Cezanne et Moi
Synopsis

They loved each other with the ardor of thirteen-year-old boys. Rebellion and curiosity, hopes and doubts, girls and dreams of glory – they shared it all.

Paul was rich, Emile poor. They left Aix-en-Provence for Paris and quickly became part of the art scene in Montmartre and Les Batignolles. They hung out in the same places, slept with the same women. They spat on the bourgeoisie (who spat back). They went skinny-dipping, drank absinthe, starved, only to overeat. Sketched models by day, caressed them by night. . . Traveled thirty hours by train just to watch a sunset...

Now, Paul is a painter and Emile, a writer.

Glory has passed Paul by.

But Emile has it all: fame, money, the perfect wife, whom Paul once loved.

They judge each other, admire each other, confront each other. They lose touch, meet up again, like a couple who cannot stop loving each other.
Interview with
Daniele Thompson
HOW DID YOU COME ACROSS THE IDEA TO MAKE THIS FILM, WHICH SEEMS SO DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS - MOSTLY COMEDIES - IN YOUR FILMOGRAPHY?

Fifteen years ago, I read an article about how Cézanne and Zola were friends since childhood, before eventually growing apart. I must admit that I had never heard about this rift. It intrigued me. So I started reading biographies about them. I reread texts by Zola which I had forgotten, looked at paintings by Cézanne which I didn’t know. There was a dramatic element to their falling out which went beyond mere anecdote. Each time I finished a film, I wanted to try to take up their story but was told “No, do a comedy. It’s what you know how to do.” So I did a comedy, then another, and another. Until IT HAPPENED IN SAINT-TROPEZ, which was not the hit I’d hoped for. The reaction to that film destabilized me a bit. So, out of pure pleasure, I submerged myself in the lives of Cézanne and Zola, not knowing whether I’d find subject matter for a film. I read and read, took tons of notes. I was absolutely fascinated by everything I read, by everything I learned.

WHY?

Because I was entering the hearts of these people, I was entering their youth. When we talk about Cézanne, Hugo or Renoir nowadays, we imagine remarkable old men with white hair. But I discovered young men on the way to becoming something. Men in their intimacy, in their daily lives which were anything but remarkable. They weren’t legends, they weren’t icons, just young men with friends, problems, dreams, weaknesses and hopes.

They didn’t live that long ago, and we have plenty of texts and testimonies that are rich and vibrant. With the help of Jean-Claude Fasquelle, whose grandfather was Zola’s editor, I met Martine Léblond-Zola, Emile’s great-granddaughter. I submerged myself in what Cézanne and Zola wrote and what was written about them. I followed the paths they trod, both literally and figuratively. I consulted Zola’s manuscripts at the Bibliothèque Nationale. Seeing words crossed out by his own hand was so moving, I went to museums, observing with a fresh eye the paintings that connected me to the texts, taking pictures of the ones that spoke to me, on the walls, in books on the internet. I compiled albums with all these images and documents. I felt like I was living in the nineteenth century. Cézanne and Zola became my family. Then one day I felt ready to undertake the adventure. I decided to tell their story as I imagined it. My albums took on a life of their own. I started writing. At first I just wanted to write a synopsis, but I soon realized I was writing the film.

WHAT IS IT THAT TOUCHES YOU THE MOST IN THIS STORY? IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CÉZANNE AND ZOLA?

Everything. The story has many levels to it and that’s what fascinates me. It’s about two friends who throughout their lives try to remain the childhood friends they once were, but no longer are. It’s as strong as a love story, if not more so. Like they say in the film, friendship is harder than love. Because there are no reference points, no rules or precise definitions. Stories of friendship can be very deep, painful and ambiguous too. Because after their teen years, they started sharing money, women, obsessions, ambition, the difficulty of wanting to be an artist. It’s the second aspect that moves me. It’s truly the heart of the subject. How do you accomplish your destiny as a writer or painter and stay friends? What’s interesting are these destinies which crisscross.
A son of poor parents who becomes a wealthy bourgeois, established and recognized. And the son of wealthy, bourgeois parents who becomes a bohemian artist. He made nothing from his painting, living with a woman he wouldn't marry. His only obsession is his art. And just when one wonders if his inspiration hasn’t run dry, and other finally starts getting noticed and making a name for himself. He writes his greatest work: from 25 to 50, and the other finds his way as the precursor of modern art, the son of wealthy, bourgeois parents who establishes himself and recognizes. And the son of wealthy, bourgeois parents who becomes marginalized by his bohemian lifestyle. He made nothing from his painting, lived with a woman he wouldn’t marry. And just when one wonders if his inspiration hasn’t run dry, he starts getting noticed and his work is recognized. And the son of wealthy, bourgeois parents who establishes himself and recognizes. And the son of wealthy, bourgeois parents who becomes marginalized by his bohemian lifestyle. He made nothing from his painting, lived with a woman he wouldn’t marry. And just when one wonders if his inspiration hasn’t run dry, he starts getting noticed and his work is recognized.

