



— BLOODY ORANGES

A Film By Jean-Christophe Meurisse

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Jean-Christophe Meurisse

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SAT 10 th	11:30 AM	@ OLYMPIA 7 (market)
SAT 10 th	8.30 PM	@ SALLE BAZIN

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— BLOODY ORANGES



— SYNOPSIS

France, today.

Simultaneously, a retired couple overwhelmed by debt tries to win a dance contest, as the minister of economy is suspected of tax evasion, and a teenage girl encounters a sexual maniac, while a young lawyer attempts to climb the social ladder.

When the shoe drops, the winner won't necessarily be the one we expected.

—A CONVERSATION WITH JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MEURISSE



How was a film like *Bloody Oranges* born? Do you start by writing alone, or with your co-writers Amélie Philippe and Yohann Gloaguen?

Jean-Christophe Meurisse – I start by writing alone. After a first draft, Amélie Philippe and Yohann Gloaguen join me to develop the script. Amélie Philippe continues to work with me on the script at every stage of production: script, shooting and editing. Often many screenplays are written from books, I write from news stories. For instance, the young girl who castrates her rapist, it happened in the United States in 2015. She made him eat his own testicles, there was a trial with a popular jury and she was unanimously acquitted. Self-defense in the United States is supposed to last twenty minutes, but she tortured her rapist for four hours, which was a problem! Anyway, I was wondering what would happen if I put balls in the microwave: would they bubble, would they smoke, etc.? That was the first image of the film I had in mind. On the shoot, we used rooster testicles, there is a region in France where they eat that stuff.

Was your fraudulent minister inspired by Jerome Cahuzac?

Yes, and so many others! I remember him on the news saying that French people had to tighten their belts. What we also see a lot of on the news is elderly couples who commit suicide because they are over-indebted through a series of small accumulations facilitated by the credit system. It caught my attention. Then I thought of the rock contest for the aspect of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*. And with my slightly sadistic side, I made the old couple lose in the end.

Do you write the individual stories first or do you think about the overall structure first?

The character-links came to me very quickly, as well as the bridges between the different stories, with a game of parallels and alternations. In a mosaic film like *Blood Oranges*, the difficulty is to find the echoes between the stories, and not lose characters along the way. These echoes must be organic rather than intellectual or theoretical. For instance, the over-indebted seniors respond to the tax evading minister without it being explicit. This ends up giving a vision of French society.

Another echo, the young girl who has just lost her virginity and then meets a sex maniac.

This deranged character could be heroic at first: the one who avenges us of injustice. Then, when this deranged person meets the young girl, we are ashamed to have felt a little sympathy for him. I find it interesting that the characters' trajectories are not binary. This film is a western, the meeting of many bad guys, with a social aspect as well. The danger when you are political is to fall into militancy, I hope to have avoided that. When I make films, I don't do "national education", and even less politics in the partisan sense.

***Bloody Oranges* has no exposition scene, we dive directly into a discussion that quickly becomes a jubilant shouting match.**

This is my way of doing things in the theater. Even if cinema and theater are different, both have in common the characters... Indeed, I don't care too much about exposition scenes. It's also a game with today's cinema spectator: spectators are very intelligent animals who understand the

codes at a glance. The goal is to surprise them. The risk with an exposition scene is that the spectator understands everything too quickly.

This opening scene, like many others afterwards, is remarkably written. And yet, one has the feeling that the actors are improvising, as if we were witnessing the scene live.

It's a mixture of both. I write the setting, the situation, the themes, but then I like to hear the actor's own words. An actor is never as good or as accurate as when he is not in a state of interpretation. When an actor thinks about the words he's going to say, he's not thinking about how he has to play, and that's when he is right. Throwing yourself into the void, into the ultra-present, is the best. Well, others have done it before me, from Cassavetes to Pialat...

For example, the "Fringe Rock", is it written or improvised?

It was found by the actress Charlotte Laemmel. I rehearse a lot before shooting, without writing, we breathe each other, we try things... For instance, when she says "rock with fringes", we don't write it down, but I told her "we'll do it again". The same goes when Fred Tousch insists to say "rock" in the American way instead of "rock" the French way. We keep the ideas in reserve, then afterwards, we let the cameras roll, it can last thirty minutes or an hour. Fortunately we now use digital!

When Ghislaine Londez breaks down and screams at the end of the scene, is this an indication from you or is she going off on her own?

