



TORONTO
INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL
OFFICIAL SELECTION
2004

Innocence

A FILM BY LUCILE HADZIHALILOVIC

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A subterranean rumbling resonates in the heart of a forest. Hidden by foliage, a metal grate reveals underground passageways, which lead to the cellars of five houses scattered throughout a great park. The park is cut off from the outside world by a huge wall with no door.

In one of these houses, a group of girls aged between seven and twelve gathers around a coffin. The coffin lid opens, revealing a six-year-old girl. Her name is Iris.

Bianca, the eldest of the group, introduces Iris into this strange but pleasant boarding school, home to some thirty little girls. There are no adults here, save for several old servants and two young teachers: Mademoiselle Edith and Mademoiselle Eva.

Iris very quickly discovers the rules of the school, where teaching centres on dance, physical education and biology. Obedience is paramount, and any boarder who would rebel and try to escape is condemned to remain in the park and serve the others forever.

Time passes and Iris grows accustomed to her new life. But she is troubled by a mystery: every evening at nine, when the lamps are lit, the subterranean rumbling returns and Bianca leaves the house to attend a secret meeting. One evening, Iris follows her to the big house where the teachers live. Inside, all seems deserted. Even Bianca appears to have vanished into thin air...

CAST

Zoé AUCLAIR AS IRIS

Bérangère HAUBRUGE AS BIANCA

Lea BRIDAROLLI AS ALICE

Marion COTILLARD AS MADEMOISELLE EVA

Hélène de FOUGEROLLES AS MADEMOISELLE EDITH

CREW

DIRECTOR **Lucile HADZIHAILOVIC**

SCREENPLAY **Lucile HADZIHAILOVIC**

BASED ON THE NOVELLA BY **Frank WEDEKIND** ("Mine-Haha, or The Corporal Education of Young Girls")

DP **Benoît DEBIE**

SET DESIGNER **Arnaud de MOLÉRON**

EDITOR **Adam FINCH**

SOUND **Pascal JASMES / Andy WALKER / Graham PETERS / Tim CAVAGIN**

MUSIC **Leos JANACEK / Sergei PROKOVIEV / Pietro GALLI / Richard COOKE**

A **FRENCH / BELGIAN / UK** CO-PRODUCTION

PRODUCTION **EX NIHILO (Patrick SOBELMAN)**

CO-PRODUCTION **LES ATELIERS DE BAERE / BLUELIGHT / UK FILM COUNCIL / LOVE STREAMS / GIMAGES**

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF **KINÉTIQUE / CNC / WALLIMAGE**

LUCILE HADZIHAILOVIC SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

AS WRITER & DIRECTOR

INNOCENCE (2004)

GOOD BOYS USE CONDOMS (1998)

LA BOUCHE DE JEAN-PIERRE aka **MIMI** (1996)

LA PREMIERE MORT DE NONO (1986)

AS EDITOR & PRODUCER

SEUL CONTRE TOUS aka **I STAND ALONE** GASPARD NOE (1998)

LA BOUCHE DE JEAN-PIERRE aka **MIMI** (1996)

CARNE GASPARD NOE (1991)

MARION COTILLARD SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

SAUF LE RESPECT QUE JE VOUS DOIS FABIENNE GODET (2004)

CAVALCADE STEVE SUISSA (2004)

UN LONG DIMANCHE DE FIANÇAILLES
aka **A VERY LONG ENGAGEMENT** JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET (2004)

BIG FISH TIM BURTON (2003)

NARCO TRISTAN AUROUET & GILLES LELLOUCHE (2003)

JEUX D'ENFANTS aka **LOVE ME IF YOU DARE** YANN SAMUEL (2003)

TAXI 3 GERARD KRAWCZYK (2003)

UNE AFFAIRE PRIVÉE aka **A PRIVATE AFFAIR** GUILLAUME NICLOUX (2002)

LES JOLIES CHOSES aka **PRETTY THINGS** GILLES PAQUET-BRENNER (2001)

LISA PIERRE GRIMBLAT (2001)

FURIA ALEXANDRE AJA (2000)

TAXI 2 GERARD KRAWCZYK (2000)

