



**CRUEL FLESH:
FILMS OF THE NEW FRENCH EXTREMITY**

Criminal Lovers

François Ozon on 'Criminal Lovers'

In Criminal Lovers you collide the world's violent reality with the fantasy and symbolism of fairy tales. It's a daring project.

The idea of this story came to me from a passion for both crime stories and fairy tales. I wanted to combine two genres: a crime film inspired by headlines mixed with the fairy tale, mostly a literary genre. Normally they oppose one another. One is rooted in reality and the other in a fantastic and symbolic universe. Nevertheless, they both have the same dark side, often the same themes – murder, abandonment, incest, suicide... Fairy tales arouse the same kind of fascination in both adults and children. These stories, real or imaginary, speak to us intimately about our doubts, our fears and our worries. Furthermore, everyone has his or her favourite fairy tale, which says something about the individual's personality.

Fairy tales always begin with concrete situations...

In my favourite fairy tale, *Hansel and Gretel*, the parents are forced to abandon their children in a forest because they don't have enough food to feed them. This is followed with the determination to escape in the symbolic sense. The ogre, the witch or whatever kind of animal involved, all have specific functions. I found it interesting to make a portrait of two adolescents based on a news headline, which then slips little by little into the fairy tale world. For me, more interesting than just using the structure of naturalism and the classic justifications of social commentary cinema.

What were your sources of inspiration?

I was interested in accounts of many crimes in which the protagonists were adolescents. Recently, there have been a lot of similar cases in Europe and the US. For example, the story of this young, rich American girl who asked her middle-class boyfriend to kill a homeless man in Central Park. A completely gratuitous crime, just for the pleasure of killing or witnessing death ... And, of course, there's also the cinema tradition, mostly American, of young criminals on the run – from *They Live by Night* to *Bonnie and Clyde*, by way of *The Honeymoon Killers*.

The character of Alice, although much younger, still evokes the Hollywood praying mantis type female character that seduces her lover to push him toward crime. Like Barbara Stanwyck in Double Indemnity, Lana Turner in The Postman Always Rings Twice...

I've always been fascinated by what are referred to as screen 'bitches'. I enjoy giving to female characters that same cruelty normally seen in men. Feminine manipulation is always much stronger, much more exciting. There is a particular sensuality in a woman's cruelty. Already, in my short, *See the Sea*, I showed outright the truly evil nature of the character played by Marina de Van without any psychological explication for the cruelty of her acts.

In Criminal Lovers there is no explained psychological analysis. You don't show any elements of the criminal pathology of your characters. You also don't paint a portrait of a disturbed era...

The criminal act is presented as it is in all its mysterious and frightening brutality, without any psychological explanation or sociological context. One rarely knows the real reasons why someone commits an act. That's what interests me, to try and get closer to that obscure moment of the murderous impulse. In fact, it seems to me that Alice doesn't desire Luc, but actually desires Saïd. She doesn't assume her sexuality. She isn't ready to have a real love relationship with Saïd. She sticks to fantasy and provocation. She turns him on ... She then has the object of her desire killed so as not to respond to that desire. This delight in killing is her manner of attaining orgasm.

Do you think identification with the characters of Alice and Luc might be difficult for the audience?

The spectator has to choose their own path. I expect the spectator to be active. He or she is allowed to identify with the characters at times, and at other times maybe reject them. At the beginning, one sees them clearly as monsters, criminals. Later, in the grips of the Woodsman, Alice and Luc themselves become the victims. As prisoners of this ogre, it's easier to identify with them, to have pity for them. We almost forget that they have committed a murder. Then we are taken back to reality. I wanted the audience to stay on this path, to ask the question 'Is there something in this or that character that I can find in myself?'

You opted for a story structure based on flashback...

The screenplay was first written in chronological order. In editing, we realised the succession of situations worked too distinctly. The period of initiation where the young couple are held prisoner in the cellar became stronger, and the beginning was forgotten. The murder was overshadowed. The flashbacks gave more presence to the character of Saïd, thus reinforcing the cruelty of the two adolescents. Furthermore, the cellar imprisonment is suitable to the flashback. In this space, time becomes abstract, similar to what must be felt in prison. One has time to rethink one's acts, the murder committed, childhood... The film was edited on this idea.

The film begins fast-paced, tight and alert like Alice's nervous rhythm...

At the beginning, she runs the show. I wanted to avoid making her touching. Alice and Luc are heartless and mechanical, like robots who commit a murder. At first, everything goes fine, it clicks together. Then the manipulation and their plan begin to crack. These two robots become human beings confronted with the real and unexpected consequences of their act. They have to drive a car, get rid of the body, buy a shovel. They have no money. They're hungry... During their improvised escape, their actions prove to be childish and immature. The rhythm of the film then adopts their own rhythms. The framing becomes more open, wider. The characters lose themselves in the frame as in their plan. After the murder, it was difficult for me to film them in close-up. I felt they didn't deserve it.

