



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

Martyrs

The films of the New French Extremity and the accompanying focus on Gaspar Noé examine an important, controversial and highly violent cinema movement. They are not suitable for all.

The film you are about to watch may contain very dark themes, graphic imagery, and scenes of a very upsetting nature including sexual violence and body horror.

One of the most divisive French films of recent times, *Martyrs* is shocking in its unrelenting examination of pain and transcendence. It follows two young women, Lucie (Mylène Jampanoi) and Anna (Morjana Alaoui), as the former plots revenge against a group who tortured her for a year in an abandoned abattoir.

A vital film in the so called New French Extremity, it pushed the boundaries of on-screen violence, taking inspiration from both the writings of Edgar Allan Poe and the Marquis de Sade and the wave of American 'torture porn' movies such as the *Saw* franchise.

Adam Scovell, bfi.org.uk, 31 October 2018

Martyrs, the second feature from *House of Voices* director Pascal Laugier, is a pulverising journey into pain built on astoundingly committed performances by Mylène Jampanoi and Morjana Alaoui. Embracing and then transcending the torture obsession of films such as *Saw* and *Hostel* (both of which, despite the bolt-cutters and popped eyeballs, are essentially 'goodtime' thrill-rides), Laugier's story ricochets somewhere altogether stranger, with scenes of gruelling physical horror, stomach-churning emotional anguish, and a truly bizarre strain of religious villainy. The first part of the film, depicting the shocking revenge a woman, Lucie, exacts on those she believes abused her as a child, pushes physical violence to extremes. Laugier makes things queasier by skilfully feeding our doubts: by the time we understand the truth of what we've seen, events have spiralled so far out of control that we dread what still remains and, with another 30 minutes of brutality to go, many will find themselves glancing nervously at their watches.

Scenes of drawn-out torture subdue the more whimsical amusements of horror, closing down narrative pleasure and blocking aesthetic escape routes. They can induce either morbid vertigo, a sensation of confronting our worst fears – or boredom, depending on the quality of the film and the emotional engagement of the viewer. Most horror films fixate on the body these days, but *Martyrs* is equally concerned with the suffering of the mind trapped in the bleeding flesh. It's a frequently sad, sombre film, thanks to a script that explores issues of trust, loyalty, betrayal, guilt and self-harm. As a child, Lucie escaped abuse while leaving a fellow captive behind, giving rise to corrosive guilt and razor-slashing 'visitations' from an emaciated ghoul, while her friend Anna's doubts about Lucie's sanity and ability to identify her abusers likewise lead to agonising emotional consequences.

The subject of confinement and torture echoes several recent real-life atrocities (Marc Dutroux, Josef Fritzl and, with its religious extremism, the Mauerova family/'Grail Movement' case) but the overall sobriety of the film avoids sensationalism. Which is just as well: whereas European horrors such as the French *Frontière(s)* and the Belgian *Calvaire* have visited extreme violence chiefly on male characters, *Martyrs* takes the 'old-school' route and places only female characters in jeopardy. It does so, however, in a resolutely unexploitative way; sexual abuse is not involved, and the camera observes events without the teasing prurience common in the genre.

Viewers accustomed to gore but allergic to Christian symbolism may find that it's the film's underlying themes, rather than the sadism, which bring them out in a rash. The Eastern Orthodox notion of martyrdom sees it as 'baptism in blood', of a higher order than mere baptism in water, and this gives an otherwise puzzling scene in which Anna is sponged down with cold water a sense of ritual preparation for what must follow. Anna's tragic need for expiation eventually leads to an astonishing sequence, redolent of Gaspar Noé's *Irréversible* (2002) though philosophically more aligned with Ken Russell's *Altered States* (1980), which strives to visualise a metaphysical state onscreen. And for those who regard the idea of transfiguration as just so much mumbo-jumbo, the film's provocative climax allows for a highly satisfying existential reading too.

Martyrs feels closer to Japanese or Italian horror than to the *Hostell/Saw* axis, and the frenzied performance of Jampanoï frequently recalls Isabelle Adjani in that most convulsive of Euro art-horrors, Andrzej Zulawski's *Possession* (1981). It's perhaps inevitable, given the flesh-ripping religiosity of the climax, that Laugier has been signed up to direct the remake of Clive Barker's *Hellraiser*, but meanwhile, with this immensely confident, arresting and stylish film, he has restated Europe's claim to the edgiest of horror cinema.