It was her, in the momentum of the scene. From her offended reaction to the disability, I said "go for it!". I direct, but not in the sense of an actor's director, I see myself more as an agitator, I shake up the particles. The way I work is a bit like jazz bands: excellent soloists who manage to improvise with each other and form a collective. Ghislaine Londez, Vincent Dedienne, Fred Tousch and the others improvise together in this scene. But I don't have any rules. Some scenes are more written out, some are not, the method varies according to the needs of each sequence.

The dialogue on arrogance between Denis Podalydès and Alexandre Steiger seems remarkably written.

It is totally improvised. Denis and Alexandre are virtuosos. Furthermore, we had not rehearsed because there was no time. In the film, the scene lasts four minutes but they improvised for an hour! That sequence was enough to make a movie, like "My Dinner with André". Alexandre and Denis know each other well, this dialogue was a real game between them.

On the other hand, the scene where the minister arrives at the sex maniac's house seems more written out.

Yes, it was written, cut out, prepared. But even within this scene, there is the madness of the actor who plays the maniac, Fred Blin. I told him "you have to be a Diogenes, a cynic in the Greek sense" - because cynicism is a totally overused term today. The true cynic in the original sense is the one who questions everything but with humor. Today, we would say ironic rather than cynical. In short, I told Fred, "question everything, but with a smile". Well, afterwards, there is the poisoning, the sodomy, then the rape of the girl, but before that, the scene could have taken place in a tea room, everything is kind of mellow, but with an underlying violence. This character has a very leftist side to him, very critical of capitalism.

The maniac sequence is reminiscent of John Boorman's Deliverance, because of the sodomy and the presence of the pig.

Great movie! Except that in Deliverance, it's real "monsters" who are playing, thinking of the teenager who plays the banjo. Of course we're reminded of *Deliverance*, or Sam Peckinpah's films. The American indie cinema of the seventies is my favorite period.

You have divided *Bloody Oranges* into two distinct parts, separated by Gramsci's quote about the world that is dying and the world that is slow in coming: the first "day" part evokes the corrosive comedies of Chabrol and the second "night" part is reminiscent of the period of American cinema that you mention.

I like Chabrol a lot. *The Ceremony* is a masterpiece. He was very good at dismantling the bourgeoisie. And in the second part of *Bloody Oranges*, yes, we see the monsters, as in American cinema, as in the Coen brothers. The Americans knew how to film monsters better than the French, except for Chabrol. When you see Javier Bardem in *No Country for Old Men*, it's obvious. Americans have the culture of the character and they are so strong that when a villain is well embodied, you could watch him drink milk for an hour. Between the Actor's studio and comic books, there is something that fascinates me and I would like to achieve that.

We could also take a long look at your stalker in his most daily gestures.

When he feeds his pig, it was a written and composed picture. He feeds the pig pork sausages, which makes the pig a cannibal. On the set, it was forbidden out of respect for the animal, so we gave him vegetable sausages, but the idea of pig cannibalism is there. The great sadists in movies can be fascinating, as in Tarantino's films.

Because they represent everything that we are not or that we repress in real life?

Yes. That's what cinema is for.

The girl goes through a whole journey in one night: as if she was leaping ahead in a very short time.

I wanted her to go through different stages in one cathartic night throughfilm. Lilith Grasmug is an amazing actress. There is the cliché that women are subjected to the brutality of men when they lose their virginity: this is undoubtedly a reality but I wanted it to be the opposite, it is the boy who is most afraid. In a way, there is something deranged about her. In this film, there is a moral: you can always meet someone crazier than yourself. And the clothes don't make the man. The minister is a villain, he meets a villain greater than himself, and this villain will meet an even greater villain, and it is her.

Except that she doesn't attack, she defends herself.

It's true, she replies. But her reply is extremely brutal. That's what interested me, to see all the destinies rush into the night. To me, everything is acceptable in order to find the living. Pialat did that, Kéchiche too... My films are first and foremost an accumulation of rushes. My real writing work takes place while editing. When Godard said "shooting is the place of unconsciousness, editing is the place of consciousness", this is completely true for me. I want to remain unconscious during the shooting, and do whatever I want, to remain childish, regressive. And afterwards, in the editing, we have the distance, it is the place of the dramaturgy, the desire, the politics. It is where we refine, reduce, with Flora Volpelière, the editor, and Amélie Philippe, the artistic collaborator. We go towards what we want to say.

