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CAST

Birte Schnöink as Henriette Vogel
Christian Friedel as Heinrich von Kleist
Stephan Grossmann as Vogel
Sandra Hüller as Marie
Holger Handtke as Arzt
Barbara Schnitzler as Mother
Alissa Wilms as Dörte
Paraschiva Dragus as Pauline

CREW

Screenplay and Direction **Jessica Hausner**
Director of Photography **Martin Gschlacht**
Production Designer **Katharina Wöppermann**
Costume Designer **Tanja Hausner**
Sound **Uve Haussig**
Editor **Karina Ressler**
Producers **Martin Gschlacht, Antonin Svoboda, Bruno Wagner,
Bady Minck, Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu, Philippe Bober**





THE POIGNANT AMBIGUITIES OF AMOUR FOU (2017)

by Margaret Deriaz

At the heart of *Amour Fou*, the fourth feature by Austrian director Jessica Hausner, lurks a mysterious figure whose surname is never mentioned, though there are numerous unmistakable clues to his historical identity. As portrayed by Christian Friedel (who played the schoolmaster in Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* [*Das weiße Band - Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte*, 2009]), Heinrich von Kleist (1777 – 1811) comes across as somewhat stiff and charmless. One might never suspect that he has long been celebrated as one of Germany's greatest dramatists and short story writers, a brilliant ironist whose sense of the absurd seems startlingly modern, and whose influence extends from Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett to many prominent authors of our day. Indeed, in the German-speaking world, Kleist's renown is such that some critics have struggled to put aside their preconceptions and to accept Hausner's modification of certain biographical facts. It may perhaps be easier for those with little or no knowledge of Kleist to take the film on its own terms. Hausner has, after all, insisted that it's not a biopic, pointing out that what originally interested her was simply the idea of a double suicide motivated by love. Many years before *Amour Fou* finally came to fruition, she considered adapting Igor Bauersima's 2001 radio play *norway.today*, about a couple who meet in an online chat room and agree to jump off a cliff together. She felt, however, that her draft script lacked a certain lightness of touch, and it was by chance, some time later, that she came across a magazine article about the scandalous suicide pact of Kleist and the terminally ill Henriette Vogel, a married woman with a young daughter. The tragic anecdote of how, on 21 November 1811, the 34-year-old writer shot first Henriette, then himself, on the shores of Berlin's Wannsee, has a status in German culture comparable – in terms of English literary history – with the premature deaths of John Keats and Percy Shelley. What tickled Hausner's imagination on this occasion was the “banal, slightly ridiculous” fact that Kleist had previously asked a number of people, including a close male friend and his adored cousin Marie von Kleist, if they would commit suicide with him before finally settling on Henriette.

Amour Fou's first reference to Kleist is as the author of *The Marquise of O...* (*Die Marquise von O*), a bizarre short story about a virtuous young widow who, on falling inexplicably pregnant, advertises for the father of the child to come forward and marry her. First published in 1808, this remains one of Kleist's best-known works and will be familiar to

cinephiles through Éric Rohmer's elegant and intriguing adaptation of 1976. Significantly, some years prior to the writing of his enigmatic short stories, Kleist had been deeply shaken by Immanuel Kant's speculations on the limitation of human knowledge and the fallibility of human perception. What anguished him, as he wrote to his then fiancée, was our inability to determine "whether what we call truth really is truth, or merely seems so to us". *Marquise*, like much of his other work, portrays an unpredictable world full of chance events, in which appearances are deceptive and people's motives inscrutable, frequently even to themselves. This evidently strikes a chord with the Henriette of Hausner's film (a beautifully calibrated performance from Birte Schnöink that gives little away). While agreeing with her husband that "such things rarely occur", she nonetheless declares herself strangely moved by the Marquise's fate.

While *Amour Fou* isn't a Kleist biopic, Hausner's disregard for strict biographical accuracy is anything but wilful or careless. The changes she makes to the historical account of Kleist and Henriette seem to be undertaken in a truly Kleistian spirit, heightening the random, farcical nature of things. A key example is her depiction of the actual suicide, which – according to a report in the *London Times* of 28 December 1811 – was a strangely merry affair for which the couple prepared themselves by "putting up prayers, singing, drinking a number of bottles of wine and rum, and last of all by taking about sixteen cups of coffee".