DU BLEU JUSQU'EN AMÉRIQUE SARAH LEVY (1999)

LA GUERRE DANS LE HAUT PAYS aka **WAR IN THE HIGHLANDS** FRANCIS REUSSER (1999)

TAXI GERARD PIRES (1998)

LA BELLE VERTE COLINE SERREAU (1996)

COMMENT JE ME SUIS DISPUTÉ... (MA VIE SEXUELLE)
aka **MY SEX LIFE... OR HOW I GOT INTO AN ARGUMENT** ARNAUD DESPLECHIN (1996)

L'HISTOIRE DU GARÇON QUI VOULAIT QU'ON L'EMBRASSE
aka **THE STORY OF A BOY WHO WANTED TO BE KISSED** PHILIPPE HAREL (1994)

HÉLÈNE DE FOUGEROLLES SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

LES GENS HONNÊTES VIVENT EN FRANCE BOB DECOUT (2004)

LE PLUS BEAU JOUR DE MA VIE JULIE LIPINSKI (2004)

FANFAN LA TULIPE GERARD KRAWCZYK (2003)

LA MER aka **THE SEA** BALTASAR KORMAKUR (2002)

LE RAID aka **THE RACE** DJAMEL BENSALA (2002)

VA SAVOIR JACQUES RIVETTE (2001)

MORTEL TRANSFERT aka **MORTAL TRANSFER** JEAN-JACQUES BEINEIX (2001)

LE PROF ALEXANDRE JARDIN (2000)

THE BEACH DANNY BOYLE (2000)

THE FALL ANDREW PIDDINGTON (1998)

QUE LA LUMIÈRE SOIT aka **LET THERE BE LIGHT** ARTHUR JOFFE (1998)

ASSASSIN(S) MATHIEU KASSOVITZ (1997)

LA DIVINE POURSUITE aka **THE GODS MUST BE DARING** MICHEL DEVILLE (1997)

CHACUN CHERCHE SON CHAT aka **WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY** CÉDRIC KLAPISCH (1996)

LE PÉRIL JEUNE CÉDRIC KLAPISCH (1994)

LA CITÉ DE LA PEUR aka **FEAR CITY** ALAIN BERBERIAN (1994)

JEANNE LA PUCELLE II - LES PRISONS aka **JOAN THE MAID 2: THE PRISONS** JACQUES RIVETTE (1994)

LE MARI DE LÉON aka **LEON'S HUSBAND** JEAN-PIERRE MOCKY (1993)

INTERVIEW WITH LUCILE HADZIHILIOVIC

What made you decide to adapt the short story “Mine-Haha, or The Corporal Education of Young Girls”?

The friend who suggested I read this Symbolist short story, written in 1888 by the German playwright Frank Wedekind, said it was definitely for me. Sure enough, I had never previously found a text that presented everything I wanted to recount on screen in quite such an incredible way.

What I liked most in the story was the way the school was set up: an enclosed space where young girls live in autarchy, the elder girls looking after the younger ones, the importance of dance and physical exercises, and the essential relationship with nature.

But there's also something very mysterious about it all. I immediately dismissed the hypothesis of a sinister background that might evoke a form of child prostitution; I saw it more as a kind of utopia to educate children by liberating their bodies, with all the negative totalitarian aspects that can have. The school is a paradise and a prison at the same time. But many questions remain. Even the departure of one of the heroines doesn't provide any certainties. Then there's the underground world, the train that travels beneath the school, the strange little theatre...

What changes did you make to the short story?

When writing the script I realised that above all I shouldn't try to explain anything. Any explanation brought the whole edifice tumbling down like a house of cards. The changes I made are therefore factual.

For example, in Wedekind's text we follow the same girl through all her years at the school. It would have been difficult for me to find several different children to play the same girl at different ages, so I split the heroine into three characters: Iris, the youngest girl, who arrives at the school, Alice, who has already spent several years there and rebels, and Bianca, who is at the end of the school cycle and represents a young girl shaped by it. During the film, there is a relay from one to the other. What's more, this enabled me to maintain a certain unity of time by fitting the story into one year, marked by the rhythm of passing seasons.

