

LES FILMS PELLEAS & LES FILMS DE PIERRE
PRESENT



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
COMPETITION
2023 OFFICIAL SELECTION

ANATOMY OF A FALL

A FILM BY JUSTINE TRIET



2023 – FRANCE – DRAMA – FRENCH, ENGLISH – 150'



SYNOPSIS

For the past year, Sandra, a German writer, her French husband Samuel, and their eleven-year-old son Daniel have lived a secluded life in a remote town in the French Alps. When Samuel is found dead in the snow below their chalet, the police question whether he committed suicide or was killed. Samuel's death is treated as suspicious, presumed murder, and Sandra becomes the main suspect. Little by little the trial becomes not just an investigation of the circumstances of Samuel's death, but an unsettling psychological journey into the depths of Sandra and Samuel's conflicted relationship.

INTERVIEW WITH JUSTINE TRIET - Director

What was the starting point for *Anatomy of a Fall*?

My intention was to create a film that portrays the downfall of a couple's relationship. The concept was to depict the physical and emotional descent of a body in a technical manner, symbolizing the decline of their love story.

This couple has a son who discovers their tumultuous relationship during a trial that scrutinizes every aspect of their past. As the trial unfolds, the boy transitions from a state of complete trust in his mother to one of doubt, marking a crucial turning point in his life. The film follows this transformation closely. In my previous films, children were present but silent, merely existing in the background. However, in this film, I wanted to incorporate the child's perspective into the narrative and juxtapose it with Sandra's, the main character, for a more balanced portrayal of the events.

The film took on the form of an extended interrogation, with scenes shifting from the couple's home to the courtroom, where characters are incessantly questioned. I aimed to bring a sense of realism, approaching a documentary style both in the writing and the cinematography. However, I also wanted to delve deeper into the intricacies of the story and evoke a range of emotions in the audience. In pursuit of this goal, I opted for greater simplicity: the absence of additional music and a raw, unembellished tone that sets this film apart from my earlier works.

The film begins with a disorienting shot of a ball rolling down a flight of stairs...

This obsession with falling is a recurring motif throughout the film, initially in a literal sense. I've long been fascinated with the sensation of "body weight" and what it feels like to fall, which was sparked by the opening credits of *Mad Men*, where a man keeps falling. In my film, we constantly ascend and descend stairs, observing the fall from various angles to unravel how it happened. I wanted to approach the film from a side angle, which is why we introduced the ball as a symbol of the fall, caught by a dog who looks at Sandra, the central character, and sets the stage for the two and a half hour exploration of her story.

The battle of the couple with a child is at the center of the film...

At the heart of the film is the battle between a couple with a child, delving into the complexities of time-sharing in a relationship. It's a theme that, in my opinion, isn't often explored in cinema and raises important questions about reciprocity, trust, and the dynamics of a partnership.

Sandra Voyter, a successful writer, and her husband, a teacher who also writes while homeschooling their son, challenge the traditional couple schema by reversing their roles. Sandra's pursuit of her freedom and will creates an imbalance, leading to an exploration of equality in a relationship that is both powerful and questionable. The film invites us to question our preconceived notions of democracy in a relationship and how it can be derailed by dictatorial impulses and a dimension of rivalry. Despite their struggles, the couple's idealism and refusal to resign themselves to a less-than-perfect situation is admirable. Even in their arguments, which are actually negotiations, they continue to be honest with each other, revealing a deep love that persists despite their challenges.

You co-wrote with Arthur Harari. The script is not adapted from a real story, yet it is full of details, especially legal details, that seem more real than life. Did you call on experts?

Yes, Arthur and I co-wrote the film together, really sharing the work. And we received valuable guidance from a criminal lawyer named Vincent Courcelle-Labrousse. We consulted with him frequently to ensure accuracy in the technical aspects of the story, as well as to gain a better understanding of how French court hearings are conducted. What surprised us was the somewhat disorganized nature of trials in France, which differed greatly from the more structured approach seen in the United States. This allowed me to create a distinctly French film and take a different approach from the more spectacle-driven American courtroom dramas. The decision to present uninterrupted blocks of hearings was a natural one. During post-production, I spent considerable time working with my editor, Laurent Sénéchal, to slow down the pace, keep shots imperfect, and maintain a slightly shaky, raw feel to the film. I didn't want it to be too polished or predictable. In the end, I discovered a new formal pleasure in making this film.

And you wrote specifically with Sandra Hüller in mind, didn't you?