Hausner, by contrast, portrays the proceedings as solemn, awkward and bungled, showing how the couple's first attempt to carry out their plan is thwarted by the unexpected appearance of Kleist's friend at the inn where they propose to spend their last night on earth. (Their edgy dinner *à trois* recalls the station café scene at the end of *Brief Encounter* [1945] where the lovers' final farewell is interrupted by a chatty acquaintance.) Even their second, ultimately successful attempt is preceded by a terrible misunderstanding which has the two of them suddenly saying the same words but meaning tragically and absurdly different things. To cap it all, when Kleist first puts the gun to his head, it misfires and he is forced to seek another weapon. This might have seemed enough, but Hausner ratchets up the absurdity by having the doctor finally inform Henriette's husband that his wife's terminal diagnosis was all a mistake. While not borne out by historical evidence, this sudden twist of meaningless fate is worthy of Kleist himself and reminiscent of the many cruel surprises by which the characters of his fictions are laid low.

Although, on its release, *Amour Fou* was marketed mischievously and perhaps a little misleadingly as a romantic comedy, anyone hoping for belly laughs could only be disappointed by its droll, dead-pan wit. The film's title is itself a joke of sorts. The French term 'amour fou' usually connotes a blinding mutual passion, both physical and emotional, but such romantic notions are here debunked. As self-centred human beings, trapped

within their own subjectivity, the would-be lovers are easily deluded about their own feelings and those of others. Misconceptions, mishaps and miscommunications ensue, and love is shown to be 'mad' in the most humdrum sense. Hausner herself offers the following insight into the film's dark humour: "You laugh because you suddenly understand what a tiny speck you are in the universe, or how laughable some things are, and significant things suddenly crumble into the banal."

Irony and ambiguity are key qualities, not only of *Amour Fou*, but of Hausner's previous work pre-dating her preoccupation with Kleist. Born and educated in Vienna, she first came to international attention with her debut feature *Lovely Rita* (2001), but it was the award-winning *Lourdes* (2009) which confirmed her reputation as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary European cinema. It's a profoundly unsettling tale, full of odd twists and turns, in which a quadriplegic young woman visits the famous pilgrimage site in the hope of a miracle. As with Kleist's narratives, it's extremely difficult to gauge Hausner's attitude to her subject, the extent of her compassion, mockery or cool detachment.

Henriette, the central character of *Amour Fou*, is likewise shrouded in ambiguity – seemingly straightforward but ultimately hard to fathom. The fact that she can be talked into suicide suggests a certain passivity, as does her seemingly meek contribution to a conversation on social reform: "I am my husband's property and would never dream of demanding my freedom." But maybe the laugh is on those who take this light remark at face value. Might it not be tongue-in-cheek, a sly reminder that women lag far behind men in their enjoyment of freedom? Nor is she utterly deluded by notions of grand passion in that she recognises Kleist's egotism, remarking that she could never live with him as he thinks only of himself. She claims to feel that her fate is directed by an external force, echoing Kleist's sentiment that the world is "like a puppet theatre in which everyone moves to a prescribed choreography". But is she really as constrained as she appears to believe? In the end, whatever her motive may be for doing so, she does defy convention by going off with Kleist. It is difficult to know how we should view her – except, perhaps, as a victim of the 'imperfection inherent in the order of the world', to quote a celebrated phrase from *The Marquise of O...*

