



THE QUEEN OF CLUBS

A FILM BY JÉRÔME BONNELL

WORLD SALES

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France - 2009 - 100 min - Thriller/Drama - 1:85 - Dolby DTS - French

QUEEN OF CLUBS



SYNOPSIS

Aurélien and Argine have never been able to leave each other. Brother and sister, they have always lived together. Aurélien secretly makes ends meet for them by dealing in stolen metal. One night, his accomplice Simon suddenly arrives. With the police on his heels, he demands money and soon becomes threatening. For Aurélien, things soon spiral out of control, forcing him to face his own violence. He lies to his sister, to protect her...



INTERVIEW WITH JÉRÔME BONNELL

La dame de trèfle feels like a film noir at times... A desire or a need to change genres?

Initially, yes. La dame de trèfle was born of a desire to make a crime thriller. A strong desire to tackle a new form and explore unfamiliar terrain. But I soon realized that this initial, playful and rather theoretic aspiration was just an alibi to show a few characters. And I saw that the crime thriller form allowed me to go much further in the exploration of something intimate and personal. That brought out the film's true theme, almost naturally, with its violence, as if I had needed to use this "front" for it to reveal itself to me...

On top of this, there was also the pleasure of writing and shooting a much more narrative film than my previous ones, a desire for events. The thread of my first three films – fragile and deliberately so – was based much more on the bonds between characters than on the forward motion of the action. With La dame de trèfle, I wanted to build up a genuine but very simple plot, marked by constant tension. But, in fact, what mattered to me most was using this as a bare stage where nothing would be tied down or blocked during the writing stage. Above all, I wanted to avoid making the film before shooting it, something that I dread each time. I remain convinced that the most essential things occur at the moment of shooting when the actors are in front of the camera.

Does a filmmaker find pleasure in making his characters do negative things?

I've never asked myself the question in terms of positive/negative because I have always striven – and not just with this film – never to judge a character. I don't believe that is the director's task. I believe that my role is simply to make sure that we are "with" a character. In fact, I think that it can be very healthy and agreeable for the audience to identify with a murderer, with all the pleasure and fear that entails, simply because we are not allowed to have such reactions in real life. The cinema is ideal for that since fiction creates distance. And there are numerous examples of it... In La dame de trèfle, there is of course a novelistic and even an immoral dimension to come to terms with but, above all, I am moved by Aurélien's inner journey. Passing through horror to make the break from oneself. Aurélien is stifling and doesn't understand why. As if his two murders were deliberately dragging him towards his sister in a blind movement of love.



La dame de trèfle is a film on guilt and repression. We can sense the influence of Greek tragedy and mythology on the film.

In the very beginning, I was thinking more of a children's tale. For me, the screenplay was a quirky interpretation of Hansel and Gretel: Argine and Aurélien are alone at home, while their parents are lost in the forest... with Marc Barbé as the ogre! Then, a hint of tragedy slipped in spontaneously, linked to the simplicity of the tale, to the complexity of the bonds, to the "oracle" nature of the story, as a form of coherent destiny. As if Aurélien had searched all his life for a way of leaving his sister and the only way he could do it was by becoming a murderer. I nonetheless wanted this film to be as "unpsychological" as possible. I didn't seek to give real "reasons" for the characters' acts as in a traditional crime thriller. Above all, I didn't want to stress the psychosocial context or reduce the characters to victims of their condition, probably because I was afraid of falling into a slightly dubious form of compassion. For me, the main thing is the bond between brother and sister.

I therefore tried to get as close as possible to the feelings, bodies and breathing. Along with the director of photography, Pascal Lagriffoul, I decided to use longer focal lengths than in the past and more cramped settings. As a result, the close-up imposed itself as a natural distance from the characters, as if the camera were naturally part and parcel of their movements, their lack of breathing space. I rarely draw up a shot breakdown ahead of shooting: I need to see the actors moving around the sets and so be receptive to what comes along. Their freedom and pleasure are precious to me.

The bond between Aurélien and Argine is fairly hazy in the first part of the film, playing on the unease aroused by the "couple".

The ambiguity was already present in the screenplay and, during editing, I even delayed the moment when we discover the family tie. The scene in the bath at the start of the film came much later in the story but, along with Laure Gardette, the editor, I decided to move it to the very beginning of the film. We felt it thus created even more mystery.

There is in fact a brother/sister relationship in each of your films but you examine it in greater detail this time...

The film tells the simple story of a brother and a sister whose fear of the world is so great that they have decided never to leave each other, the best way for both of them, in their own way, to never know another love. Nor to deal with life. So this is the story of a journey towards an inevitable separation. One that is a form of release. In saving her brother, Argine probably saves herself. Deep down, that is what I wanted to relate, beyond their physical closeness. Indeed, that is why the viewpoint changes at the end and the film concludes with Argine, something that I improvised during shooting.

