



Only the Animals (Seules les bêtes)
(France/Germany 2020)

Spoiler alert: You may prefer to read this review after the screening

DIRECTOR : Dominik Moll
RUNNING TIME : 118mins
RATING : M

Synopsis:

Following the disappearance of glamorous housewife Evelyne Ducat in the French highlands, the lives of five people inextricably linked to Evelyne are brought together to devastating effect as the local police investigate the case.

Review: Jordan Mintzer

Human foibles are the true culprits in *Only the Animals (Seules les bêtes)*, a new thriller from French writer-director Dominik Moll. Spreading a murder mystery across two continents and chopping it up into a *Rashomon*-style narrative, the film can be a bit low on suspense in places but remains intriguing enough to keep you guessing till the last twist.

Adapting Colin Niel's novel with his regular co-writer Gilles Marchand, Moll crafts a seemingly simple plot that gets increasingly tangled as it jumps from one character to another, taking some rather surprising turns but managing to make sense of it all by the last scene.

When we first meet home care nurse Alice (Laure Calamy) and her humdrum farmer husband, Michel (Denis Menochet), on the windswept plains of central France, they seem like your typical unhappy middle-aged couple. Alice is having an affair with the taciturn, slightly on-the-spectrum Joseph (Damien Bonnard), who's one of her patients, while Michel spends all day stuck in his office apparently handling the farm's accounts.

But when a neighbour, Evelyne (Valeria Bruni Tedeschi), turns up missing, her car abandoned on a local road, we start wondering how these people could be involved in her disappearance. Was Evelyne actually Michel's mistress, which may explain why he arrives home one night with a bloody nose? Or did Joseph wind up killing her, which may explain why his dog has somehow been shot to death?

Cont.

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Review: Cont.

These and other questions will slowly but surely be answered as we switch from Alice's point of view to that of Joseph's and then to the young waitress Marion (Nadia Tereszkiewicz), whose relationship with the victim opens the film up into a whole new territory that raises even more questions. And then we switch viewpoints again, this time to Armand (Guy Roger "Bibisse" N'drin), a 20-something grifter in the Ivory Coast who could be the person tying everyone else together.

Like *Fargo* remixed with *Babel* by way of Atom Egoyan, *Only the Animals* starts off as an intimate rural mystery and blossoms into a global affair where several strangers wind up connected in unexpected ways. The script tosses out a few good curveballs, especially when the action suddenly jumps from France to Africa, but each plot reversal also gets us closer to the heart of the mystery — even if some of the twists seem a little far-fetched to be true.

Yet Moll also has a firm enough command as a director (this is his fifth feature) to render the fragmented drama credible, although he could have upped the suspense at times to make his movie more of a nail-biter.

What ultimately happens to Alice, Michel, Evelyne, Marion and Armand — regular people caught in something much bigger than themselves — is not without its own irony, though it's one less tinged with laughter than regret.

Source: www.hollywoodreporter.com Jordan Mintzer 28/8/2019 Edited extracts ~ accessed 8/5/2021



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Some Thoughts on: *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Yes - it was long and yes, it was slow, but this beautiful film benefited brilliantly from both of those elements. The length gave the love between Marianne and Heloise the time to develop gradually, as one would expect in such a relationship between two strangers, particularly given the sensibilities of the times in which the film was set. The slower pace allowed for the intensity of their attraction to be the sole focus, where nuanced glances and gestures meant so much.

I loved this film, there was just so much to admire and appreciate. I loved the beautifully turbulent ocean and noisy, windy beaches and grasslands, the threatening cliffs and rocky shores contrasting perfectly with the silent, (even soundtrack free), indoors, where heels on wooden floors were the only dominant sounds to break the silence. The regular 'escapes' from the house for walks provided a glorious space for Marianne to observe and ultimately, fall in love with Heloise.

I loved how this film was framed and exquisitely shot by director Celine Sciamma. The pale palette allowing the almost matching gowns of the two main protagonists, and the developing portrait itself, to stand out and feature so prominently. These two wonderful performances demanded such a focus, as we were taken along on this most tender and emotional of love stories.

I was also so impressed with the very powerful feminist theme that played throughout, alongside the developing relationship itself. Marianne's proud, independent, determined and hugely talented characteristics led the way. The pregnancy termination, Marianne revealing that her work had to be seen as a male creation to be formally exhibited and even her physically difficult arrival to the island by boat, was plagued with male indifference and neglect.

Apart from the spectacular depiction of the surrounding physical landscape, my favourite two parts were when, many years later after they had gone their separate ways. Firstly, Marianne stands viewing another portrait of Heloise in a formal gallery and notices that her one-time lover is nursing a book on her lap, cleverly revealing the page number 28. A page that was so meaningful to them both.

Secondly, when both distanced ladies attend the same opera performance unaware of each other's presence. Marianne finally noticing Heloise, on the opposite side of the opera house, moved to tears by the beauty of the music and her memories, was one of the most moving and emotionally charged moments I've seen in film for a very long time. (Eyes getting a bit misty now actually!!)

I saw this film some years ago on SBS TV and enjoyed it, but seeing it again on the full cinema screen, took it to a whole new level of intensity, impact and appreciation.

NOTHING beats the cinema for optimum viewing, especially if that cinema happens to be the award-winning, (again), EMPIRE. Long may she reign.

Ross Armfield.

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Message from the President

Thank you to all those of you who have chosen to renew your membership of FISH till June, 2023.

You will receive acknowledgment of your renewal by email.

Please keep your current [red] membership card till the end of 2022.

I am so glad we were finally able to screen *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* which I found visually stunning. Who could fail to be moved by the mesmerising singing of the group of women?

Thanks again to Ross for another insightful review.

Sandra Gillespie.

COMING UP:

July	<i>A War</i> [Denmark]	Sunday 24 th & Tuesday 26 th
August	<i>Pain and Glory</i> [Spain] [tbc]	Sunday 21 st & Tuesday 23 rd



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