DO YOU NECESSARILY BECOME A “PRISONER OF THE TRUTH” WHEN YOU TAKE ON FAMOUS PEOPLE WHO REALLY DID EXIST?

Yes, of course. When I was doing research, I wondered whether I could take enough liberties to make a film. But it turns out that one of the most plausible explanations of their growing apart is Zola’s book The Masterpiece. Zola’s inspiration was Cézanne’s youth and friendship, their obsessions and discussions. But he also did what novelists do with the truth: he took liberties with their lives, with their work, with the dialogue I gave them. It was fascinating to blend it all together, to juggle real-life stories with the dialogue I gave them. Cézanne said, so the screenwriter’s inspiration necessarily comes into play. That said, even if they did see each other, we don’t know what they’d have said to each other. Perhaps Cézanne introduced Zola to the woman who would become Zola’s wife. Rumor has it that she might once have been Paul’s mistress. So I said to myself: “All right, she was!”

THE FILM’S MAIN THREAD IS THE “LAST ENCOUNTER” BETWEEN CÉZANNE AND ZOLA IN MÉDAN IN 1888. DID IT REALLY TAKE PLACE?

Maybe… (laughs) Something wild happened when I was working on the script. Zola’s book The Masterpiece marked the end of their friendship, and the last known letter from Cézanne to Zola, the one read aloud in the film, in which he “thanks” him for the book, also dates from 1886. I decided to make 1889 the film’s central reference point. It was an important year for both of them. Cézanne’s father died, which meant that Paul suddenly had money. And five months before his father’s death, Paul finally married Hortense. Meanwhile in the Zola household, 1889 marked the arrival of Jeanne, the young laundry maid. This was major upheaval. Each one was in love in his own way, and stars leading an almost double life. So I imagined, despite what all the historians think, that they met in 1888, and that Cézanne came to Médan one last time for a last explanation. When the script was almost finished, I went to Aix to see the places I had described while writing the script. There I met Michel Frasset, the curator of Cézanne’s last workshop, the one he used last for years of his life and which anyone can visit. It’s a moving place, with its wicker baskets (only the apples date from today), his smock, dotted with paint. He asked me: “Do you know Cézanne’s last letter to Zola?” Yes, you’ve all the historians say about it. “No, a letter that was sold at Sotheby’s three months ago.” I was reeling. “No, I never heard about it.” Cézanne dedicated an article to Cézanne, and at the same time, Cézanne introduced Zola to the woman who would become Zola’s wife. Rumor has it that she might once have been Paul’s mistress. So I said to myself: “All right, she was!”

IN FACT, YOU DON’T TAKE SIDES WITH ONE OR THE OTHER… HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT ZOLA MISUNDERSTOOD CÉZANNE, EVEN IF HE AFFIRMED THE OPPOSITE AT THE TIME, THE IMPRESSIONISTS, MANET…

