



## NEW RELEASES

# Anatomy of a Fall

### Anatomy of a Fall

(Anatomie d'une chute)

Director: Justine Triet

Collaboration in the direction of actors:

Cynthia Arra

©: Les Films Pelléas, Les Films de Pierre, France 2 Cinéma, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma

A Les Films Pelléas and Les Films de Pierre production

In co-production with: France 2 Cinéma, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma

With the support of: Canal+, Ciné+

With the participation of: France

Télévisions, Le Pacte, MK2 Films

International Sales: MK2 Films

Produced by: Marie-Ange Luciani, David Trion

Post-production Supervisor:

Juliette Mallon

Script Supervisor: Clémentine Schaeffer

CASTING: Cynthia Arra

Written by: Justine Triet, Arthur Harari

Director of Photography: Simon Beaufils

Stills Photography: Carole Bethuel

Editor: Laurent Sénéchal

Art Director: Emmanuelle Duplay

Costume Designer: Isabelle Pannetier

Key Make-up: Aurélie Cerveau

Key Hair Stylist: Aude Thomas

Music Supervisor: Thibault Deboaisne

Sound: Julien Sicart, Fanny Martin,

Jeanne Delplancq, Olivier Goinard

Stunt Co-ordinator: Alexandre Cauderlier

Cast:

Sandra Hüller (Sandra)

Swann Arlaud (Vincent)

Milo Machado Graner (Daniel)

Antoine Reinartz (prosecuting lawyer)

Samuel Theis (Samuel)

Jehny Beth (Marge)

Saadia Bentaïeb (Nour)

Camille Rutherford (Zoé)

Anne Rotger (judge)

Sophie Fillières (Monica)

France 2023

150 mins

Digital

A Picturehouse Entertainment Release

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The protagonist of Justine Triet's courtroom drama *Anatomy of a Fall* is no easy or ingratiating character, but the woman who plays the role is unequivocal about her. 'I love her,' says Sandra Hüller of the character, also named Sandra. 'I admire her very much – for her adult behaviour, for standing up for herself. I admire her for standing up for her beliefs and for addressing what is wrong in her relationship.' All hard enough in any context, let alone one in which you have been credibly accused of your husband's murder.

Triet's film – a compelling hybrid of legal procedural, high-stakes emotional melodrama and philosophical meditation on the complexities of communication, which the director co-wrote with her partner in life and work Arthur Harari – thrusts us straight into a scenario of domestic disharmony that is at once quotidian and unsettling. Sandra, a successful novelist of German origin who lives in the French Alps with her French husband Samuel and their ten-year-old son Daniel, is being interviewed by a young female French literature student. The two women clearly enjoy each other's company, and are even flirting; but their ability to understand one another is impeded, and not only by the language barrier. In the room upstairs, Samuel is playing a maddening piece of music, maddeningly loud.

It's a scenario that's sharply evocative of the passive aggression that can fester between long-term romantic partners with unaddressed issues, and one to which it's tempting to apply assumptions influenced by personal experiences or existing tropes. Does the still unseen Samuel habitually obstruct his accomplished wife? Or might *he* be the undermined one, protesting his own neglect? Very soon, it's too late to ask him – and the tensions and complexities of his relationship with Sandra are being thrashed out in a court of law.

Triet and Harari crafted Sandra with Hüller in mind, after Triet directed her in 2009's *Sibyl* – a starchy but somewhat messy comedy drama, also co-written with Harari and also selected for the Cannes Competition. Though Hüller is quick to assert that Sandra is "not *me*", it's not hard to see how Hüller's qualities as an actress contributed to the formation of the character. 'She brings a sort of opacity, something that you can't really grasp,' Triet explains. 'I thought that would lend itself to the character, because she's so mysterious.' Yet there's warmth and directness in Hüller's screen presence too, a physicality Triet associates with the actress's prestigious history of stage work. It's a performance at once deeply considered and charged with livewire unpredictability – and one that takes on even greater complexity as Hüller spars and sparks with her three male co-stars.

Samuel is played in flashback by the actor, writer and director Samuel Theis, a friend of Triet's. 'In real life, he's homosexual, so this was the opposite of his real life!' Triet says with a laugh. Yet Theis and Hüller generate an extraordinarily persuasive sense of intimacy, which culminates in an argument sequence that is simply riveting in its laying bare of marital insecurities, secrets and cruelties. Hüller, says Triet, 'was in love with that scene – she told me she accepted the movie because of that scene.' But both writing and playing such a sequence came with risks. 'There are many traps in that kind of scene, because we've seen a lot of them. So you have to avoid many, many clichés. And when you see people hurting like this, it can be ugly. It's very important that we love them at the end – that we don't lose them.' Triet thinks that audience members find greater sympathy for Sandra because of this sequence – even Hüller herself, she suggests, played the part differently after working on it. 'That scene reveals everyone.'

The argument is also pivotal in the film's courtroom narrative, for it is recorded, and played to the jury during Sandra's trial. Moments of heightened emotion and unguarded spontaneity become grounds on which to judge Sandra's entire character. 'I think it's the worst possible thing to live through,' says Triet. 'It's a nightmare. You could find something in my cellphone, and judge me... I think it's why I'm so interested in filming the courtroom and the trial. We are dispossessed of our stories. Others talk for us. It warps everything.'

