

‘Dewaele, “a lord, dark and inhabited”’ by Gerard Lefort, *Libération*, 17 March 2013



David Dewaele in *Hors Satan* – Photo 38 Productions

David Dewaele died on 27 February in Hazebrouck, northern France, following a stroke. He was 37 years old. He was unknown except to those who saw him in three films by Bruno Dumont: *Flanders* (2006), *Hadewijch* (2009) and especially *Hors Satan* (2011)... he is remembered for his handsome and broken face, his grey-blue eyes, his dry hair, and above all the mystery of his acting, at once hyper present and absent.

On Saturday, Bruno Dumont, returning from the promotion of his new film, *Camille Claudel 1915*, stated that he is ‘very saddened’ for the man he immediately named his ‘alter ego’: ‘We were from the same country, the same landscape, in the vicinity of Calais, Hazebrouck, Wissant, but from different backgrounds. A working-class kid, damaged during childhood, then raised by a beloved grandmother, he turned a bit of a bad guy, a bit of a thief, often in jail, torn between his adventures in bars and his conversion to Islam, as well as his problems with drugs and alcohol. A “*misérable*” in the noble sense of Victor Hugo. The word that comes to mind: a lord, violent, dark but inhabited by an exceptional sensitivity.’

The two men met during the preparation of *Flanders*, through the unemployment office in Hazebrouck. ‘David came to the casting without any kind of project. Actor? He had no idea what it meant. This or something else, it was just a small job that would pay for his cigarettes and beer. During the interview, he spoke of his life a little, not much. He was not the talkative type. And he lied too, obviously. But his earthly presence, at once tender and threatening, was immediate. This materiality became even more visible during the first screen tests.’

David Dewaele... was then given a small part in *Flanders* and another in *Hadewijch*. His great breakthrough was *Hors Satan*. ‘When I told him that he would play the main character, the “guy”, David said: “Are you crazy? I won’t be able to do it.” He of course managed to do it. Paralyzed by fear but still moving. He knew how to stand in

front of a camera and make it an ally. In the morning he would arrive in a kind of fog. All day we were under the impression that he was still dead on his feet. This state suited the character he was playing: a man constantly elsewhere, too crazy to be part of real life. He liked his face to be beautiful. And he was. He inspired great ideas in me...'

To discuss the role, Dumont shows Dewaele portraits painted by Flemish masters, or by Raphael. 'He was very interested in the fingers' position. He would scrutinize the painting and let out a "Oh, Fuck!" He understood it all.' An accomplice? A friend? 'Better that this. We were equidistant and complementary, walking on the side of the same path.'

Translation Diane Gabrysiak