In comparison to all the monsters, the couple of indebted seniors are the good guys of the film, they embody lasting love, benevolence. The scene where they commit suicide is very powerful. Does it represent a tragedy or a form of paradoxical, desperate, magnificent victory over the banks?

They say it: "Fuck those bankers! ". In their gesture, there is indeed a form of panache. I saw my ruined grandparents die of sadness. With the couple in the film, there is this "we'd rather die than kneel down" aspect, but also the dark romanticism of the story. Their suicide is also an act of desperate love.

You said, with the editing you go towards what you want to say. So what did you want to say with this film?

I am wary of partisan labels, but let's just say that I wanted to express the common sense of the left, if the left exists. At the same time, I wanted to avoid the left-wing curate side. The scene in the ministry where they discuss reforms' ideas to earn money is what sums up my point. One might think that I am exaggerating but the reality is even worse than what I show, I know because we were advised by Benoit Hamon (a former French Minister). Some of the ideas that have been put forward for real in ministerial meetings are in the film. One would be surprised to see that on the left, too, there are

sometimes strange ideas circulating.

We feel that your film leans to the left but that you also hose down political correctness, and the "soft" left, as you do in the ministerial meeting, or in the opening scene when the discussion talks about disability?

What I find interesting when you show debates in a film is to show the thesis, the antithesis and to add caustic humor, that's what makes it come alive. I don't take sides either, cinematographically, so as not to become Manicheist and so that everyone can identify with the debate in question. My aim is not to make a leftist film or not, but to open up. I am trying to appeal to common sense, to the spirit of fairness, because we live in a time when there are too many lies. But I could also talk about the "poor bastards", no problem. In cinema, you have to avoid Manicheism at all costs, otherwise, one part of the audience closes up and the other adheres to it without any distance. *Bloody Oranges* is political, but it does not belong to a political party. It shows a critical vision of the French society but the best tribute that an artist can pay to his country, it is to criticize it. Bloody oranges are the characters, they are us, French people. Plus, there is a ring to "oranges sanguines", it sounds good, like *Chiens de Navarre* (theater company created by Jean-Christophe Meurisse).

Let's talk about the team, the actors, starting with Frédéric Blin, who is quite crazy in the role of the madman.

Fred Blin is new to the Chiens de Navarre family. He comes from a troupe of clowns, the "Chiche Capon". I also saw him say a serious text at the Avignon Festival and I found him very funny and very political. I called him, he knew Les Chiens de Navarre and we immediately hit it off. He is very gentle but naturally conveys a certain violence. I was looking for an actor who was both funny and disturbing and Fred seemed the obvious choice. It's the first time he's had a role like that in film and I like to bring new actors into my crew. To have a style, a tone in cinema, is also done with a group of actors. Desplechin started out like that, with his crew.

We are happy to see Christophe Paou again in an important role in cinema a few years after *Stranger by the Lake*.

He burst through the screen in *Stranger by the Lake*! I have known him for a long time, he is an extraordinary theater actor. He has something frightening with his steel blue eyes, very prominent cheekbones, an almost prehistoric physique. From the audition, he did it the old fashioned way, very professional, he was immediately the character. I hope that after this film, he will have more film proposals, he is one of our best actors.

Lorella Cravotta and Olivier Saladin are really part of the Deschiens group.

Yes, they came to us through my wife and collaborator, Amélie Philippe, who knew Olivier and the Deschiens. Lorella and Olivier are old warriors of laughter, and I made them play more dramatic parts, it was important for me. It's easier to put funny actors in drama than the opposite. But their suicide scene remains funny. It felt right for them to join us. Above all, beyond the comedic side, they are excellent actors.

Alexandre Steiger is perfect in the part of the uncomfortable class defector, at ease nowhere.

He has been a Chien de Navarre for a long time. He's also a great writer, an author, he's had a lot of supporting roles in movies. I love working with him and I'm very happy to show him. I wrote the part for him. Alexandre can convey many contradictory things: he can be nice or obnoxious, rich or poor, childish or rebellious, he is a total actor.

You mentioned Lilith Grasmug, who goes through different states with the same talent.

It took us a long time to cast this character. Lilith embodies today's youth who hunger for truth and justice. I don't know this youth well, it gives me hope, but at the same time, it may be tougher, more violent than we were. I am very curious to see how they will overthrow a certain self-righteousness.

Beside your group, there are also famous guests, such as Blanche Gardin: she has only one scene, but exceptional.