Production notes

CRIMINAL LOVERS (LES AMANTS CRIMINELS)

Director: François Ozon
©/Production Companies: Fidélité Productions, Le Studio Canal+, La Sept Cinéma, Euro Space
Production Company: Arte France Cinéma
With the participation of: Canal+, Studio Images 5, CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie
Producers: Olivier Delbosc, Marc Missonnier
Fidélité Productions: Ronald Kirjner, Eric Jehelman, Emilie Tisé, Damien Petit
Unit Managers: Philippe Royer, Florent Fay
Production Manager: Mat Troi Day
Administrator: Jean-Jacques Boulben
Location Managers: Pierre Grippon, Marc Thiebault
Unit Location Manager: Valérie Debeaumont
Post-production: Mélanie Karlin
Production Secretary: Valérie Arbib
1st Assistant Director: Hubert Barbin
2nd Assistant Director: Cyril Duval
Script Supervisor: Anne Wermelinger
Casting: Stéphane Foenkinos
Scenario/Dialogue: François Ozon
Scenario Interventions: Marcia Romano, Annabelle Perrichon
Director of Photography: Pierre Stoeber
Steadicam Operators: Eric Le Roux, Jacques Monge
1st Assistant Operator: Benoît Rizzotti
2nd Assistant Operator: Caroline Swarowsky
Gaffer: Jacques Bulot
Electrician: Stéphane Beneyton
Groupman: Michel Dalmet
Key Grip: Hervé Rousset
Grip: Julien Monneret
Additional Grip: Carlos Ribeiro
Stills Photography: Jean-Claude Moireau
Special Effects: Philippe Alleton, Philippe van Herwijnen, Pierre Olivier Persin
Assistant Special Effects: Pierre Turmeau
Editors: Dominique Pétrot, Claudine Bouché
Assistant Editor: Frédéric Krettly
Art Director: Arnaud de Moléron
1st Assistant Art Director: Etienne Rohde

Props: Arthur Deleu
Construction Supervisor: Nicolas Doyon
Construction: Stéphane Renie
Carpenter: Vincent Chassaing
Upholsterer: Pascale Godard
Painters: Sophie Chandoutis, Isabelle Morange
Costumes: Pascaline Chavanne
Costumer: Christine Vargas
Make-up: Agnès Morlhigem
Additional Make-up: Nelly Robin, Manuela Taco
Titles/Opticals: ACME Films
Grading: Patrick Delamotte
Music/Music Conductor/Orchestration: Philippe Rombi
Music Performed by: Orchestre Bell'arte
Music Consultant: Christophe Flous
Sound: François Guillaume, Olivier Grandjean
Recorders: Salim Amrani, Gaël Nicolas, Alexandre Weiser, Carl Goetgheluck
Sound Editor/Mixer: Benoît Hillebrant
Assistant Sound Editor: Charles Autrand
Sound Effects: Christophe Bourreau
Stunts: Gil de Murger
Camera Car: Gilles Cappelletto
Animal Trainer: Frédérique Chauvineau

Cast

Natacha Régnier (*Alice*)
Jérémy Renier (*Luc*)
Miki Manojlović (*man in the woods*)
Salim Kechiouche (*Saïd*)
Yasmine Belmadi (*Karim*)
Bernard Maume (*teacher*)
Jean-Louis Debard (*nightwatchman*)
Catherine Vierende (*jewellery shop saleswoman*)
Marielle Coubaillon (*supermarket woman*)
Olivier Papot (*policeman*)
Gil de Murger (*GIGN man*)

France 1999©
96 mins

CRUEL FLESH: FILMS OF THE NEW FRENCH EXTREMITY

Carne + La Bouche de Jean-Pierre

Sun 1 May 11:50; Thu 12 May 20:45 (+ Q&A with Lucile Hadžihalilovic)

Baise-moi

Sun 1 May 18:20; Sat 7 May 20:50

The Ordeal (Calvaire)

Mon 2 May 12:30; Sun 22 May 18:20

Man Bites Dog (C'est arrivé près de chez vous)

Mon 2 May 15:10; Tue 10 May 20:55

Sex and Death, but Make It Arthouse

Tue 3 May 18:10

Trouble Every Day

Tue 3 May 20:30 (+ intro by writer and creative Sophie Monks Kaufman);
Tue 24 May 20:45

Criminal Lovers (Les Amants criminels)

Wed 4 May 20:50; Sat 14 May 12:00

Pola X

Thu 5 May 20:25; Sat 28 May 17:50

Romance (Romance X)

Fri 6 May 18:00 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's College London);
Tue 17 May 20:45

Philosophical Screens: Romance

Fri 6 May 20:00

In My Skin (Dans ma peau)

Sat 7 May 17:50 (+ intro by Catherine Wheatley, King's College London);
Thu 19 May 20:40

High Tension (aka Switchblade Romance) (Haute Tension)

Mon 9 May 18:00 (+ pre-recorded intro by author Alexandra West);
Sat 28 May 12:20

Inside (À l'intérieur)

Sat 14 May 20:50; Thu 26 May 18:20

Them (Ils)

Mon 16 May 20:50; Sun 29 May 18:20

Irreversible (Irréversible) (theatrical version)

Sat 21 May 17:45

Martyrs

Sat 28 May 20:50; Tue 31 May 20:40

Horror à la Française

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