I was eager to collaborate with her again, following our work on *Sibyl*. I wrote the script with her in mind, and that was one of the initial things that sparked my interest. This liberated woman, who was judged for her sexuality, her career, and her motherhood: I believed Sandra would bring complexity and depth to the character, without making it a mere "message". As soon as we started to shoot, I was struck by her conviction and authenticity. She infused every line with a sense of reality that emanated from within her. Sometimes, she even challenged my writing and pushed me to revise certain scenes. She has a palpable presence, and her interpretation of the role left a lasting imprint on the film. By the end of the shoot, I felt as though she had given a part of herself to the project, and that what we captured was a one-of-a-kind performance.

The use of different languages - French, English, and German - adds a layer of complexity to Sandra's character and creates a sense of opacity...

It also maintains a distance between her and the audience as a foreigner on trial in France, who must navigate her way through the languages of her husband and son. Sandra is a complex character with many layers, which the trial will explore. I was particularly interested in portraying the life of a couple who do not speak the same language. This made their negotiation even more concrete, with the idea of a third language serving as neutral ground.

And did you have Samuel Theis in mind since day one?

No, I saw a lot of actors for the role but, believe it or not, the character was already named Samuel! Even though he doesn't have many scenes, he's essential to the story and had to capture our attention immediately. I have to admit, I find him very attractive, with a captivating voice and a soft exterior that hides a deeper, denser layer. I wanted to film him because he has a certain thickness that I love in actors - both physical and internal layers that make for a compelling performance.

And Milo Machado Graner, who plays the child, was he hard to find?

Yes, it was a lengthy process. Cynthia Arra — my long-time collaborator when I work with my actors — and I spent four months casting visually impaired children, but we couldn't find the right one. So, we expanded the search to sighted children for another three months before we finally found Milo. Jill Gagé, a casting assistant, discovered him, and he immediately impressed us with his natural talent. Milo dedicated himself to intensive piano lessons, and together with Cynthia, we consulted with experts in visual impairment to determine the appropriate level of impairment for the character. We decided to go with a mild level of visual impairment, with high myopia that didn't affect peripheral vision. Milo is an incredibly gifted child with exceptional intellectual and emotional capacities and a subtle sense of melancholy.

It's clear that there's a real love of language and verbal sparring in the courtroom scenes, and Antoine Reinartz has a lot to do with that. How did you come to cast him in the role?

I chose him because of the modernity he brought to the character. He adds an otherness to the film and brings the contemporary world into it, which breaks the dusty solemnity of the trial. Although he plays the villain, he portrays a very seductive, devious, and flamboyant character. He speaks on behalf of the deceased, whom we hardly ever see, and must make him endearing to both the jurors and the audience. Antoine brings an arena dimension to the court and portrays the civilized violence of the prosecution.

On the contrary, Swann Arlaud plays a rather fragile character, sensitive, on the defensive...

Yes, I didn't want to stage a cockfight between them. Vincent's character is not portrayed as a bar virtuoso, he is good but not idealized. Swann brings a nuanced performance, an apprehension, because he knows his client and feels more in danger. I found it interesting that he is a kind of doppelgänger of Samuel, that the two share some similarities. It's clear that Sandra and Swann knew each other years ago, and that there is still something between them that is not entirely extinguished.

Vincent Courcelle-Labrousse, our consulting lawyer, had advised us that when friends ask you to defend them, it's always a trap. This idea of a trap, or at least a difficult or impossible distance to overcome, was important for the dynamic of this duo. It's clear that something else is going on, and Sandra probably needs that support. Swann is great at bringing all these dimensions to life without dialogue. It's just there, palpable.

The film has no flashbacks, with one very powerful exception: the argument scene.

From the beginning, I wanted to avoid using flashbacks in the film. I find them unnecessary, and more importantly, I wanted the focus to be on the spoken word. In a trial, truth is elusive, and there is a void that needs to be filled by the spoken word. We only allowed exceptions through the use of sound. And in reality, these exceptions are not flashbacks: in the scene of the argument, it is a sound recording that suddenly materializes on screen, creating a sense of presence. It creates a void and it's almost more powerful than the image, in my opinion: it's both pure presence and ghostly.

There's also the scene where Daniel reenacts his dead father's words, but it belongs to a different category. This time we have the image, but it's an account of a memory, an invention, or at best, a testimony without proof, as pointed out by the public prosecutor.

The courtroom is essentially where our history no longer belongs to us, where it's judged by others who have to piece it together from scattered and ambiguous elements. It becomes fiction, and that's precisely what interests me.

