that are practically immutable, while between these supporting points, I played with the gaps and breaks, narrative spaces that call for the viewer's participation. It is less about understanding the intrigue than getting involved in it.

And from a visual standpoint?

Above all, the film had to be beautiful, in its scenery, lighting, music, bodies and costumes. This aspect governed the entire process of making the film, and in particular my collaboration with Antoine Plateau, the head set designer, and Rémy Chevrin, the head cameraman, and then with Jérôme Lemonnier, who wrote the score. In order to understand something of the fascination and seduction that is at work with Mathieu's character, the film absolutely had to be presented as something very beautiful that powerfully develops, with a certain depth.

Can you speak to us about the actors you chose to interpret the two brothers?

Vincent Perez has several facets that seem very interesting to me. First of all, he is someone who has a complex career path: he is at the same time an actor, director, and photographer. Secondly, and this was very important for the film, Vincent is an actor who is very much identified with period films and period costumes, resulting from films such as *Queen Margot*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, and *The Hunchback*. He no longer has a real desire to interpret this type of role today, and in my film precisely, you can feel his reluctance to put the costume on, to blend in with the time period. It corresponds well with him. Additionally, the fact that he almost hasn't been seen on screen these last few years appealed to me. As the subject is strange, I especially didn't want an actor for the main role who already stars in five films per year. Vincent provided considerable preparation work between training for combat, and practicing the piano, which he had never played before. And in the end, in the film, it is he who performs all of the musical pieces, and of course all of the duels.

Very quickly an excellent relationship developed between Jérémie Rénier and Vincent, so good that during the shooting, I was often tempted to make scenes last longer, just for the pleasure of filming them together. The further we advanced, the further the story constructed itself around the friendly dimension of the fraternal

relationship, and that owing to the beauty of the pair on screen. They are both very physical, very focused, very precise actors who are capable of truly surprising things. In response to everything that Vincent was bringing to the film in terms of presence and restraint, it seemed wise to me to ask Jérémie to work on his role's trajectory in a direction that was practically the opposite, a mixture of fragility and exuberance. His intuition is incredible: as of the first take he was in the role, in the scene. He was completely committed to his character, which was very impressive. And we worked a great deal on the moments when Paul slips on his Hussar costume. Once wearing the uniform, he had to suddenly be radiant, he had to give off a beauty that stayed under wraps, that stayed hidden until that specific moment.

For supporting roles, you opted for actors coming from extremely different backgrounds: Françoise Lebrun, Eustache's and Vecchiali's actress, Anne Marivin, who we discovered in *Welcome to the Sticks*, or an actor with an eclectic career path like Aurélien Recoing.

It's true, and what's more, it called for a type of work that was completely different for each person. Anne, for example, was more accustomed to comedies, and it was the first time she worked in a film of this kind. Like all good comic actresses, her acting is extremely precise. But I also asked her to have an impenetrability that she never needed to have before. She found a way to give the Jeanne character an entirely interior emotion. With Aurélien, for his Captain Déprées character whose reality seems to have entirely tipped over into the game, there was the pleasure of a sort of mixing the acting between that of film and theater. We worked a great deal on references, from *Roi des Aulnes* to *Star Wars* for example. He had to be a sort of Darth Vader, a sort of ogre. With Françoise of course it was an entirely other register. The character that she portrays had to always be very beautiful, very soft. I didn't want this mother to impose anything at all that could be burdensome, and so I asked her to always smile, in a state of motherly affection.

Tomorrow at dawn speaks about masks, disguise, and turns out to be a film that unfolds as if masking something. The first scene leads you to believe it is a period film, then someone speaks about a trip to Japan that doesn't happen. And more generally, the transitional scenes between the two worlds are somewhat disturbing.

This confusion is an aspect of the film that was very important to me and guided me in writing the screenplay. What is also sure is that these characters wear a mask all of the time, and just as in *The Page Turner*, I wanted to play with manipulation, because the film also speaks about that. It brings us back to the opaque structure of these organizations, and their possible sectarian outlook: in theory, players establish an impenetrable dividing line between life and the role playing game. They especially do not want one interfering with the other, but obviously in reality the two sides contaminate one another. And that gives rise to confusion in which the characters stray, and also possibly the viewer.

This film plays with the idea of games...

Furthermore, there was a type of osmosis during the shoot, which turned out to be very amusing for everyone, without a doubt partly because of this fact. In film, we play at being somebody else, interpreting stories. And in making this story of disguise and invented worlds, about lives that one dreams up and invents, I had the impression of returning to the fundamental elements of moviemaking. On the set, there was more than ever the feeling of play, of the pleasure of designing the bivouac scenes, candlelight dinners and the duels. In the end, it has become quite rare to have to direct duel fights. There were three for this film, and it was an immense pleasure for me. I got hooked on the game.

Denis Dercourt

Denis Dercourt was born in Paris in 1964. After obtaining a degree in Philosophy from Paris University and a postgraduate diploma from the Institute of Political Studies (Sciences-Po), he was solo viola with the French Symphony Orchestra from 1988 to 1993.

Since 1993 he has been teaching viola and chamber music at the Strasbourg Region National Conservatory.

Filmography

1998 LES CACHETONNEURS

2000 LISE ET ANDRÉ

2002 MES ENFANTS NE SONT PAS COMME LES AUTRES

2005 UKYIO, MONDE FLOTTANT

2006 LA TOURNEUSE DE PAGES

2009 DEMAIN DÈS L'AUBE

Cast

Mathieu.....Vincent PEREZ
Paul.....Jérémie RENIER
Captain Déprées.....Aurélien RECOING
Jeanne.....Anne MARIVIN
Claire Guibert.....Françoise LEBRUN
Major Rogart.....Gérald LAROCHE
Christelle.....Barbara PROBST

Crew

Directed and written byDenis DERCOURT
Screenplay CollaborationJacques SOTTY
CinematographyRémy CHEVRIN (AFC)
SoundFrançois MAUREL
François FAYARD
Thomas GAUDER
Set designerAntoine PLATTEAU
CostumesPierre-Yves GAYRAUD
Make-UpVéronique DELMESTRE
CastingBrigitte MOIDON (ARDA)
ScriptLouis SÉBASTIEN
EditingYannick KERGOAT
Original ScoreJérôme LEMONNIER
Line ProducerBénédicte MELLAC
Produced byMichel SAINT-JEAN

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