In this world of Kleistian uncertainty, the only things we can be sure about are death and taxes, although our thinking about these is also beset by paradox. As is pointed out by Kleist's cousin Marie (a spirited performance from Sandra Hüller, star of the recent hit comedy *Toni Erdmann*, 2016), the idea of dying *with* someone is nonsense: 'in the end, we all have to die alone'. Contradictions also arise from the characters' discussions of freedom, not only in the personal sphere, but in the wider social and political arenas. Threaded through the film is a series of conversations about the proposed Prussian tax

reforms of 1811, a response to the existential crisis faced by the bankrupt Prussian state following its defeat by Napoleon in 1806. The elite company is alarmed by the liberation of the serfs who will henceforth have the 'freedom' to pay taxes – and, even more so, by the suggestion that the aristocracy should no longer be exempt from paying taxes. Will the liberalisation of the social order really lead to more freedom for the poorer Prussians or will they simply be crushed by greater economic burdens while the rich cling on to their privileges? It's ironic that while freedom is hotly debated, even those of a more progressive bent pay no attention to the largely mute servants who stand by like extras, pouring their tea or helping them take off their boots.

Like a series of *tableaux vivants*, the film's beautifully studied images reflect the notion of the world as a puppet theatre in which the dramatis personae act out their pre-ordained roles. The theatrical effect is heightened by Martin Gschlacht's largely static camera and by the brevity of the scenes (often two or three minutes or less) and the clear delineations between them. Alternating between the bourgeois décor of Henriette's house and the more aristocratic salon of Kleist's elderly aunt, the exquisitely arranged, studio-built interiors (production design by Katharina Wöppermann) are like stage settings with backdrops so striking that they almost overshadow the characters. Their geometric construction is emphasised, and the various spaces of the house are glimpsed through a series of receding doorways, recalling the work of artists such as Johannes Vermeer and Pieter de Hooch. This painterly stylisation, along with the use of mirror shots, foregrounds the notion of representation, the sense that what we see is not reality but something reflected and mediated. Indeed, a strong sense of performance pervades the entire film, in which people seem to alternate between being actors and audience. Our first glimpse of Henriette shows her 'backstage', almost comically obscured behind the huge bowl of flowers she is arranging in preparation for a musical soirée at her house, the first in a rather repetitive series of recitals. Not only is the film punctuated by performances in a literal, theatrical sense, but people in their everyday lives, whether dining or conversing, are arranged in self-conscious groupings and poses. Everything is driven by what Hausner calls "the will to represent", an impression reinforced by what might loosely be termed a Brechtian acting style. Hausner, who did 15-20 takes of each scene, instructed her actors to move as if they were pieces in a chess game, and their recitation of the film's highly intricate dialogue, modelled on diaries and letters of the period, is simultaneously believable and artificial.

This puppet-theatre world is at once ravishing to the eye and faintly ludicrous, full of bathetic juxtapositions in which dogs (domestic pets) and music (in mostly amateur performance) play a prominent part. In Kleist's aunt's household, the writer's earnest explanation of his melancholic suffering is incongruously counterpointed by canine frolics, while at the Vogels' residence, their lugubrious hound is conspicuous throughout, ensuring that anything

would-be solemn or sublime is brought down to earth. As for the film's repetitive use of diegetic music: Henriette's uninspired singing to her young daughter's faltering accompaniment contrasts with the accomplishment of the professional musicians seen at the beginning and undercuts any high-flown sentiments expressed in the lyrics (although it's also worth considering the playful humour which may be detected in Mozart's 'Das Veilchen', a setting of Goethe's poem about a poor little violet who so adores a beautiful shepherdess that it is only too happy to die when trampled underfoot by the careless maiden). In this film of multiple perspectives, there are also various characters whose down-to-earth views challenge the more idealistic attitudes of the doomed couple. Henriette's mother, for example, has a no-nonsense put down for every occasion, while Marie von Kleist, who turns down Kleist's proposal that the two of them die together, may agree that life is meaningless and people cruel, but stubbornly refuses to let it get her down.