I also made the eldest girls younger to keep the story plausible. In his short story, Wedekind suggests that they are 14 to 15. I reckoned that beyond the age of 11 or 12, the girls would certainly have tried to run away. This age suited me all the more for being the time when menstruation first starts, the end of a kind of pre-adolescence.

In the original text, none of the girls try to get away. In the film too, most of the girls seem to have forgotten everything about the outside world. It's almost as though their minds have retracted into the confines of the school. But for dramatic reasons, I invented the characters of two girls who try to run away.

I also added natural science classes to the physical education imagined by Wedekind, again for reasons of realism. This meant I could develop a relationship with nature which I found very important, and stress the theme of bodily metamorphosis.

Nothing overly dramatic happens, so how do you explain the rising tide of anxiety the film provokes?

Nothing dramatic happens on a sexual level, but there is still the risk that the story could veer into another dimension at any moment. And then there's the anxiety of knowing what Bianca, the eldest girl, is going to find outside.

I tried to transcribe in the film what I felt when reading the story. Starting with questions about what all this means. The further the story progresses without giving any answers, the more the anxiety builds. And then there's the oppressive underlying notion that the girls are in fact primarily being prepared to reproduce. From the natural science classes insisting on the cycle of life to the physical exercises to make them pretty and graceful, everything points to this idea that they are being educated to perpetuate the species.

Isn't it paradoxical to prepare them for reproduction without them ever seeing any boys?

Exactly: in this exclusively female world, what could these little girls want more than to meet boys? At their age, relationships with boys are often conflictual, and the idea of a place where they can blossom far from boys is quite conceivable. But this complete absence of male characters becomes stifling. Half the human species is missing from this world, not just for the girls but for the adults too. The old maids and the two young teachers are deprived of all relationships with men. A closed space like this, with only girls in it, evokes a convent and its opposite, a

brothel – without being one or the other, of course. I particularly wanted to keep any religious elements out of the film and develop a kind of pantheism instead.

One of the very original things about the film is the balance between realism and fantasy.

The fantasy element is in the setting: the coffin, the train, the underground tunnels and the existence of an enclosed site like this in society. On the other hand, the girls' feelings and relationships with each other are entirely realistic, from the fear of getting lost in the forest to the anxiety of being all alone at night or the apprehension of performing on stage in front of strangers.

If I had set the story in an ordinary country boarding school, something would have been lost. I needed this dreamlike dimension which was already very present in my first film, "**La Bouche de Jean-Pierre**". There are strong bonds between the worlds of childhood and imagination and I find that using the form of a fable is appropriate for telling children's stories.

Do you think that your film will be received in the same way by both men and women?

I think that for women it will be easier to identify with the girls; they won't ask so many questions about the meaning of all this. The absence of male characters will probably be more unsettling for men, who may be left with more of a focus on the way they view these young girls. I haven't tried to convey any particular message. I portray the way this school works without saying whether it's good or bad. Just as there are no answers to the questions, there's no moral to the story either.

What do you hope for from audiences?

This film is like a small theatre that I'm inviting people into. I hope they will be charmed and engaged and that they'll enjoy remembering it afterwards. The idea was to make an appealing work, for people to be able to slip into the girls' worlds and create their own film. As a spectator, I like films that take you into a particular physical world by playing on sound and sensorial perception. Similarly, I wanted to offer audiences an emotional experience.

During the screening, two others films came to my mind: Dario Argento's "Suspiria" and Peter Weir's "Picnic at Hanging Rock".

I'm delighted by these two references. In fact, Dario Argento apparently based "**Suspiria**" very loosely on the same short story by Wedekind. I didn't know it when I was shooting my film and I didn't really have "**Suspiria**" in mind. But I discovered cinema at the age of 13 with Dario Argento's films and their very sober eroticism. The reference to "**Picnic at Hanging Rock**" is more conscious, even though I haven't actually seen the film again since it was released. I especially remembered those young white-clad girls out in nature, with a sensual and very mysterious side to it all. Like mine, Peter Weir's film asks questions that aren't anecdotal. I would also add "**The Spirit of the Beehive**" by Victor Erice, for its underlying fantasy aspect linked to the world of childhood. Nevertheless, these are secondary references and I never had a specific film in mind when I was making "**Innocence**".