Between the ages of 26 and 30, Zola was a magnificent art critic. He defended the Impressionists when everyone else spat on them. Cézanne dedicated an article to Cézanne, but did not mention him in the article! He loved his friend, he cheered him on, and he figured he’d soon be recognized. Zola wrote in the article that he thought he’d never make it. Furthermore, as time went by, Zola’s tastes changed, they became more academic, more conformist (just look at his house, full of dusty antiques!), and at the age of 48—old age at the time!—he would make it, but in his heart he thought he’d never make it. Moreover, between the ages of 26 and 30, Zola was a magnificent art critic. He defended the Impressionists when everyone else spat on them. Cézanne dedicated an article to Cézanne, but did not mention him in the article! He loved his friend, he cheered him on, and he figured he’d soon be recognized. Zola wrote in the article that he thought he’d never make it. Furthermore, as time went by, Zola’s tastes changed, they became more academic, more conformist (just look at his house, full of dusty antiques!), and at the age of 48—old age at the time!—he would make it, but in his heart he thought he’d never make it. Moreover, Zola, like all their artist friends at the time, other than Degas—was anti-Dreyfusard. Even if they did meet, Zola had understood Cézanne. Was he still open to that? What was he writing then had nothing to do with what he wrote when he was 25. Cézanne only began to be more or less recognized at the very end of his life. When Zola died, his friend, Alexandre Edmond, and Zola’s went for next to nothing. When Cézanne wrote in the article that he thought he’d never make it, he was writing about Cézanne, even if he didn’t understand him. I fell in love with both of them! As Guillaume Gallienne says: “Cézanne is really “charm-mean!” He’s a pain in the ass who always goes too far. These are two artists for whom their obsession with work, the work they want to accomplish takes precedence over everything else.

FOR ME, THE IDEAL ACTOR IS THE ACTOR I WANT, AND WHO WANTS TO MAKE THE FILM AS MUCH AS I DO. IF AN ACTOR SAYS “I’m not sure, I don’t really feel it.” I immediately drop him. I believe deeply in instinct, and I don’t like the idea of having to convince them. In this case the enthusiasm of the two Guillaumes was immediate. It’s true, there aren’t many character roles in France, and that must have sounded exciting to them. For me, the ideal actor is the actor I want, and who wants to make the film as much as I do. If an actor says “I’m not sure, I don’t really feel it.” I immediately drop him. I believe deeply in instinct, and I don’t like the idea of having to convince them. In this case the enthusiasm of the two Guillaumes was immediate. It’s true, there aren’t many character roles in France, and that must have sounded exciting to them. For me, the ideal actor is the actor I want, and who wants to make the film as much as I do. If an actor says “I’m not sure, I don’t really feel it.” I immediately drop him. I believe deeply in instinct, and I don’t like the idea of having to convince them. In this case the enthusiasm of the two Guillaumes was immediate. It’s true, there aren’t many character roles in France, and that must have sounded exciting to them. For me, the ideal actor is the actor I want, and who wants to make the film as much as I do. If an actor says “I’m not sure, I don’t really feel it.” I immediately drop him. I believe deeply in instinct, and I don’t like the idea of having to convince them. In this case the enthusiasm of the two Guillaumes was immediate. It’s true, there aren’t many character roles in France, and that must have sounded exciting to them.
ITS TRUE YOU FORGET THEM VERY QUICKLY, YOU NO LONGER SEE ANYTHING OTHER THAN THE CHARACTERS THEY PLAY. THEY ARE TWO ACTORS WHO DO NOT SEEM TO COME FROM THE SAME SCHOOL. HOW DID YOU WORK WITH THEM?

Well, a lot of the screenplay is based on their differences. But actually, I decided to forget about that while I was working with them. They were my two actors, and I saw very well what I could get out of the one and the other. What really pleased me is that when they saw the finished film, separately, they were truly amazed by each other, as if they had so thoroughly become their characters that they didn’t notice it on location. And what is more, they are both directors in their own right. I didn’t want to think about that too much either, or it could have blocked me. In fact, I had two actors who were good listeners, who were both nervous about taking up such a challenge. They both wanted to do their best, they both always wanted to do one more take. They both gave me the feeling that they had perfect confidence in me, and I felt very good in their company.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT IS THE GREATEST ASSET OF ONE AND THE OTHER?

The both have an immense actor’s instinct. Guillaume Canet instinctively felt that he had to play his ‘iconic’ character very simply and soberly. On the other hand, Guillaume Gallienne instinctively felt that he was dealing with a madman – today Cézanne would be classified ‘bipolar’. He would fly into furious rages, and a few seconds later seem to have forgotten all about them. Even though they had different educations, even though they come from different “milieux”, have had different careers, and play very different characters, they both have the same discipline, the same tastes, and indeed the same obsessions with their work.

What I felt they both had, aside from their very obvious talent, was their considerable experience, their great concentration and great desire to achieve what I wanted from them. Neither one of them came on set whistling. They both have endurance, perseverance and obstinacy in their search for what they need to do, which is magnificent and rare.

THEIR NAMES ARE BOTH GUILLAME. WASN’T THERE A RISK OF YOUR INSTRUCTIONS GETTING CONFUSED WHEN THEY WERE TOGETHER ON SET?