I will continue to work with her, she is very close to me. In real life, she has a gutter punk side, Blanche. I entrusted the first roles to people of my group and the second roles to stars.

Can you say a few more words about Denis Podalydès, who is brilliant, although out of character.

He has several engines at the same time. He's always hot because he plays at the Comédie Française all the time. He knew and appreciated Les Chiens de Navarre and he said yes right away to *Bloody Oranges*, without reading the script. I like this non-calculating, non-career side. He is simply greedy to play the game, the texts, the cinema. You can only work with him for the right reasons. It's the same with Blanche, who is a bit like a degenerate cousin to me, I say it affectionately. I feel I have known her in another life and of having done crazy stuff with her: we have the same look, she thinks like me that humor is fundamental. I have seen her shows, and not only does she make the entire audience laugh, but she also takes away people's anxieties. You can feel that laughter is political, that it is a means of survival. For me too: laughter is the fuse, the resistance, it's what we have left. As Beckett said, "in the face of the worst, laughter". Laughter is wild, it is an indomitable intelligence and it frightens the powers that be or the right-thinking. I advocate laughter. There are people who tell sad things with sadness, I tell sad things with laughter.

Fred Tousch is very funny when he says "wrock" (in the american way) instead of "rock" (à la française).

He is a street clown, and was for a long time partner with Edouard Baer. I like people who like to make people laugh and who do it well. Behind good laughter, there must be a heap of revolt, melancholy, tragedy. As Oscar Wilde said, you have to go down to the mines to be able to make people laugh.

We also see Vincent Dedienne, in a very small part.

People know him as a columnist for *Barthès* (a French T.V host) but he is far from being just that. He comes from the comedy school of Saint Etienne, he has worked with the sharpest directors of the public theater, he can play in a commercial comedy or come to make an appearance at my place... I like his immense curiosity and above all, he is a very good actor. There, he was in the middle of the *Chiens de Navarre*, he very quickly felt the stage, the improvisation. I think this guy will have a very interesting career because of his choices, his intelligence, his talent as an actor.

You mentioned your editor, Flora Volpelière.

She was awarded a Cesar for *Les Misérables*. We did a huge job. For each scene, we went from twenty minutes to fifteen, then ten, then six, then three. Can you imagine the patience it took? With Flora, everything is possible, she looks at everything like a huge chessboard and she arranges everything, she is a technical genius. We were together in turmoil for three months, eight hours a day.

Your director of photography, Javier Ruiz-Gomez, was already with you on *Apnea*. Is he part of your crew?

Yes, he was already on my first short film. He is a pure product of the FEMIS but he is also an adventurer. He has no pre-established method, he's ready to try anything, fixed camera, handheld, two cameras, three cameras... He loves actors, knows how to film them. Javier is also a great cinephile, he has seen everything. We don't have the same tastes, but I'm interested: I like it when two planets meet and it creates, in cinema or theater, a third planet. For me, making art is a way to meet the Other, a way to reconcile.

***Bloody oranges* has a grating, corrosive tone, which will perhaps divide. Are you afraid of criticism?**

I love criticism, I have been reading it regularly for a long time. I know one thing, the most important for a work or an artist is that it is talked about, good or bad, it doesn't matter. Art

must divide. If it divides, there is debate, and if there is debate, there is vitality. As the character played by Denis would say, you have to be on the edge of indecency. Not completely in, but on the edge. I think that defines all my work. And this film.