JUSTINE TRIET - Director

Justine Triet is a graduate of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Her first films question the place of the individual within the group. *Sur Place* (2007) was shot during the student demonstrations and *Solférino* (2008) during the presidential elections. In 2009, she directed *Des Ombres dans la Maison* in a township of São Paulo. Her first fiction short, *Vilaine Fille, Mauvais Garçon* (*Two Ships*), won a number of prizes at French and international festivals (European Film Award, Berlinale 2012; Grand Prix, Angers First Look; Grand Prix, Belfort; preselection for best short, 2013 Césars). Her debut feature *La Bataille de Solférino* (*Age of Panic*) was selected for ACID in Cannes 2013 and nominated for a 2014 César in the Best First Film category. *Victoria*, her second feature, opened the Critics' Week in Cannes in 2016. Starring Virginie Efira, the film was nominated for five Césars, including Best Film and Best Actress. *Sibyl*, her third feature, was selected to compete for the Palme d'Or at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. *Anatomy of a Fall* is her fourth feature and also set to premiere in Competition in the Official Selection of Cannes 2023.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2023** ANATOMY OF A FALL
Cannes Film Festival 2023 – Official Selection – Competition

- 2019** SIBYL
Cannes Film Festival 2019 - Official Selection – Competition

- 2016** IN BED WITH VICTORIA
Cannes Critics' Week 2019 - Opening Film

- 2013** AGE OF PANIC
Cannes ACID 2013

- 2011** TWO SHIPS

- 2010** DES OMBRES DANS LA MAISON

- 2009** SOLFÉRINO

- 2007** SUR PLACE

SANDRA HÜLLER

Sandra Hüller studied acting at the renowned University of Dramatic Arts "Ernst Busch" in Berlin. She has received numerous awards for her roles in the theater, and she has been voted actress of the year four times (2010, 2013, 2019 and 2020) in the critics' survey of Theater heute. Since 2018, Sandra Hüller has been a member of the ensemble at the Schauspielhaus Bochum, where she is currently celebrating great successes as "*Hamlet*" and "*Penthesilea*" in the eponymous productions of Johan Simons. Sandra Hüller received numerous awards for her first film main role in Hans-Christian Schmid's feature film "*Requiem*", including the Silver Bear, the German Film Award and the Bavarian Film Award. Also in Maren Ades cult movie "*Toni Erdmann*" Sandra Hüller inspired audiences and critics alike and received for her performance of Ines Conradi the European Film Award, the Toronto Film Critics Association Award, the Malaysia Golden Global Award, the German Film Award and the Bavarian Film Award. *Toni Erdmann* has received numerous national and international awards and in 2017 was the German Oscar candidate for Best Foreign Language Film. Sandra Hüller starred in Justine Triet's film *Sibyl*, for whom she most recently also appeared in *Anatomy of a Fall*. With Jonathan Glazer, she shot *The Zone of Interest* in 2021.

CAST

Sandra Hüller

Sandra

Swann Arlaud

Vincent

Milo Machado Graner

Daniel

Antoine Reinartz

The Advocate General

Samuel Theis

Samuel

Jehny Beth

Marge

Saadia Bentaïeb

Nour

Camille Rutherford

Zoé

Anne Rotger

The Judge

Sophie Fillières

Monica

CREW

Director	Justine Triet
Writer	Justine Triet and Arthur Harari
Producers	Marie-Ange Luciani and David Thion
Associate Producer	Philippe Martin
Director of Photography	Simon Beaufigs
Editor	Laurent Sénéchal
Actor Directing Collaborator	Cynthia Arra
First Assistant Director	Benjamin Papin
Script	Clémentine Schaeffer
Sound	Julien Sicart, Fanny Martin, Jeanne Delplancq, Olivier Goinard
Set Design	Emmanuelle Duplay
Costume	Isabelle Pannetier
Production Manager	Julien Flick
Set Manager	Benjamin Goumard
Production	Les Films Pelléas, Les Films de Pierre
Coproduction	France 2 Cinéma, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma
With the Support of	Canal+, Ciné+
With the Participation of	France Télévisions, Le Pacte, mk2 films, Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée, the Région Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, the Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, the Département de la Charente-Maritime in partnership with the CNC
In Association with	Cofinova 18, Cinéimage 17, Indéfilms 11, Cinécap 5, Cineventure 7 and 8
Developped with the Support of French Distribution International Sales	Cinéimage 16 Développement Le Pacte mk2 films

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