I thought of that a lot before the shoot and it did worry me a little. But once they were on set, there were never any misunderstandings. They always knew whom I was talking to (laughter).

WAS THIS FILM HARD TO FINANCE?

These days no film is easy to finance. Especially a “period” film, a film that is different from your run-of-the-mill projects, and from my own previous films, which can frighten the decision-makers. But the man of my life, Albert Koski, labored personally and passionately to make this film possible. It was a great joy to work together on this atypical project that was so close to both our hearts. And he was able to embark Pathé on the adventure, and others too who participated in the production. And he was also able to communicate to the crew enthusiasm equal to his own.
THE STRUCTURE OF THE FILM IS RATHER SCATTERED, ALMOST “IMPRESSIONIST”. WAS THAT ALREADY THE CASE IN THE SCREENPLAY?

Yes, with the encounter in Médan that serves as a “main thread”, except that... in the end it’s no longer the same scattered effect! Once we were editing the scenes that we shot, the finish was no longer exactly the same. I worked a lot with my editor, Sylvie Landra, for about six months. What we did was almost a rewrite of the film. That is the mystery – and beauty of the editing process. YOU FILMED A LOT ON REAL LOCATIONS...

We shot most of the scenes that were supposed to take place in Paris in Moulins – after all, it was much simpler! But yes, we did shoot quite a bit in the places where the story actually did happen. And shooting in places so steeped in history was very emotional, not only for the actors, but for the rest of the crew as well. Thanks to Martine Leflohr-Zola, we were authorized to shoot in Zola’s garden at Méauln – and in the laundry where Zola’s mother washes Jeanne iron. We could have shot inside the house too, but there is a train that goes by every four minutes! We also shot in Cézanne’s father’s house, at Jas de Bouffan – we reconstructed the frescos he had painted, and that today are in the Petit Palais, and they decided to keep them! It is soon going to be restored and made into a museum. On the upper floor, where Cézanne painted, we have reconstructed his studio where we use him paint Vallier’s portrait – in fact, the portrait was actually painted in Paris. He didn’t build it – in fact, the portrait was actually painted in Paris. He didn’t build it. He often slept there to be able to catch the light of dawn. It is a magical spot. All that was obviously very moving – and inspiring.

EXACTLY. IN A FILM LIKE THIS, LIGHT IS VERY IMPORTANT.

EXACTLY. In a film like this, light is very important.

HOW AND WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK WITH JEAN-MARIE DREUJOU?

This was a very different film from the ones I had made. I wanted to call myself into question, to change crews. Jean-Jacques Annaud had spoken to me about Jean-Marie, whose work I liked a lot. I met with him. We got along very well off the bat. And aside from his talent, he is a marvelous man – and that is important, because you’re very close to your director of photography on a shoot. We spoke a lot. I showed him all the documentation I had collected. I didn’t want the light to be “Cézanne-like”. I didn’t want people to say “That looks like a Cézanne.” I watched some films again that had marked me and that took place in the same period. I wanted to tell, above and beyond the instructions I gave him. I wanted to tell, above and beyond the instructions I gave him. I didn’t want any despairing music over that ending. And Eric immediately evoked what that return to those places meant for someone who belonged to them. He was returning to his work, to his destiny as an artist, to what he truly was. We both wanted a tonality of hope.

WHAT KIND OF INSTRUCTIONS DID YOU GIVE YOUR OTHER COLLABORATORS ABOUT COSTUMES, SETS, AND MAKE UP?

We all wanted to make something that wasn’t carved in stone, that looked lively and natural, as if the story were taking place today. With people whose hair and makeup are not perfect, who sometimes look a little disheveled. The same was true for the music. I didn’t want period music. I asked Eric Nevoix for music that had to do with a feeling. I didn’t want anything imposed from the outside, contemplative... I wanted it to be the emotions, when it had to be to evoke emotions... I didn’t want any despairing music over that ending. And Eric immediately evoked what that return to those places meant for someone who belonged to them. He was returning to his work, to his destiny as an artist, to what he truly was. We both wanted a tonality of hope. The story of a friendship – which is almost a love story – was both painful and magnificent.
Interview with Guillaume Gallienne
DANIEL THOMPSON IMAGINED YOU A MORE LIKELY ZOLA, BUT YOU WANTED TO PLAY CÉZANNE…