Much of the emotional experience which "Innocence" proposes is conveyed through the remarkable cinematography. What made you choose Benoît Debie as director of photography?

I liked the lighting he did on a short film by Fabrice du Welz, the Belgian director of "**Calvaire**", for which he also did the camerawork. And of course his work on "**Irreversible**", which also led him to do Dario Argento's latest film. Benoît has a superb taste for colours and really dark shadows, and I knew that he was ready to take risks with the lighting. He is capable of working fast too, which is essential when you're shooting with children. On set, he was even better than I'd hoped.

What were your main options, image-wise?

To counterbalance the dreamlike elements, I wanted the lighting to be as realistic as possible. Apart from the theatre scenes, which for obvious reasons had sophisticated lighting, we restricted ourselves to daylight or light sources within the frame, without ever using a single spotlight. To that extent, it could be said that the film's lighting was co-signed by the production designer, Arnaud de Moléron. He had to take Benoît Debie's demands into account when it came to deciding how many lamps would feature in the decor and where they would be. I was also lucky to be able to count on Jim Howe, an exceptional gaffer full of inventive solutions.

One element, however, was not realistic: the evening scenes were shot in broad daylight as day-for-night. The digital grading we used enabled us to work on the evening effect in a way that would have been impossible with traditional grading. In the end you have an impression of an endless twilight, something that's neither day nor night; it contributes to the dreamlike feeling of strangeness by erasing the passage of time.

The other very important thing for me image-wise was colour intensity. I wanted a rendering close to Technicolor. The images we shot were initially very colourful, but we upped the intensity during grading to make this world even more attractive: the greens in the park, the whiteness of the uniforms, and the different colours of the ribbons in the girls' hair. For both the colours and the visual themes I had two pictorial references in mind: the Symbolists (notably Belgian) and Magritte.

Why did you shoot in CinemaScope?

It's a format that allows you to frame several characters at once, yet it can also be very oppressive: it encloses while appearing to open up. For budgetary reasons, however, I couldn't use real CinemaScope, but Super 16 blown up to 35 mm.

How easy was it to finance the film?

It actually turned out to be much harder than I thought. Ten years ago, you could easily propose atypical subjects that didn't fit into the dominant genres. But nowadays in France it's not easy to finance a first feature that isn't a comedy or an action movie. Fortunately Patrick Sobelman, the producer, was very tenacious and managed to rally several foreign partners from England, Belgium and Japan. Agnès B participated as well. Also Wild Bunch, who are handling international sales, came in on the project very early and helped us a great deal. In the end I had the means I needed to make the film without having to sacrifice my aesthetic and narrative choices.

Why is there virtually no background music?

Apart from two scenes, the only music heard in the film comes from a few classical pieces which the girls dance to or listen to. I didn't want music the rest of the time because I wanted to highlight the other sounds and avoid any outside commentary. As with the lighting, I wanted each sound to have an intrinsic justification, a source within the film's own universe. It gives the decor weight, its own existence. It also avoids giving the audience indications about what they should feel or what the scene might mean.

The soundtrack is no less expressive ...

It is based on the sounds in the park (animal cries, the wind, the waterfall and sounds of running water) and the sounds inside the house (creaking floorboards, wheezing plumbing and especially the obsessive tick-tock of the clocks). Each of these elements can be reassuring or harrowing by turns. The sound of the train travelling under the school and the noise of the rushing waterfall and fountain highlight both the dramatic atmosphere and the mystery. With the sound crew, we tried to compose a kind of musical and dramatic score containing a number of *leitmotifs* (the clocks, water, the train, the lamps, the insects).

Was this conception of sound already present when you wrote the script?

Yes, I had planned to use a lot of natural sounds to create both atmosphere and effect. Also, there was never any question of looping the girls' dialogue. Even if that meant not always perfectly understanding what they were saying. For a story that's supposed to take place in a location shut off from the world, shooting live sound without picking up any aeroplane or motorway noises was a real challenge. Just as no sounds from the park filter into the houses, no noises were supposed to filter into the park from outside it either, as though it was a "vacuum-packed" world.

Was working with children as hard as people say it is?