I've always thought of Aurélien as a character who is prevented from fulfilling himself, who clumsily comes up against the virile world in the way you come up against a social world. And that the characters played by Jean-Pierre Darroussin and Marc Barbé would be like a violent mirror image of that society, a mirror that brutally forces him to face his lack of "fulfilment". But the key to all that lies of course with his sister to whom I have given the title role.



The title, *La dame de trèfle*, referring to the tattoo on Argine's hand, is a very light-hearted one for a film noir...

The title may seem light-hearted because it resembles a red herring. However, it has a deep meaning for me because it is like the bond between the past and the future. It has an echo in what Argine says when she talks about her name ("The future's a drag!"). And so, for me, it raises the complex question, present in all my films, of how to make the break with childhood.

While Argine is a very sunny, extrovert and sensual character, Aurélien is very much withdrawn into himself, ruled by refusal and fear. Why this opposition?

This contrast pursues me. I have the impression that it is something that reveals my subconscious vision of women and men. In my films, the men often show more fear and restraint than the women who, more intrepid, are often the driving force behind the story, and of life in general. I cannot analyse this, it's something that escapes me.

With this film, unlike your previous ones, we have the feeling of being almost constantly in half-light.

By definition, half-light naturally stresses what is visible and what is hidden. In a very simple way, it can highlight lies, guilt and secrets. But, beyond that, in this film it above all acts for me as a link to childhood. It accompanies Aurélien's solitude as for a child who cannot sleep, a child who is scared of the dark.

Why do you always set your films in provincial France?

Perhaps because the notion of solitude strikes me more there. A small town is like a family: everyone knows each other but each person is alone...

What made you choose Malik Zidi to play Aurélien?

I thought of Malik on seeing him in Emmanuel Bourdieu's *Les amitiés maléfiques* in which I thought he was incredible. When we met, I think we both felt he was the one for the part. There's a confused blend of childhood and darkness in his face. Just like Florence Loiret Caille, Malik is an actor who constantly holds back powerful emotions. And so a thousand things always occur when he is in front of the camera. We were very close to each other during shooting. This film owes him a great deal, just as it does to Florence. There was intense complicity between the three of us.

This is the third time that you have worked with Florence Loiret Caille...

Keeping her in mind as soon as I set to work helped me to write the character, to break down barriers and to put myself at risk. Florence is an actress whose generosity lifts you higher and gives wings to the whole crew. She dares to try things in an incredibly free manner. Like Malik, she is ruled by her instincts and vitality. She never knows ahead of time what she is going to do before a take. She performs in the present, inventing every second.



You remain loyal to a company of actors. Alongside Florence Loiret Caille, we have Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Nathalie Boutefeu, Marc Citti and Judith Rémy who all appear regularly in your films. Is this a way of reassuring yourself?

On the contrary! Working with the same people and following a common path is everything but comfortable. There is of course huge pleasure in working with each other again but the very fact we know each other so well means we have to go further each time. Personally, I have the impression that this forces us to face ever-higher demands. I love the idea of having offered Jean-Pierre Darroussin a character that is the polar opposite of the one he played in *J'attends quelqu'un*. The role of Simon made both of us very excited because there was something so unfamiliar about it. Moreover, loyalty to actors or the crew, even if it isn't a principle of mine, is something that I find very moving over the years. It's the idea of an exchange that digs deeper each time.

There's Marc Barbé too, a newcomer...

Marc is wonderful as Loïc, Argine's lover. There was a risk of turning him into a caricature or a stereotype but he brought a great deal of nuance and mystery to the character. Moreover, like Nathalie Boutefeu and Jean-Pierre Darroussin, Marc is a director himself. I have often worked – and I love this coincidence – with actors who cross to “the other side”. I have noticed that this always leads to additional pleasure, a secret sharing of the desire for cinema.

People often say that your cinema is melancholy and light. Do you think those adjectives will change when they see this film?

I don't know. I'm wary of adjectives. If there is any kind of break with this film, it's a loyal break. Above all, I hope that I have made a film that resembles me, like each of my first three.

Jérôme Bonnell Filmography

2007 *Waiting for Someone*
2005 *Les Yeux clairs (Berlin - Forum)*
2002 *Le Chignon d'Olga*

CAST

Aurélien
Argine
Simon
Loïc
Vassilissa
Pujol
Marie-Jeanne

Malik Zidi
Florence Loiret Caille
Jean-Pierre Darroussin
Marc Barbé
Nathalie Boutefeu
Marc Citti
Judith Rémy

CREW

Director	Jérôme Bonnell
Screenplay	Jérôme Bonnell
Production	Gloria Films Laurent Lavolé, Isabelle Pragier
Coproduction	Octave Films
Production manager	Cristobal Matheron
1st AD	Simon Rooke
Script Supervisor	Christine Raffa Catonné

Cinematography	Pascal Lagriffoul
Sound	Laurent Benaim
Sets	Marc Flouquet
Costume design	Carole Gérard
Editor	Laure Gardette
Sound mixer	Emmanuelle Crozet

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