



Three Films by Maurice Pialat

À nos amours

À nos amours To Our Loves

Director: Maurice Pialat

Production Companies: Les Films du Livradois, Gaumont, France 3

Producer: Micheline Pialat

Associate Producer: Emmanuel Schlumberger

Production Manager: Sylvie Danton, Hervé Austen

Production Administrator: Claude Bertonazzi

Assistant Directors: Florence Quentin, Cyril Collard, Christian Argentino

Screenplay and Dialogue: Arlette Langmann, Maurice Pialat

Director of Photography: Jacques Loiseleux

Assistant Photographers: Pierre Novion,

Patrice Guillou, Christian Fournie

Stills Photographer: William Karel *

Editor: Yann Dedet

Assistant Editors: Sophie Coussein,

Valérie Condroyer, Corinne Lazare, Jean Gargonne,

Nathalie Letrosne, Catherine Legault

Art Directors: Jean-Paul Camail, Arlette Langmann

Costumes: Valérie Schlumberger,

Martha de Villalonga

Title Design: Jean-Noël Delamare

Sound Recording: Jean Umansky,

François de Morant, Julien Cloquet,

Thierry Jeandroz

Sound Re-recording: Dominique Hennequin

Sound Effects: Jonathan Liebling

Cast:

Sandrine Bonnaire (*Suzanne*)

Dominique Besnehard (*Robert*)

Maurice Pialat (*father*)

Evelyne Ker (*mother*)

Anne-Sophie Maillé (*Anne*)

Christophe Odent (*Michel*)

Cyr Boitard (*Luc*)

Maité Maillé (*Martine*)

Pierre-Loup Rajot (*Bernard*)

Cyril Collard (*Jean-Pierre*)

Nathalie Gureghian (*Nathalie*)

Guénolé Pascal (*coach*)

Caroline Cibat (*Charline*)

Jacques Fieschi (*Jacques*)

Valérie Schlumberger (*Marie-France*)

Tom Stevens (*American sailor*)

Tsilka Theodorou (*Fanny*)

Vangel Theodorou (*Claude*)

Isabelle Prades (*Solange*)

Hervé Austen (*Freddy*)

Alexandre de Dardel (*Alex*)

Alexis Quentin (*Richard*)

Pierre Novion (*Adrien*)

Eric Viellard (*Henri*)

France 1983

102 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

The screening on Fri 14 Aug will include an introduction by David Thompson, presented by A Nos Amours.

A Nos Amours is a collective founded by Joanna Hogg and Adam Roberts dedicated to programming, promoting, understanding and enjoying over-looked, under-exposed or especially potent cinema.

Unhappiness, to coin a maxim, often derives from nothing more than the fact that we do not possess precisely the kind of happiness we might wish. As with most of Maurice Pialat's protagonists, Suzanne in *À nos amours* is unhappy. Even when sanguine, she has a baffling capacity for radiating unhappiness around her, like those people who carry the condition within them like a disease, infecting others without suffering its effects themselves. Nor are we made privy to any latent causes for unhappiness in her nature. She is pretty, intelligent in a teenager's sulky, incommunicative manner, surrounded by chums of both sexes, wooed by an attractive though rather doleful youth and patently, if very maladroitly, worshipped by her parents and elder brother.

Furthermore, Pialat has set his film, to begin with, in the South of France (where Suzanne is seen performing Musset's *On ne badine pas avec l'amour* in the openair theatre of a summer camp), and its lighting makes such flattering use of the warm afterglow characteristic of Mediterranean evenings that, as in so many French films, youthful lovemaking appears to register principally as the mating of two tans; then, later, in some provincial town in the North, with the shivery premonitions of autumn tempered by another afterglow, that of all those double-coat suntans displayed by a *jeunesse* now literally *dorée*. He even enshrines her in one of the most dazzling credit-title sequences it would be possible to envisage: standing on the prow of a yacht, her back to the camera, her summery white frock delineating a pair of delicate shark's fin shoulder blades, to the accompaniment on the soundtrack of Purcell's 'The Cold Song' sung by the German countertenor Klaus Nomi (a rare instance in Pialat's work when the beauty of his *mise en scène* is offered neat – as one says of whisky).