For Hüller, the situation raises the question of whether 'it's even the right thing to do, to drag things into a courtroom this way. Why would people be allowed to watch this sort of thing? Is it even possible to speak openly and freely about the life you had, when so many people are watching? When your *son* is watching?'

The fact that Sandra is multilingual and doesn't address her husband, son or the court in her first language adds a further layer of complexity. 'It's like a filter between her and reality,' says Triet. 'English is the emotional language for her: she switches to English when she feels too much. French is the language when she's in full possession of herself –

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(*Anatomie d'une chute*)

Continued from Fri 24 Nov

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### Queendom

From Fri 1 Dec

### Tish

From Fri 15 Dec (Preview on Fri 1 Dec

18:00 + Q&A with director Paul Sng)

### Priscilla (preview screenings)

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Jan

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*Ikiruka*)

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she prepares everything in French. And also, she's this "cold" German woman and she's judged for that. It was very interesting for us to have that multiplicity of languages to express different things and to show that it's really complicated. Language is the deep centre of the movie – it's a character in the movie. There is the language of passion; there is language that explains, analyses, dissects. And we switch all the time between passion and analysis.' But as the film repeatedly demonstrates, there can also be charm, creativity and even occasional revelation in language gaps. They can separate us; they can also be where we find each other.

Hüller, who juggles multiple languages in her own professional life, not only loves this notion, but immediately illustrates it with a perfectly imperfect turn of phrase. 'The imperfections in it cause a big fun for me! I like the distance that's created with people in my personal life when they don't speak my language. I have a tendency to be a bit too close, so the language always puts a little layer in between – and it's the same with work for me. It also makes it easier to say certain things that you couldn't say in your own language. I really love the moments in the film where Sandra or one of the lawyers is searching for the right word – all these things that constantly bring to our minds that it's not a given that everybody understands each other. I think the way Justine approached [the material] tells us something about how people who are not familiar with who we are – who don't speak our language – become strangers. We live in a world where these things still happen unconsciously, and racism is all over the place. And she's a white woman, so this is the soft version!'

Fervent debate in French politics and culture over matters of origin, identity and reputation may indicate why courtroom dramas appear to be enjoying something of a revival within the national cinema. Acclaimed titles such as Alice Diop's *Saint Omer* (2022) and Cédric Kahn's recent *The Goldman Case* (in which Harari has an acting role) share *Anatomy of a Fall's* preoccupation with the weight of words and the elusiveness of a shared truth.

Like Diop, Triet is keen to stand apart, referring frequently to her determination not to replicate what she calls 'the usual bullshit' of the courtroom movie. For instance, *Anatomy of a Fall* eschews an emotionally didactic musical score – a tendency Triet laughingly calls 'a plague'. Extensive study of the genre altered her view on it, as well as highlighting its pitfalls. 'It's a place of fiction,' she says. 'When I was young, I thought: it's the place where the truth can emerge. Now I can say, it's the opposite. It's the place where two different stories are told... and the truth is not the point.' Nor is it the point of her film, she says. 'It's my job to tell stories.'

Just as it avoids directing us as to the moral character of its central couple, so the film's other characters body-swerve stereotype. Sandra's lawyer Vincent (Swann Arlaud) is no blazing rhetorician nor embodiment of macho authority, but an elfin, almost feminine man, who leads with his intellect. He's also Sandra's onetime lover and now her friend, a dynamic rather more common in life than in film, and one that the two actors portray with a fascinating delicacy of touch.

No less complex is Sandra's relationship with her son Daniel (Milo Machado Graner). No unconditionally adoring extension of his mother, he is closer to his father, who has been his primary carer since he was blinded in an accident as an infant. Hüller firmly rejects the notion that Sandra has prioritised her career over her son: 'I felt strongly that she didn't have a choice: the trauma bond between the father and son was so strong that she just made way for it.' But Daniel is enigmatic to Sandra, his approval not guaranteed, which makes the power he eventually wields in the courtroom an onerous and unpredictable factor in the film's outcome.

Hüller is full of praise for both actors. Of working with Arlaud, she says, 'It was very easy from the beginning. He's a very sensitive person and actor. We did a lot of improvisation, just letting the camera roll at the end of takes and it was like a dance – I really loved it.' Machado Graner, meanwhile, was simply 'a proper colleague. It wasn't working with a child actor who you have to be careful with or who needs special treatment – he was super-professional. He's very quick, he's very smart. He had the ability to get into the emotions, but as soon as shooting was over he was this boy again. He didn't have this weight on his shoulders all the time. So that was pretty impressive.' To inform the character's precocity, Triet drew on life once more. 'I was very inspired by my older daughter, who was ten at the time. She's really brainy – always serious, and she speaks very, very well. People said to me, "It's not possible – he's like an adult." But I said, "It is! Sometimes, kids talk like this".'

Justine Trier and Sandra Hüller talk to Hannah McGill, *Sight and Sound*, December 2023