

HADEWIJCH

Directed by

Bruno Dumont

Winner Fipresci Prize Toronto Film Festival



France 2009 / 105 minutes / Certificate: tbc

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Hadewijch

Director	Bruno Dumont
Screenplay	Bruno Dumont
Photography	Yves Cape
Sound	Philippe Lecoœur and Emmanuel Crozet
Editing	Guy Lecomte
Costumes	Annie Morel-Paris and Alexandra Charles
Set	Jean Marc Tan Tan Ba
Producers	Jean Brehat, Rachid Bouchareb and Muriel Merlin
Production company	3B PRODUCTIONS
Co-production companies	ARTE France CINEMA CRRAV Nord Pas de Calais – LE FRESNOY – ZDF – ARTE – HERBSTFILMS Produktion (Germany)

In association with Cofinova 5 With the support of CNC, Région Ile-de-France, Région Nord-Pas de Calais

France 2009 / 105 minutes / 35 mm / Colour / 1.66 / Dolby SRD



Hadewijch

CAST

Céline / Hadewijch

Julie SOKOLOWSKI

Nassir

Karl SARAFIDIS

Yassine

Yassine SALIME

David

David DEWAELE

Mother Superior

Brigitte MAYEUX-CLERGET

Prioress

Michelle ARDENNE

The Novice

Sabrina LECHENE

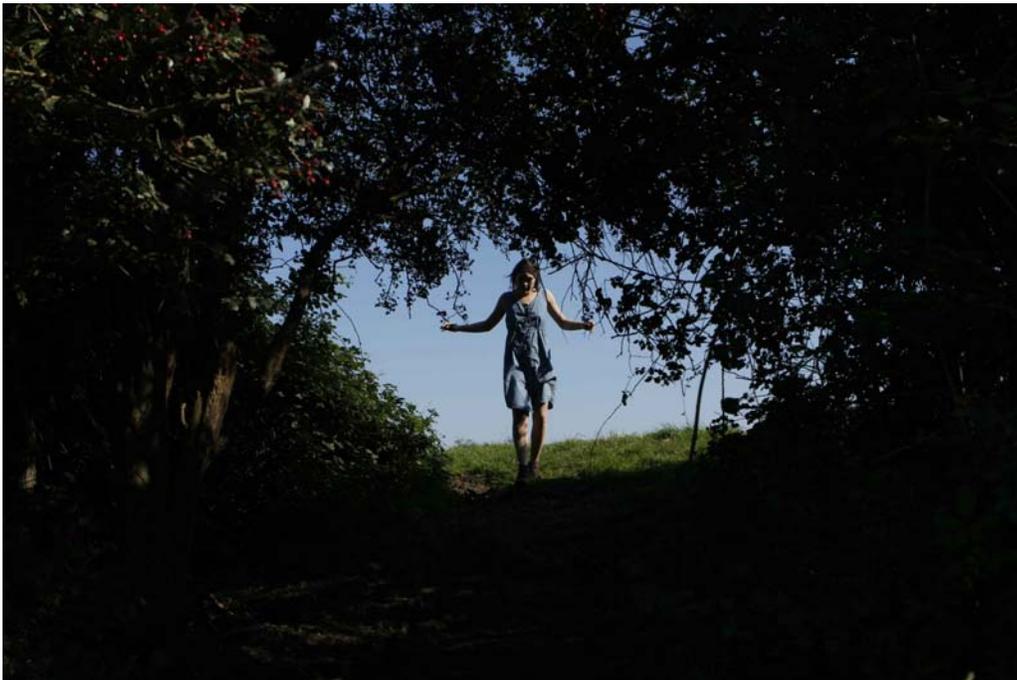
Céline's Mother

Marie CASTELAIN

Céline's Father

Luc-François BOUYSSONIE

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SYNOPSIS

Céline, a theology student, takes the name of Hadewijch, a 13th century mystic from Brabant, as her name for her novitiate. But shocked by the blind, ecstatic faith of Hadewijch, the mother superior tells her she must leave the convent and find her vocation in the world.

Hadewijch once again becomes Céline, 20, the daughter of a French minister. She meets Yassine, a North African from the banlieues, who introduces her to his brother Nassir, a committed Muslim and religious instructor. Her passionate love of God and her despair at God's invisibility, her rage, and her desire for self-sacrifice lead her, between grace and madness, off along dangerous paths.

Bruno Dumont

Filmography

1997	La Vie de Jésus Camera d'Or Special mention, Cannes 1997 European Film Awards – Discovery of the Year
1999	L'Humanité Winner Grand Prix , Best Actor, Best Actress Cannes 1999
2003	Twentynine Palms
2006	Flandres Winner Grand Prix , Cannes 2006
2009	Hadewijch Winner FIPRESCI Prize Toronto 2009
2011	Hors Satan Un Certain Regard Canned 2011

Interview with Bruno Dumont by Jean-Sébastien Chauvin. Paris, September 2009

A Thirteenth century Flemish poet and mystic gives the film its title...