The more closely one scrutinises *Amour Fou*, the more it seems to elude one's grasp, yielding questions rather than answers. Perhaps its most poignant ambiguity relates to the nature of love, the film's ostensible theme. When first suggesting suicide to Henriette, Kleist argues that she loves nobody and nobody loves her – an idea that she at first rejects but that seems gradually to colour her thinking. Nonetheless, as the film progresses, there are increasing signs of her husband's genuine respect, deep concern and love for her. Sensitively portrayed by Stephan Grossmann, he is a character worth watching, more tolerant and open-minded in his attitudes to society – and women's place in it – than those around him. Then there is Henriette's daughter, for so much of the film like a little marionette. Yet in *Amour Fou*'s closing moments, her solo rendition of an oft-repeated song from Beethoven's 'To the Distant Beloved' no longer seems to express a self-indulgent longing for escape from reality but a child's wistful yearning for the mother she has lost. It's still a performance, of course, but the ultimate irony may not be that of the absurdity of human fate, but of our failure to recognise love in its unromantic, everyday guise. Of this, too, we cannot be certain.

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PREGNANT AIRS AND HISTORY'S HEIRS: AMOUR FOU AND THE MARQUISE OF O

By Michael Pattison

An earlier version of this essay was published by Keyframe in March 2015.

Amour Fou, the fourth feature by Austrian auteur Jessica Hausner, is a Berlin-set account of the platonic relationship between Heinrich von Kleist, the German dramatist, and Henriette Vogel, the wife of a government official, who took their own lives in a suicide pact in November 1811. Kleist was 34, Vogel 31. Retaining what is by now a trademark ambiguity, Hausner plays this curious tale straight, holding its innately tragic qualities at bay in favour of a mystery that, without any easy resolution, must finally become darkly comical. Writing on the film when it was first released in UK cinemas, I noted that of all its clever subtleties, perhaps the most notable was how it unfolds seemingly from the perspective of its male protagonist, when its deeper complexities actually centre around its leading woman.

Such complexities are rooted in the central mystery of the suicide pact. Just how does a man of seemingly unremarkable personality persuade a woman of sane mind to commit suicide with him? What exceptional circumstances—historical, social, political, personal—need to coincide in order for this to happen? As played by Christian Friedel, Kleist in Hausner's film is something of a joke—if an irreconcilably contradictory one. On the one hand he hails from the same aristocratic classes who, in 19th Century Prussia, find themselves dismayed by a number of concomitant tidal waves, as exemplified by an imminent universal tax system, the aftershocks of the French Revolution, the specific emergence of the bourgeoisie and more general advancements in intellectual, philosophical and scientific enquiry.

On the other hand, Kleist is clearly at odds with the status quo that is so desperately hanging onto the property laws of yore. His aunt, on whose financial support he depends, complains that the new tax proposals are “utterly inconvenient” for her (“even we have to pay taxes”); it's to Hausner's credit that the writer's insufferable narcissism is half-accounted for in such scenes. In others, the practicalities of the new economic order are elaborated upon: how did, or indeed does, a nation implement a tax system when the majority of its people (unseen here) are still unregistered with a trade? In addition, we're

told, there are too few officials, the nobility cling to their privileges like a bone, and there's no system by which to measure income and property. In all of this, there is not so much a parallel to present-day Europe as there is the superclass that currently governs it.

The real fools in *Amour Fou* are those attempting to debunk calls for social change by claiming that the established socioeconomic order is the result of natural laws—that it is somehow removed and immune from the hazards and contingencies of an artificial (actively produced) marketplace. The film's title, now in common parlance in languages other than French, primes this subtext: by the beginning of the 19th Century, ripples from the French Revolution were beginning to infiltrate and challenge long-standing empires. It's no coincidence that in their *Communist Manifesto*, written some 37 years after the events in Hausner's film took place, Marx and Engels were able to observe a spectre already haunting Europe. Such reminders, that older elites were demonstrably fallible before they themselves realised it, are never unwelcome; even the Vogels' ubiquitous Weimaraner, a mascot for aristocratic Germany if ever there was one, appears to be sadder than everyone else around it. The very air is pregnant with the anticipations of history.