Yet, in spite of these advantages, so to speak, Suzanne, one of the cinema's unluckiest *femmes fatales*, remains a disruptive, almost subversive, presence. And how she pays for it! When she disobeys her father, she is brutally slapped. When she sports a vulgar miniskirt, slap! When she taunts her brother for his homosexuality, slap! When she talks back to her mother, slap! slap! slap! In fact, slaps constitute the organising principle – the leitmotif, I suppose the word must be – of the film (along with sobs, screams and the tearing out of hair); and poor Suzanne is gradually moulded, *sculpted*, by them. These scenes (on occasion somewhat mechanically juxtaposed with interludes of domestic harmony – for, though a beautiful and moving film, *À nos amours* is also an imperfect one) are genuinely frightening, none more so than when, towards the end, Suzanne's father (played by Pialat himself) makes an inopportune reappearance in the household which he abandoned.

After haranguing his family and their dinner guests (and what he has to say, of only marginal import to the film's narrative drive, sounds very much like Pialat getting a few grievances off his own chest), he is suddenly slapped by his incensed and long-suffering wife. Even if one had not been enlightened by a couple of published interviews, one might well have surmised both from its violence and the expression of pained stupefaction on Pialat's features that this particular slap was unscripted, unpremeditated and in all likelihood administered by the actress Evelyne Ker to her director, rather than by one of the film's characters to another.

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Fri 14 Aug 18:00 (presented by A Nos Amours, with an intro by David Thompson); Mon 17 Aug 14:30; Thu 20 Aug 20:50

L'enfance nue Naked Childhood

Sat 15 Aug 16:00; Thu 20 Aug 14:30; Sun 23 Aug 12:10

Passe ton bac d'abord... Graduate First

Sat 15 Aug 20:45; Tue 18 Aug 14:30; Fri 21 Aug 18:30

Re-releases

Akira

From Fri 14 Aug

La maison des bois The House in the Woods

From Sat 15 Aug (Sun 16 Aug 12:00 presented by A Nos Amours, with an intro by David Thompson)

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Pialat's films are not psychodramas (both performers, though visibly consumed with rage, succeed in playing the scene out in professional fashion). Instead, it is probable that Evelyne Ker began, like any mere spectator, to suspend her disbelief. She began to *believe*. Whether as Maurice Pialat or as her 'husband', she had come to loathe the man, and the character's natural reflex – schizophrenically usurping the actress's – was to slap him in the face. The supreme virtue of Pialat's cinema is this faculty for inspiring belief. *À nos amours* has, as I suggested, its share of flaws, mostly lapses of memory – an overextended preliminary section, a slew of narrative loose ends, a persistent reluctance to impose any truly dramatic continuity on the course of Suzanne's self-destruction – but, given the sense of utter conviction which it manages to generate, they cease to matter. This is due in no small degree to the performers, most remarkably Sandrine Bonnaire as Suzanne (her failure to gain an award at the Berlin Festival was scandalous), Pialat and Dominique Besnehard, as the brother who becomes more and more effeminate throughout the film until, during the climactic dinner party, we discover that he is married!

But there is something else. Pialat's personal reputation is that of a difficult, contentious man, who has been accused more than once of misogyny and once (by an otherwise sympathetic critic from *Cahiers du cinéma*) of deliberately provocative antisemitism. Whatever the legitimacy of these charges, there is no question but that his films are informed with a vein of reactionary pessimism, similar, if in a minor key, to that found in the novels of Céline (whose two jet-black masterpieces, *Voyage au bout de la nuit* and *Mort à crédit*, are conceivably the only works of literature which Pialat might be tempted to adapt). And what makes them so poignant is that, as an artist, Pialat has perhaps been *saved by the cinema* – which is to say, saved from a Célinian despair and outpouring of bile by a medium which, dealing with human beings instead of with words, is not easily conducive to hatred.

Thus the ending of *À nos amours* should not be read as wholly pessimistic; and discarding one's illusions, as Suzanne does, is not quite the same thing as being disillusioned. For (concluding, as I started, with a maxim) as we grow older, we are left with fewer causes for hope or happiness, but fewer of those left to us turn out to be illusory.

Gilbert Adair, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1984