The discovery of her Visions and of her mystical experience was a wonder and the start of the project. Through making films, I have undoubtedly been, in a natural way, slowly drawn towards a more mystical dimension of the world. The mystical experience is rather like an additional, hidden and mysterious dimension. In filming or in editing shots, I would see things come to life, at once present and invisible, such things that intelligence thrown into disarray would no longer be able to respond to. Cinema and mystical experience enjoy a certain proximity in their relationship to the real and to appearances, and in the power of sensations they give rise to and unveil. I do not try to understand things that mysteriously arise. Mystics are often ordinary people who live a religious experience which is not necessarily "understood": it is rapture. They talk about it, they see it. The need to understand has disappeared. As for myself, I film things that I feel but that I do not understand well. But this is no loss. On the contrary, it is a joy.

When you get an idea for a film, does it come to you as visions?

When I start, I need to write in a literary way to enter the vision and trance of the character and of the action, including write things that I won't shoot. But it does not matter. A script is an incantation, a prayer, nothing else. And as soon as you start filming, it dies, you inevitably go back to the real, raw, a long way from the text, to confront this reality and battle against it. Mise-en-scène is in reality totally unpredictable, it is a stoic asceticism, a desire for what comes... I test the actor in some actions to see what happens under their constraints, but with his or her freedom and creativity.

In other words?

Julie Sokolowski who plays the main role is not a believer. She has composed her role as Hadewijch by drawing on her own desire to love and be loved. She has transposed it into God for the sake of illusion and representation. This process is fruitful because the character awakens through it, with fragility and sincerity. With a terrible humanity.

Hadewijch

Faced with your films, one can be under the impression that you are a director of control. Here, on the contrary, you talk to us about accidents, about fragility.

Paradoxically, accidents must be clearly seen and felt by the spectator. When, at the beginning of the film, Céline comes back to the tomb of Christ and cries – by accident, because Julie is tired- her back faces us and then she turns around, facing the camera. With each take, when she turned around, Julie would more or less lower her head. I wanted to see her head up. We've had to do about ten takes for her to finally offer her clear eyes to the viewer. In the past, I have sometimes done long shots and been so far from the actor that one misses a gesture, an expression which consequently is not really in the film. Today I can keep a slightly blurry shot if I think that the actor is much stronger in it than in another, sharper take.

Has your technique remained the same between *The Life of Jesus* and *Hadewijch*?

I have shot in 1.66 for the first time, not in Cinemascope like for my other films. It's an almost square format which lends itself better to *Hadewijch* since it is an involuntarily less spectacular film with a more intimate approach. It is a way to be more in the character's interiority. The idea is that of a cloister. It is important then to be as close as possible to this cloistered character.

How did you choose Julie Sokolowski?

I met Julie by chance after a screening of *Flanders* in the north of France. I was stuck by her way of being. I came back to her after months of fruitless research. At the beginning she was not interested in acting at all, which I quite liked. She was about to go to the US to work as an au pair. We then corresponded for a few months. It was a revelation, for her and for me, that she was not a believer, that she was outside the things of God, and that, in order to approach the role, I had to start from her human love. She woke up to *Hadewijch* through a comparison, and this is the true way of a Mystic.

You look for an embodiment rather than for an actor?

The actor is embodiment. Julie is slightly angelical, subtle, naive, and full of charm. We shot the film trying to respect the chronology so as to allow her to gain ground. Her first prayers in the convent, so clumsy, so unsure, were here so basic and human that I myself embraced

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Hadewijch

her manners and adopted her ways. How to work on something so abstract as the love of God? Some things are so inaccessible and difficult to explain that the only way to get to them is to use analogy, resemblance, and in this case through Julie herself, by directing her in her composition of Hadewijch through the transposition of her love life. Some Mystics do not function differently. Take for example a theologian who, to explain his mystical theology to monks, had sent out his book alongside a small painting – a self-portrait by a Flemish painter – to evoke his words by analogy. He thought that in this way, out of resemblance, he could really lead them from the human to the divine. Resemblance is very particular to cinema which itself makes use of the metaphor of material things. What can a forest or rain evoke for example? Inevitably, the viewer works according to this principle, under a mode which itself is visionary.

It is quite paradoxical to take as a departure point a Flemish poet and mystic who was filled with visions, whereas your character, *Hadewijch*, who bears her name, is on the contrary prevented from accessing her visions.

