



fish

Antoinette in the Cevennes
(France 2020)

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

DIRECTOR : Caroline Vignal
RUNNING TIME : 96mins
RATING :

Synopsis:

A mischievous 'feel-good' film that offers a funny and poignant reminder of the virtues of independence, and that the journey, not the destination, is often the reward. 40-something primary teacher Antoinette impulsively decides to embark on a hiking trip with an unlikely companion...a wise grey donkey named Patrick

Review: Paul Byrnes

To attempt a long walk in the rugged Cevennes region of southern France at any time requires strength of purpose, experience, a level head. The heroine of Caroline Vignal's disarming comedy has none of these.

Antoinette (Laure Calamy), a Parisian junior school teacher in her 40s, is just following her heart, hoping to cross paths with the father of one of her pupils. She is giddily in love with the wrong man, but judgment is not her strong suit.

Writer/director Caroline Vignal establishes this in the first scene, an end-of-term concert where she dresses in a spangly frock and sings over the top of her kids as if she's on a talent show. Calamy makes us love her character here, tying her innocence to the level of her students. Antoinette has a beautiful spirit, but no inhibitors.

On the eve of the holidays, her lover Vladimir (Benjamin Lavernhe) stands her up. He must take his family hiking, instead of spending time with her. She books a trip in the same region, with a donkey as her walking companion. Other walkers, on the night before she sets out, call her mad. You are doing this alone and without experience? Only the women at the table, old and young, seem to understand.

Cont.

FILMS IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS INC

10.00 am Sunday 11th December 2022
8.15 pm Tuesday 13th December 2022

Review: Cont.

Robert Louis Stevenson did this journey in 1878 with a broken heart and weak lungs. His stubborn donkey was called Modestine. Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*, published in 1879, is a classic travel book. He declares that his purpose is not 'to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake'. The book is part of what inspired Caroline Vignal's script, in her second feature.

After two minutes of donkey training, Antoinette sets off. She finds that her companion shares many of Modestine's characteristics. Patrick has few forward gears, but he does have a depth of self-awareness. He will not walk unless Antoinette talks to him. Vignal makes good use of his donkeyness. He's the strong, silent type. He becomes Antoinette's confessor, guide, and sort-of friend along treacherous paths. When Patrick joins the story, the film becomes irresistible.

There is a tradition of French outdoor films in which time passes slowly, indifferently. The natural beauty seduces our senses, but the characters are often confused, especially by love. The rhythm, governed only by day and night, becomes another form of seduction. That's very true of this film, in which a woman stumbles toward self-revelation, through comedy inflected with pain. Calamy's performance has rightly been awarded for its superb shading, but let's not forget the donkey, brilliant as her straight man. Who says nobody likes a smart ass?

Source: www.smh.com Paul Byrnes 7/4/2021 ~ Edited extracts 9/8/22

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Review: Michele E. Hawkins

The school holidays are imminent, and teacher Antoinette (Laure Calamy) is excited by the prospect of a clandestine week with her married lover, Vladimir (Benjamin Lavernhe), whose daughter she teaches. But things go awry when Vladimir's wife, Eléonore (Olivia Côte), books a walking tour in the Cévennes for the family. Initially upset, Antoinette comes up with the idea of booking herself on the same holiday and surprising her lover, who she expects will be thrilled to see her.

Arriving at the tour's departure point, Antoinette's lack of preparation heralds what is evidently not going to be the idyll of her imagination. In fact, far from the romantic frolic she anticipates, Antoinette ends up pulling, dragging, coaxing, and begging her obstinate donkey companion, Patrick, along the trail with her. But donkeys can be wiser than they seem, and Patrick is one such. With him by her side, and assisted by some kindly souls from time to time, Antoinette ends up becoming freer and richer than she could have imagined.

Laure Calamy gives a funny, loveable performance as the deeply infatuated and somewhat incompetent Antoinette; Benjamin Lavernhe is aptly unlikeable as the self-serving, weak cheating husband, Vladimir; and Olivia Côte is utterly believable as the less than naïve wife, Eléonore. But, of everyone, it is Patrick who is sure to capture your heart.

An entertaining, fun romp, *Antoinette in the Cévennes* will have you smiling, and even occasionally suppressing the impulse to call out "DON'T DO IT!". You may even wish you could kidnap Patrick and stroll beside him through the enticingly beautiful Cévennes of southern France.

Source: www.bmamag.com Michele E. Hawkins 20/3/2021 Accessed 21/11/22

Some Thoughts on: *Skies of Lebanon*

I have to begin, dear readers, with the admission that I fell asleep in the last 15 minutes of this film. This may or may not have had something to do with a farewell lunch I attended where I drank several glasses of Prosecco. Nevertheless, pressed by committee members, I'm writing this review. I did canvas the comments of 4 or 5 friends on what happened at the end but there seemed to be disagreement on whether or not Joseph's appearance on the boat at the end was real or dream-like.

I can work with that, I thought. I loved this film (except for the last 15 minutes) and I'm in full agreement with the various reviewers who called it poetic, like a storybook (with the painted backdrops of 1950s street scenes) and quirky. The animation sequences were wonderful and by halfway through, I was marvelling at the contrast between the clarity of what was happening in the animations and the ambiguity of the situation in the "real" world. And the stork sequence - what a moving way of showing the initial difficulties of Joseph and Alice in having children, and their joy when eventually they did. I would never have believed such a cliché as the stork could be so tenderly and lovingly employed.

The Cedar of Lebanon was inspired, and her welcoming of Alice in the 1950s set the tone for the open and generous life that Alice found there. The later almost ballet-like sequences between the Cedar and death, and the Cedar and the various warring factions reminded me of a stylised Bangarra Dance Company sequence. So too the continually shifting alliances of the new government, as they changed places around the table. The radio announcements from various stages of the war, particularly the ceasefires – the eleventh, the fifteenth etc – reminded us of the brutal reality.... But the warmth of Alice and Joseph's home was constant. The inrush of relatives was stoically welcomed and their various characteristics and needs all accepted as part of being family – indeed the only regret I could see on the part of either Joseph or Alice, was that of not having a 2nd bathroom.

It was easy to see why so many Lebanese decided to leave at that time, and indeed in the following decades – so why did Alice and Joseph not? Joseph's rocket program was apparently historically accurate and his pride in his country and desire to have it united again obviously underlay his commitment to it. And Alice? The animated pictures of her Swiss childhood were cold and repressive – her childhood book of drawings was of the same mountains, drawn over and over again. The sunlight and warmth of Lebanon and the Lebanese, characterised initially by the Cedar's greeting at the airport, was the exact opposite.

So, I have to leave it to you to decipher the last 15 minutes. Did Joseph join her or not? Did she actually go back to Switzerland? I might have missed the ending but the beautiful, delicate framing of this story, a paradox amongst the bitter civil strife, was something for which I thank the French director, and FISH. Again.

Trish Topp

**** Thank you Trish for stepping in at very short notice and best wishes to our resident reviewer, Ross Armfield who was unable to attend the screening [Ed.]**

Message from the President

Antoinette on the Cevennes is the last of our films in the current membership period. It promises to be a charming, light-hearted film with which to end the year.

For those of you who have renewed your membership to June, 2023 new cards with the new programme will be sent to you at the end of January.

Thanks once again to the Empire Cinema and our sponsors for their support throughout the year.

On behalf of the committee I would like to wish you all a happy, healthy and safe festive season.

Sandra Gillespie

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February - June 2023 To be confirmed



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