— BIOGRAPHY

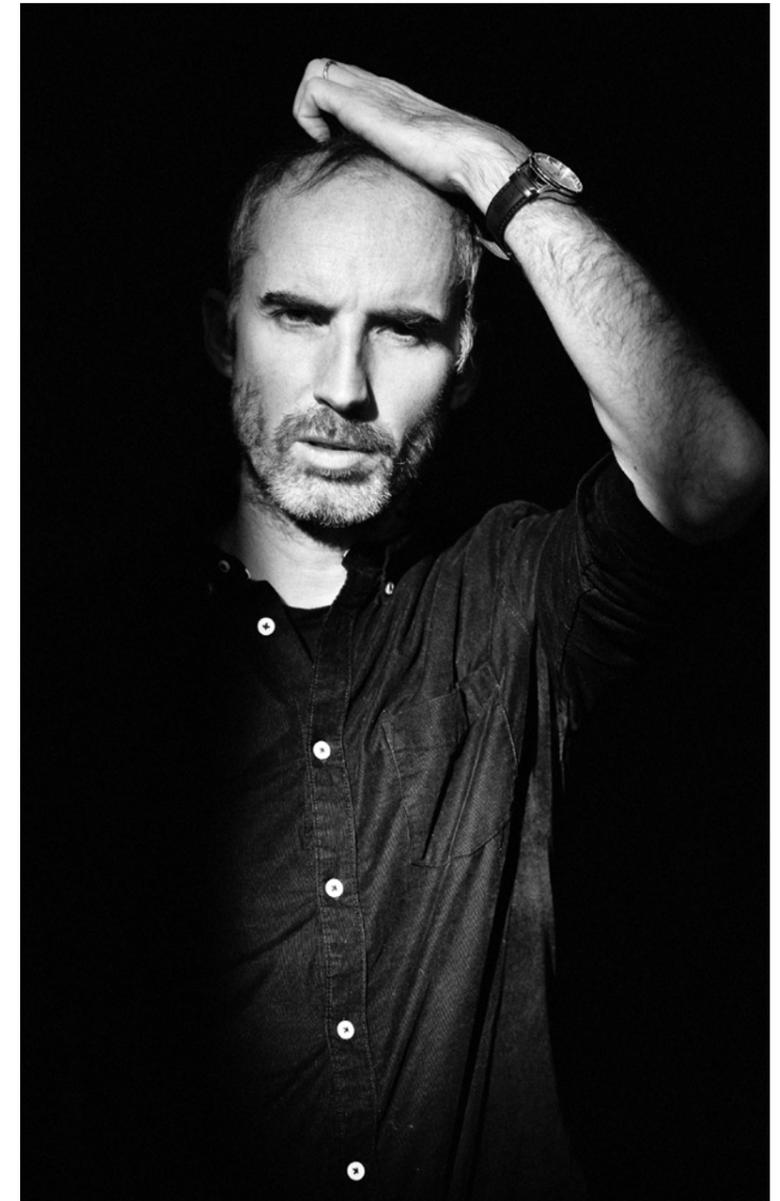
JEAN-CHRISTOPHE MEURISSE

After training as an actor, Jean-Christophe Meurisse created the *Chiens de Navarre* company in 2005, directing shows for the theater. His plays have been noticed and internationally acclaimed by critics and audience. The most recent works includes 'Jusque dans vos bras' (2017), 'Tout le monde ne peut pas être orphelin' (2019) and 'La Peste c'est Camus mais la grippe est-ce Pagnol?' (2020).

In addition, Jean-Christophe Meurisse directed in 2013 his first medium-length film 'Il est des Nôtres', awarded with several awards, including the Audience and Best Actor Awards at the Silhouette Festival in Paris (September 2013) or the Ciné+ Grand Prize at the Brive Festival (April 2014).

In 2015, he directed his first feature film 'Apnee' which premiered at Cannes Critics' Week in 2016. The film won the Jury Prize (best direction) at the International Cult Film Festival of Trouville-sur-mer in 2016. The film was nominated in the best first film category at the French 'Lumières Award' in January 2017.

Jean-Christophe is regional curling champion in 2016, 2017 and 2018 with his club AS Pontivy.



FILMOGRAPHY

JEAN-CHRISTOPHE

MEURISSE



2021	Bloody Oranges
2016	Apnée
2013	Il Est Des Nôtres (short film)

CAST

Alexandre Steiger

Christophe Paou

Lilith Grasmug

Lorella Cravotta

Olivier Saladin

Fred Blin

Denis Podalydès, Sociétaire De La Comédie Française

With The Participation Of Blanche Gardin

With the participation of Vincent Dedienne

Céline Fuhrer

Florence Janas

Anthony Paliotti

With The Participation Of Patrice Laffont

CREW

Director:	Jean-Christophe Meurisse
Artistic Collaborator :	Amélie Philippe
Script :	Jean-Christophe Meurisse with the collaboration of Amélie Philippe & Yohann Gloaguen
Line producers:	Louise Krieger and Anne-Claire Créancier
Director of photography:	Javier Ruiz-Gomez
Editor:	Flora Volpelière
Sound :	Lucas Héberlé
Set design:	Hervé Redoules
Costumes :	Sophie Rossignol
Make-up :	Alexandra Brelin
Assistant Director :	Agnès Guilbault
Production :	Rectangle Productions, Mamma Roman
Producers :	Alice Girard, Marine Bergère, Romain Daubeach
Country of production:	France
International Sales:	Best Friend Forever