These shifts find their dormant spokesperson in Henriette, who spends much of the film having to listen to others—all men—discuss things deemed to be above her station if not beyond her understanding, including the apparently untreatable abdominal tumour with which she herself has been diagnosed. As the film progresses, though, Henriette grows in confidence, and Birte Schnöink is exemplary in conveying the character's unacknowledged precocity in early scenes and her moments of doubt regarding Kleist in later ones. Indeed, just as Kleist might be a suitable stand-in for Romanticism—at once dispirited by, responding to and bound up with the limitations of his class—Henriette's strengths are all the deeper for being so contained, so quiet, so *in-the-making*. This is precisely why in Hausner's film the final interpretation of the duo's shared fate has less to do with mutual consent as it does the selfish and insidious imposition of male-on-female violence.

Such thematic threads chime well with Éric Rohmer's *The Marquise of O* (available as part of Arrow's The Éric Rohmer Collection), which won the Grand Prix in Cannes after receiving its premiere there in 1976. In addition to being adapted from Kleist's own novella, first published in 1808 (*Amour Fou's* story begins in 1809), there are startling affinities between this film and Hausner's. Like the more recent work, *Marquise* centres around a female protagonist—Juliette (Edith Clever), the virtuous widow of the title—who nevertheless spends large portions of the film listening to, admired by, intruded upon, spoken about and castigated by others.

Set in 1799 Italy during Europe's Second Coalition War against revolutionary France (in which a teenage Kleist had participated as a Prussian officer), its story opens with Russian forces blockading the citadel overseen by the Marquise's father. About to be raped, the Marquise is saved by Count F. (Bruno Ganz), a Russian officer who thereafter maintains an intensely devout love for her, proposing marriage even when the Marquise discovers, much to her family's horror, that she is pregnant—though she insists that she is innocent, claiming the pregnancy is the result either of a miracle or rape.

Appearing more like an angel than a gallant knight, Ganz's Count dons throughout the film a tunic so immaculately white that the righteous grounds with which he insists upon marrying the Marquise become increasingly suspicious. In fact, Ganz—moping, deadpan, through a succession of comically flat emotional outpourings—is not unlike Christian Friedel's own portrayal of Kleist in *Amour Fou*. A bit too intense, a bit too forceful for his convictions to be taken seriously, the Count is a figure more of folly than of courage. As Juliette's mother puts it, "He seems to storm ladies' hearts as if they were fortresses." Quite so: the bloated, narcissistic sense of entitlement with which the Count pursues his fancies is a telling precursor to Friedel's Kleist. Did the latter, in real life, write the Count in his own image?

Rohmer, who died in 2010 aged 89, remains one of the few male filmmakers sensitive, radical and frankly competent enough to have given us female characters more daringly and fully fleshed-out than the facile sketches the cinema ordinarily offers. As Adrian Martin notes: "Rohmer's narrative style, the particular kinds of stories and intrigues he liked to tell, seem classical and simple. They are linear—not flashbacks. They have the air of being rather external and objective: no point-of-view shots, no subjective dreams, hallucinations, or fantasies."

Martin goes on: "But this simplicity is deceptive. Rohmer's stories are, at every level, full of fundamental mysteries and ambiguities. The lies, delusions and projections of characters proliferate. Key events sometimes occur between scenes, or just off-screen; our only access to them comes through competing accounts, each with their own, partial perspective and wily agenda. The greatest mystery of all is usually the filmmaker's own viewpoint towards what he is showing, and particularly towards the central character in each film: is Rohmer approving or disapproving, is he being indulgent or ironic?"

It's not difficult to read such observations without thinking of Hausner—about her body of work in general, but especially in regard to *Amour Fou*. And though her film can be positioned in relation to Kleist's novella and Rohmer's adaptation, it goes further than the limitations of both. While the earlier works reveal how an ostensibly romantic seduction is underpinned by violence, deceit and the profoundly coercive pressures of social custom,

each ends with a strongly implied Happy Ever After. By contrast, in Hausner's film, if Kleist is portrayed as a victim of his epoch, then Henriette is doubly so: here, the same imbalances and contradictions that seem to condition one poor soul's suicidal tendencies also marginalise an otherwise intelligent woman—to the point at which one man's pathetic whims become something of a charm.