I had the feeling that I had already played Zola a little. I got the impression that Zola’s mission was somewhat the same as Pierre Bergé’s in Jalles Pepé’s YVES SAINT-LAURENT. Being the one who takes some distance, who is wise, who takes the rap. On the other hand, Cézanne, “c’est moi”. Why? His relations with his father, his rich kid aspect, his angry young man aspect… Danièle was surprised. I told her let’s make it simple, we’ll do a reading and well see, either it works or it doesn’t. I went to her place and, before beginning to read, she said: “With the accent of course”. With the accent? What accent? The Aix accent, Cézanne spoke with the accent of Aix. As much as I can do northern accents, Russian, German, English… Southern accents! I didn’t say anything and I went for it, I did it as I felt it, except that after a short moment, I had the impression that I was doing so much of an accent that I no longer heard what he was saying. All I heard was the accent. “Less”, Danièle said. And that’s what I love about Danièle, nothing is ever complicated, no obstacle is insurmountable. In her house in the South, on her desk, there is a paperweight that reads ‘Please disturb!’ That’s the Danièle, I love it! At the start of our collaboration, she told me: “You talk to me about anything you like anytime you like”. And I took her up on it. I think that she the person with whom I’ve spoken most about intimate things.

HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THAT?

It’s those eyes! Her eyes shine with intelligence, curiosity, youth, experience, but without ever moronizing, without anything ever conventional… We laughed a lot together, maybe because we have a certain culture in common, common references. We’re marvelously complicit about many things…. First of all, she has known the theater since childhood, and it’s not because you feel touched by serious, indeed grave things that you necessarily have to look sad and sinister, it’s not because you have good taste that you are necessarily a stupid bourgeois. Finally, we have another point in common: we don’t like pigeonholes and labels. I love how she can always put things into perspective, she understands actors down to the slightest detail, things that seem to be nothing at all, but that can be a hindrance. “In that case, don’t bother your head with that!” And that’s it. She knows how to lighten the atmosphere! On the shoot, she gave me the beautiful gift of not automatically cutting. She would let the camera roll. So, I tried, and I tried and after a while, I had to do so to be me: That was something that has happened so rarely in my life as an actor. There were some moments of grace that I will always remember. And often in scenes where I’m painting, by the way.

HOW DO YOU PREPARE TO PERSONIFY CÉZANNE?

Danièle had me meet one of her friends, a painter from Marseille with magnificent wrinkles, beautiful eyes and a lovely smile: Gérard Traquandi. The first time I went to see him in his studio – seven or eight months before the shoot – he took a canvas, an easel, and said to me: “Cézanne was like this, with his brushes, his palette, and that’s it… So here, have some cobalt blue… and paint that” I had looked at some photos of Cézanne at work. I saw how he held his brushes. I began to paint, and he said: “You have a problem, you want to fill in too fast”. I heard what he was saying, because that’s something I can be reproached with as an actor too. “Roger and out.” “Empty, don’t fill in, don’t start with anything, start with what you see…”. I worked regularly with Gérard. We went to the Musée d’Orsay too. “And what do you think of this painting? A daub, isn’t it? Yes, you’re right, but you can already see the humility”. He would say things like that, things that I liked and that guided me. Thanks to him, with him, I looked at Cézanne’s painting a lot. I really took the time to savor it, and especially to
good advice! Then, as for preparation, there was of course the work accent, all he said was “Think of Alain Françon. Elegance!” What opposite of Impressionism. With what he had before his eyes, he It’s all nothing but lines that run on, intersect and collide! The wonder Cézanne hated the Impressionists’, look at those lines… Provence. And he told me something beautiful: “I thought about comes straight out of the same milieu, the grande bourgeoisie of near Aix. I saw my friend Bruno Raffaelli, who like Cézanne And so during my vacation before the shoot, I rented a house fact, I never like to do too much research. I’m more into feeling. In any case, I did not want to be influenced by Zola’s view of YOU FELT EXACTLY THE SAME AS CÉZANNE, IN FACT… The Masterpiece, but not The Kill. THE MASTERPIECE Germinal for his moments of depression. She understood. She left me alone. that’s what touches me most, because that’s what I aim for too: I WHAT TOUCHES YOU THE MOST ABOUT CÉZANNE? He was right, but without yet knowing how to do it right. He was very aware of his talent and his powerlessness to sublimate it. It drove him completely crazy. He was not sure of himself, but he was sure of his art. That is simultaneously fabulous and painful. He will succeed, thanks to his stubborn effort, but primarily to his intransigence against himself. He feels all that in his painting. His evolution is fabulous. He goes from a layer of paint a few centimeters thick in the beginning, to practically nothing at the end. I think that’s what touches me most, because that’s what I aim for too: I look for depth, I look to reduce. I’m not there yet, but I say… So that’s it, that’s what touches me the most about him.