Yes and no. You need time. There were major constraints for the youngest girls because you can't make them work more than three or four hours a day. And rightly so, for they tire quickly and whenever they'd had enough we had to invent new tricks to get them back in front of the camera. The hardest scenes were the ones with the group of youngest girls. If just one of the five started playing up, general mayhem quickly broke out.

To play Iris, I chose little seven-year-old Zoé Auclair. I was very lucky to find her. Physically she is very petite and could pass for a six-year-old, but with the extra maturity of a girl one year older. Above all, she has great charisma.

At first I told myself that these little girls were all going to be natural in front of the camera and that I'd be able to let them improvise. But that turned out to be difficult because we gave them a lot of constraints: we used a fixed frame for many shots, which meant the girls weren't allowed to step out of frame and also had to keep certain positions within it, in relation to how I was directing the scene. The costumes were also a constraint.

I had obviously avoided giving them their dialogues to learn. There were few enough dialogues for me to simply tell them what to say ten minutes before the take. During the eight-week shoot my little actresses integrated these different rules well. But oddly enough, they didn't really like improvising; they preferred to obey my directions, as though I was their school mistress. In the end, the fact that they are sometimes a little stiff or passive corresponded well to the whole world of the school.

How did you go about casting them?

My idea was to favour girls who had never worked in front of a camera and look for girls in dance classes, because there was some choreography to perform. I didn't do any classical screen tests. After an initial selection we organised mini dance workshops per age-group. The process ended with a short interview. The casting was completed too late for them to be able to spend any time together before the shoot, but that wasn't such a bad thing. In relation to the plot, it was good for Bérangère Haubruge (Bianca) and Zoé Auclair (Iris) to first meet each other on set.

Given this context, the days when you shot with Marion Cotillard and H  l  ne de Foug  rolles must have been quite different...

The set was entirely organised around the children. We had all regressed. We were dependent on their need to pee, their sudden tired or hungry spells and their various whims. When Marion and H  l  ne arrived, they immediately understood the situation and knew how to make themselves almost invisible; put simply, they had no qualms about playing baby-sitter. They both developed emotional ties with the children that served the story in the film. The tricky thing for them was not to let the children throw them off, to manage to act their scenes despite the girls' sometimes unpredictable reactions.

How did you choose Marion Cotillard and H  l  ne de Foug  rolles for these supporting roles?

I thought of them as soon as it was decided that, to reassure the financiers, I would have to hire famous actresses to play the two teachers, even though they weren't main roles. They both have an image of being modern but I find they both have classical, rather timeless faces that corresponded well with the atmosphere of the film. I also wanted actresses who were very pretty and feminine. Giving H  l  ne the part of a limping spinster took away any clich  d aspect to the role. With Marion, I liked her melancholic air – it went so well with how I imagined the character she plays.

These two teachers are like models of how the girls want to be when they grow up. But there are also problems: one of them limps and the other seems very unhappy. This creates a discrepancy that keeps the mystery going and maintains a kind of sexy confusion that I liked.

For the dance classes and the little theatre ballet, you worked with a choreographer...

Yes. I needed someone with experience and who liked working with children. Someone like Pedro Pauwels, who is a dancer and choreographer. I had enjoyed a small show he had done with children who had never taken dance lessons. It was very pretty and simple, in the spirit of what I had been imagining for the film. I didn't actually want any classical dance, but something freer. Having said that, I imposed quite a few constraints on him: the theatre choreography had to take the restricted number of dancers into account and accommodate the winged costumes, plus I had already chosen all the music the girls would dance to. Then there was the style of the dance: it couldn't seem too contemporary, I wanted it to have a slight 60s feel to it.

A 60s feel?

Yes, the 60s were something of a reference for everyone on set, from costumes to set design. That didn't mean a full reconstruction, of course, rather a trend. I chose the 60s for the slightly quaint old rigidity they had, through which the first signs of freedom could be glimpsed. The utopias of Wedekind's day are echoed by the utopias of the 60s. I doubtless also chose this period because it harks back to my childhood and my first perception of the world, the one that shapes us forever. But once again, the main concern was to maintain a timeless quality, like in dreams.

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