Stephen Thrower, *Sight & Sound*, May 2009

MARTYRS

Directed by: Pascal Laugier
©: Eskwad, Wild Bunch, TCB Film
Production Companies: Eskwad, Wild Bunch, TCB Film
With the participation of: Canal+, CinéCinéma,
Crédit d'impôt pour production cinématographique,
Crédit d'impôt Cinéma et Télévision-Gestion Soddec
Presented by: Richard Grandpierre
Production Services (Canada): Globalex Gestion de Risques
International Sales: Wild Bunch
Executive Producer: Frédéric Doniguian
Executive Producer (Canada): Marcel Giroux
Produced by: Richard Grandpierre
Co-producer (Canada): Simon Trottier
Production Manager: Donald Tetreault
Production Co-ordinator: Sophie Daubisse
Production Accountants: Martine Orban, Valérie Lapierre
Production Controller: Nathalie Lampre
Location Manager: Lucio Tamaro
Post-production Supervisor: Doris Yoba
1st Assistant Director: Carl Desjardins
2nd Assistant Director: Nadine Brassard
3rd Assistant Directors: Jacinthe Hamelin, Jacinthe Noreau
Script Supervisors: Sophie Boyer, Isabelle Faivre Duboz
Casting: Hélène Rousse
Casting Assistants: Isabelle Grondin, Marie-Claude Laparé
Extras Casting: Total Casting
Written by: Pascal Laugier
Directors of Photography: Nathalie Moliavko-Visotzky, Stéphane Martin
B Camera Operator: André Dufour
Steadicam Operators: Geoffroy St-Hilaire, Daniel Sauvé
1st Assistant Camera: Michel Girard, Marie-Andrée Paquet
1st Assistant B Camera: Carla Clarke
1st/2nd Assistant Camera: Jean-François Tousignant
Gaffer: Clermont Lapointe
Key Grips: Tanka Pelletier, Jean-Marc Lapointe, Jeff Nichol
Stills Photographer: Vittorio Vieira
Digital Effects: Groupe Image Buzz Inc.
GIB (Digital Effects): Pierre-Simon Lebrun,
Annie Godin, Marie-Ève Bédard-Tremblay
Special Effects Supervisor: Antonio Vidosa
Special Effects Co-ordinator: Jacques Godbout
Special Effects Technicians: Carmelle Beaudoin, Hervé Woods
Graphic Artists: Maurice Roy, Jean-François Poupart, Joseph Gagner
Editor: Sébastien Prangère
Assistant Editor: Denis Bedlow
Production Designer: Jean-André Carrière
Art Director: Louis-René Landry
Art Department Co-ordinator: Asuka Sugiyama
Set Decorator: Roger Martin
Assistant Visual Conception: Joseph Gagner
Property Buyer: Yves Fontigny
Property Master: Mathias Perronno
Construction Co-ordinator: Alexandre Cote
Construction Manager: Daniel Larocque
Costume Designer: Claire Nadon
Costume Co-ordinator: Danièle Brodeur
Wardrobe Supervisors: Julie Normandin, Tereska Gesing
Key Make-up Artist: Sophie Lebeau
Make-up Artist: Louise Mignault

Special Make-up Effects: Benoît Lestang, Adrien Morot
Special Make-up/Hair Effects: Maestro Studio F/X, Bruno Gatien,
Mélanie Rodrigue, Caroline Aquin
Key Hairstylist: Sabin Paradis
Hairstylists: Manon Miserany, Suzanne Lachapelle
Titles: Kook Ewo (Paris)
Location Camera Equipment: Département Caméra
8mm Camera Equipment: Richard Lehun
Film Stock: Kodak
Colour Timer: Fred Casnin
Laboratory: Éclair
Original Music: Seppuku Paradigm
Sound Recordist: Philippe Mercier
Boom Operator: Olivier Vinson
Sound Mixer: Jérôme Wiciak
Sound Engineers: Jérôme Wiciak, Pascal Dédeye, Guillaume Leriche
Recordist: Benoît Leduc
Re-recorded at: Palo Alto
Post-production Sound: Polyson
Sound Editor: Germain Boulay
Associate Sound Editor: Serge Rouquairol
ADR Recordist: Lionel Lebras
Foley Artists: Nicolas Becker, Pascal Dédeye
Stunt Co-ordinators: Gaëlle Cohen, Stéphane Lefebvre
For: Dario Argento
Armourer: Andrew Campbell
Publicity (France): Laurent Renard, Leslie Ricci
Making-of: Alexis Fortier-Gauthier

Cast

Morjana Alaoui (*Anna*)
Mylène Jampanoï (*Lucie*)
Catherine Bégin (*Mademoiselle*)
Robert Toupin (*father*)
Patricia Tulasne (*mother*)
Juliette Gosselin (*Marie*)
Xavier Dolan-Tadros (*Antoine*)
Isabelle Chassé (*creature*)
Émilie Miskdjian (*torture victim*)
Mike Chute (*executioner*)
Gaëlle Cohen (*henchwoman*)
Anie Pascale (*female executioner*)
Jessie Pham (*Lucie aged 10*)
Erika Scott (*Anna aged 10*)
Louise Boisvert (*voice of Anna's mother*)
Jean-Marie Moncelet (*Étienne*)
Tony Robinow (*doctor*)
Louis Thevenon (*1st henchman*)
Jean-François Boudreault, Michel Cormier,
Jean-Bernard Côté, Patrick Dorval,
Mathieu Samaille (*henchmen*)
Daniel Deburghraeve (*old man arriving at house*)
Philippe Laugier (*inspector*)
Hervé Desbois (*nurse*)
Mario Mancini (*Mademoiselle's chauffeur*)
Olivier Villeneuve (*child in institute*)

France-Canada 2008©

99 mins

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