But such charm wears off. At the crucial moment, with her back turned to the man who's about to shoot her, an inimitable expression falls upon Henriette's face: doubt, distrust. Mad love indeed. Though in the early 19th Century her palpable strengths can find no outlet, the final moments in *Amour Fou* contain the seeds of nascent revolution. History is hers now.





AN INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA HAUSNER

This interview with was conducted for *Film Comment* magazine by David Gregory Lawson in January 2015. Reprinted with kind permission.

At one point Henriette speaks a line that seems to go through everything in the film: “A figment of imagination which is as real as reality.” It seems to inform the look of the movie, and the actors’ performances, and I was wondering how you were thinking of this line while you were making the film.

I agree that this is probably one of the central lines in the film. I remember that when I was constructing the script, I was reading a book by Slavoj Žižek. I think he’s a very interesting philosopher, and he also talks a lot about cinema, but this book that I was reading was about the French philosopher Lacan. Žižek describes the idea that if you are close to someone or if you love someone, you see yourself very much in that other person, and I think that as soon as you think this way, every sort of reality becomes very subjective. And this interested me very much. I think that in *Amour Fou*, this is really the question. What is really happening, what are the feelings between those persons, and what is it that they only imagined? The male character, Heinrich, has a very strong vision of what he thinks love should be like, and he actually tries to adapt reality to his vision. For Henriette, on the other hand, this difference is not very clear. She lives a little bit in an illusion and she seems to not be able to act in a really wilful way.

All the characters, some of them tacitly, but definitely Heinrich in a very aggressive way—quiet but aggressive—are imposing an idea they have of somebody else on that person. There is a clash, it seems, between each person’s self-conception and the other person’s idea of themselves.

Yes, that is what made me think about what love can be after all. As we said before, everyone has their own reality. It’s a very subjective question of perception, and as soon as you understand this, it’s really the question of whether love can exist at all if you’re not even able to see another person the way the other person really is. I think that is not possible. You’re so submerged in your own thoughts and have your own way of thinking and feeling that you will always somehow misinterpret the other person.

The look of the film represents this too, because it almost feels like you're inside their conflicting emotions. There's so much talk of souls, and the rooms are so large in relation to their bodies. Many of your compositions centre the characters and there's all this negative space around them, and you have such a feeling of the walls, how constricting and definite those walls are.

Yes, the *mise en scène* in this film is a bit like in a play, but a bad play. [*Laughs*] What I mean is that the movement of the actors is not natural. The difficult thing for me was to find actors that have a very natural way of acting. Although the dialogue seems complicated, they still have a very casual style of speaking, because on the other hand the movement and the whole composition of the frame is very constructed. It seems like the characters are somehow part of a game. They move as if they were in a chess game. The reason for this was that the whole film goes around this question of individuality or what the characteristic or inner self of a person is. Who am I at all? And the people in the film are very much bound by the rules of the society they live in, and this is also why they seem to be so unoriginal in a way, stiff, or they behave in a very polite way or the way they talk or behave is very unified. They're not individualists. Maybe Heinrich is the most unconventional character, but the reason is really that individuals are part of the society, and this is a very modern aspect of the film, because it's the same in our society. It may be more obvious to show it in the 19th Century because you may think that in the 19th Century, the rules were strict and so on. But I think that in our society the rules are just as strict, they just have different ways of being imposed on the people.

There is an incredible shot of a maid putting fire into a stove while the bills are being paid in the background two rooms away. You get that sense of an entire household functioning on a daily level.

Yes. And for example, in the whole conversation about the political situation at the very end, when the two characters are dead, the husband and the others have to continue talking about what is important to them. I tried to have this sort of perspective throughout the film—as in the scene that you described with the maid—in which there are different perspectives and the maid, for example, is like a silent witness to all the scenes. Nobody would ever think: “What is she thinking about it?” But in the very end it's her and the girl in the frame, and for me it was very important to really give that feeling that there isn't *one* truth there.

There is something that I can't get over, that I find very compelling about Heinrich espousing how he can only find fulfilment in death and then taking more tea. It represents something of the contradictory nature of suicide.