Cinema is itself a matter of vision. Here the character is into contemplation, in search of the embodiment of the body of Christ. That's what the poet Hadewijch said. She had visions in which God came to her and she could touch him. I was very interested in taking a young woman of today and giving her the same quest. Céline [Hadewijch] suffers from the absence of Christ, an absence which makes her the perfect lover. It is a definition of absolute love which, unlike human love, cannot be embodied. On the screen, Céline is thus *pure love* and the embodiment of this feeling; action itself, the other characters and the sets are so many expressions of her inner self. For me, this religious dimension is nothing but a theatre, in other words an idealised representation of human love, its metaphor. This theatre is like poetry, it engenders a secular form of sacred which is no longer the prerogative of the church. Indeed the film sorts out the religious question by showing the two characters, Hadewijch and Nassir, hitting the brick wall. It brings the sacred back to the human. Today, the religious straightjacket is so strong that all this is difficult to explain.

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Nassir holds a very precise discourse on God and on violence

As much as Céline's discourse. Céline has a literal and contemplative belief in Christian love. Nassir realises his Muslim faith in real and political action. They encounter each other in God, each in their own faith. They become God's military wing.

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Hadewijch

A few years ago, you said that you would not be able to shoot in Paris. How did you proceed then?

It is very problematic to shoot in Paris. There is a constant humming noise, the incessant traffic. I am not interested in filming Paris as such, with all this agitation. It is somehow too real. Truth resides in the relation we have to the real. There is a portion of objectivity and another of subjectivity. The real has to be there and at the same time the artist must transform it in order to restore the impression that the real produces on him. The core of art is the real but at the same time the real has nothing to tell us. All forms of art are paths to access the real, but the real in itself is non-existent. It has to be represented. In Paris there are so many layers of superimposed sound that they end up forming a mass I can no longer intervene in. Furthermore, Paris has been filmed so much that the poetic power of the shots quickly wears out. One is reduced to filming only recognizable signs. I did some shots of the Notre-Dame Cathedral but I ended up throwing them all away. It was beautiful but boring. That's why Paris is reduced to a few basic things in the film. My Paris is rather barren.

***Hadewijch* is a film that does not cease to move from place to place: the North, the suburbs, the Middle East...**

It is important that the character of Hadewijch should travel a lot, that she be transported all the way to the Middle East. She has to endure different states, to see with her own eyes what Nassir tells her; she has to do her own journey, physical and interior. I filmed the suburbs for the first time and without any particular joy. The suburbs are social spaces, they carry within them a social varnish that hardly interests me. That's why I often empty the shots. I am not a filmmaker who gives an account of the reality of life for French people. My training in philosophy pushes me to go towards more essential matters. My actors from the North of France are more like figures of expression rather than 'social' beings, and in this way they can move a Japanese or an American viewer. I start with the exterior, from the mortal coil before going towards the interiority. It is quite paradoxical in so far as things are palpable and concrete in the images whereas the whole can assume a certain degree of abstraction. Abstraction is cinematographic, abstraction happens in the storyboard and in the editing. Ambiguity also has value for the non-professional actors I use: they are both very true and sometimes their acting also sounds off key. I need these two dimensions to lead viewers towards slightly surrealistic narratives while keeping their feet on the ground.

In the same order of ideas, the image of the heroine praying in front of the tomb of the Christ, itself located behind bars, is a very concrete one, and at the same time it

Hadewijch

contains an obvious symbolic weight about the impossibility for the heroine to access the body of Christ.

Cinema functions on a need to transfigure. This transfiguration belongs to the spectator and I can only pave the way to access it. I'd rather not formulate transcendence, otherwise it would disappear. It is important to find characters, shots and forms that are suggestive enough for viewers to go beyond the image they see. You're precisely doing this by asking me the question. The idea is to access depth through the image surface and the real. Mystical experience is exactly that: it is to go through appearances in order to access another dimension. What fascinates me in cinema is the 'conversation' that I can have with the viewer through a film. In the end, the goal is not the film but the spectator who wraps himself in it. I must leave a space for the spectator. Cinema is a means of transportation, just like a painting or a piece of music, and it penetrates and spreads out inside the viewer.

You take the time to film music twice, inside the church and then during a rock concert.

Cinema is also an art of the time. Music in cinema, on an action, increases its sensation more immediately and superficially. Music increases film's vividness and its perception depending on what use one makes of it. Here music is an additional ornament to express Hadewijch's flamboyant heart and joy.

The image of the explosion from outside while everything else is silent, is rather unexpected. It is also a beautiful shot.

The explosion is beautiful. There is an aesthetic of evil, a fascination felt by the hideous element that lies dormant in all of us. It needs to be endured and represented, raised to the viewer's gaze and fought against by him or her, through *mise-en-scène* and the viewer's awakening it engenders. The viewer's pity and fear are some of the secret workings of art in general and film in particular. The glorification of evil has moral virtues - like a vaccination - it is the blossoming of tragedy. Beauty and good conscience only make us deeply stupid: the opposite is true as well. It's the representation of the struggle between our feelings that is the truth.

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Translation Diane Gabrysiak