Yes, and also the banality of it. I think I was also interested in really spoiling this romantic idea, any sort of romantic idea. Even if you're going to die, you might be hungry before you die.

In another scene, you have this beautiful, long stretch of road in the foreground and then when Henriette and Heinrich are in the carriage going to the country retreat, you only show the last bit of them going around the bend. It's an incredibly poetic image, but traditionally you would just show the carriage in the middle of the frame going down the road. Your composition, and only showing the final leg of their voyage, suggests the end of something—there is a kind of deathly appeal to it.

Sometimes when I think about the editing, I really think about what point is the most unexpected point to cut in and out of a scene. So sometimes I really try to be very much aware of what the convention of editing and structuring a scene is, and how you might do it differently. It's also a way of giving the spectator this feeling that the story is not going to end with an easy solution. I think the whole story that I am telling in this film is a combination of bits and pieces and different aspects, and I'm really trying to give a kaleidoscope of different people's emotions or actions, but it's surely not going to lead you to some security in the end. There is no way of really explaining it after all.

Vogel in the end says something like: “It was out of love after all.” I like that very much because I thought, when I was writing the script, the film is okay if he is right *and* wrong in the end. It shouldn't be that you think “No, he's wrong” but also not “he's right.” There has to be a sort of “Hmmm, I don't know if he is right.” You cannot make a line and say this is the sum of it all. It's not possible. And this example with the carriage on the street in the woods is just an instance of this. I selected that very moment to give you the feeling that, oh, maybe I missed something, that the carriage is nearly gone. It's not that you get everything on the silver tablet and you just have to consume it. It's more like: “Oh what was it actually?”

Could you talk about the repetition of the music in the film?

The repetition of the music is also part of the idea to create a rhythm within the film that is not smooth but that has strange interruptions. It's also a way to give the spectator the feeling that one and one maybe doesn't equal two but some other number. It's about

confusion and also about space, to give you the feeling that it's more like watching a painting: you see one point of the painting and it's your decision to look over there or look over here. You have some time to make your way through the image, and those songs from the beginning to the end belong to the same concept. Some of them break the rhythm of the love story, and I think it hurts a bit and you can say it's too long but on the other hand, I think it's right for the film to have a feeling of real time – this is the time it took to sing that song. It's also a break.

I've never seen anything like that in a period film or really any film I can think of, where such deep feelings of longing and anxiety and also just basic private details—like Henriette's autopsy—are revealed in a public setting and it's not a source of controversy.

I think it's got a lot to do with the humour. I was looking for this sort of black humour. Sometimes I have the feeling that when I'm making a film, on the one hand, I try to focus on very existential or brutal or homicidal topics, but on the other hand, I need this sort of lightheaded and slightly distant point-of-view, and I think humour is the sort of glasses that I like to put on. Otherwise, for me it would not be bearable, and I love Luis Buñuel very much – he has this sort of humour that inspires me a lot, and it's a lot about absurdity. And this idea that you were talking about – “Oh would you like to die with me in front of a group of old ladies who drink their tea?” – this is a sort of humour that comes out of absurdity, because if you put the rules of society upside down, like Buñuel very often does, then automatically you feel uneasy as a spectator. You have to laugh while he's saying it in front of everyone.

There's something so strange about the placid nature of the movie. It's like a still body of water but underneath there are all these things, all this roiling, fish eating other fish... That tone, and also these night scenes that are only lit by lamps, in connection with your material, it creates a ghost story atmosphere.

Yes. This reminds me also of my other films. It's very often the case that I show the surface of something, and as soon as you have this feeling that it's only the surface, you immediately ask yourself what is behind the surface, and I think my films are very much about this question of what is behind it all. It is a sort of supernatural question. You can call it the spirituality or the soul of the human beings, or God or whatever. It's this question of whether there is anything behind it.

When Vogel is trying to convince Henriette to go to Paris, he doesn't say: "I can't lose you." But he says: "I will try everything to keep you."

Yes, I like that also. It's part of this old-fashioned language. I was reading a lot of letters and diaries from that time, and the wording is a little bit different: sometimes it's so technical. He talks about her like she was a pet or something, and he has to keep her alive.

Having the maid constantly in the background and on the periphery makes you aware of the invisible labour that keeps a bourgeois household like that of the Vogels' running. When you were writing the script, were you coming up with different actions for her to perform in each of those scenes or how you wanted her to interact with the family?

When I wrote the script, I was only focusing on the so-called love story between Heinrich and Henriette, and on the political conversations that Vogel has with the other men. I was writing the first draft of the script before I made a lot of research about the period, because I didn't want to fall into the trap of making a real period picture where you try to show everything very accurately. After finishing the script, I started doing a lot of research, because I was aware of the fact that when I do the *mise en scène*, I do have to know what it was like. But I only tried to pick the information that was really helpful for me to tell the story, and I remember that the idea of the maid came through the research, because I suddenly understood that the way a house functioned was very different from what we know nowadays. Nowadays, you're much more lonely, the private space is much bigger. I think that at that time, the public was much more mixed in with the private. Several people lived in one room and because there wasn't the technology that we have today, you had to communicate much more and you had to work together much more. And so the woman of the house, Henriette, worked with the maid, washing the clothes and preparing the dinner, and all those thoughts made me develop this idea that I have so many people in the frame all the time.

I think it's probably also because I wanted to show that somehow it's a sort of society-portrait, and I didn't want to focus on the individual story of two characters but to show a whole society. I remember that in the script, there were many scenes where there were only the two characters, and then in the film, these became scenes where for example the maid appears and disappears, or the girl is present, or the dog, in the background – you're never really alone.

Throughout the movie, the sound has a kind of spaciousness to it. You get a sense of the size of the rooms, and the distance that footsteps will carry.

I remember that I was discussing this with the mixer. He proposed to have the outside noise much louder throughout the film, and then I always told him: “No, the window is closed. Don’t make it sound as if the window was open. Let’s close the window.” That was the motto of the mixing: that the noise exists outside, the horses, the voices, the footsteps. It’s like on another planet. It’s very distant and it’s of course because of that feeling of the *huis clos*, of the closed interior. There is no way out.

The gestures of the hypnotist running his hands just a few inches above Henriette’s body and wiping them off—was that something that you found in your research?

Yes, I did a great deal of research on the whole medical aspect of the film. Also about the illness that Henriette has, and the whole part of the doctor, finding out how they made a diagnosis, what sorts of illnesses, what sorts of treatments they knew about. And at that time, the end of the 18th Century, this sort of hypnosis, this mesmerism – Mesmer was actually an Austrian doctor and he used this sort of treatment for the first time. He believed in a sort of animal magnetism, that the body has magnetic lines, and if he does this, he cleans the magnetism of a body. That was very popular at the time, and it did have some effect. It’s like a predecessor of the hypnosis and psychotherapy that Freud and the others used at the end of the 19th Century. It gave way to those kinds of psychological treatments also, because during these treatments, people started to talk and during the hypnosis, like in my film. At the time, they didn’t know yet that that could be interesting, but later Freud used this – he noticed that during the hypnosis, people started to say truths about themselves.

When Henriette is singing Mozart’s ‘Das Veilchen’ for the first time, in front of the dinner guests, she has her hands in front of her and she’s swaying a little bit. It’s childlike and it’s in direct counterpoint to the singer we see at the beginning of the film.

Henriette is a very childlike woman. That was also very important in respect to her relationship with her daughter. For me, there was always this question: how can a woman just leave her child behind, and want to die? And I think the fact that she is a child herself is the answer. They’re like two sisters saying goodbye when she leaves. She doesn’t have that motherly feeling of responsibility somehow.



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Amour Fou is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1. The film was prepared in High Definition by Société Parisienne de Production SARL and provided to Arrow Films.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Discs and Booklet Produced by James Blackford
Executive Producers Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni
Technical Producer James White
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering Digital Cinema United
Design and Artwork Obviously Creative

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Margaret Deriaz, Anthony Nield, Michael Pattison, Jon Sadler





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