HOW WOULD YOU SAY HE IS CLOSEST TO YOU? Intransigence. Which is not necessarily considered a virtue – until you’re dead! So long as you’re alive, it’s pretty hard on others and yourself. In fact, it conceals suffering, frustration, a feeling that you’re not understood. You’re rarely satisfied… Like Cézanne, I can also at times be prey to dark thoughts. When that happens, I need more space. The character of Cézanne is very colorful, and you partner must never feel that you’re monopolizing the show. If ever you feel all that lines that run on, intersect and collide! The opposite of Impressionism. With what he had before his eyes, he obviously couldn’t stand them”. And when I asked him about the accent, all he said was “Think of Alain Françon. Elegant!” What about him is the most important? As he revised, there was of course comparison with Dominique Collandt on makeup – that is the only thing I asked for on this film, that Dominique work with us. And all the reflection about costumes with Catherine Lesteron. How all of a sudden, she would see in me, with one look, that I needed to steep myself in that sort of stuff. Finally, it was exciting to look down, in the way of mining, holding still, which do not stay the same throughout your life. That was a thrill! And then the teamwork on location.

WHAT IS YOUR OPINION WAS HIS GREATEST ASSET FOR PLAYING ZOLA? We are very different from one another. Guillaume is a boss. He is And what is more, he has unbelievable charm. As soon as his eyes light up, you know that you will not be able to get him back. Once you’re thinking up with him, he’s irresistible. Whenever Zola lets down his guard, whenever let’s himself go, you begin to feel him vibrate…

HAS IT IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO SHOOT IN THE PLACES WHERE CÉZANNE LIVED AND WORKED? In the beginning, I didn’t think so. I thought that it was totally insignificant. That you might say “How moving”, but that, it didn’t change much. And afterwards, the result is not there. It is not the shirts, the pains, and wondering about how Cézanne painted them, and trying to understand how you express the wind and the tree – which is what Cézanne paints the tree. Cézanne could well say that I was beginning to feel moved by things that never touched me before. It was no longer a cliché, this was something that I was feeling myself, about myself. Above and beyond the places, the mood on location counted for a lot. Danièle had a lot to do with that, of course. Never any explosions, never any mood ups and Downs! The tone was warm, luminous, enthusiastic. I loved working with Alain Poli – I literally fell head over heels, I have rarely seen such perfection in the film business. That belongs to her the minute she walks into a room… And with Isabelle
Candeleri too, with Sabine Azéma, even if I don’t have many scenes with her. With Déléris François. And with all the members of the crew like Simon-Michel Cândia, Richard, Demian Undeen, Dominique Colladant, who was right on top of everything, Nicolas Cantin on sound, the costume girl the photographer, who, she is really very nice, envied me about my accent, because she is from Marseilles, Héctor Genestet-Morel of the production company. Albert Kocki, our producer. They were all so kind and encouraging. They were heartwarming…

**DO YOU EVEN HAVE TO WONDER HOW THEIR FRIENDSHIP LASTED AS LONG AS IT DID?**

You always need witnesses. It’s good to have witnesses, even if they can be disturbing. With them around, you can’t cheat. You can’t pull the wool over your own eyes. So it’s important to keep your witnesses, and to put up with them at times. But what struck me most when I saw the film, is that I have rarely seen a female filmmaker who loves men so much. Danièle truly loves them. In any case these two here, with all their flaws, in all their sublime, is still a trace of childhood in his face, in his eyes. Those eyes that shine behind the cataracts have always deeply moved me. I always liked that. And also that gave confidence for the future… it did take me some time to get over the shoot, the adventure. I dreamed a lot about it afterwards. Traces of the troubles we explored have lasted longer than I would have thought. The anger that agitates Cézanne, his tenacity in going to the bitter end with what he feels, his sense of being right where everyone else is wrong, his isolation, his truth, his naturalism, “true-to-lifeness”, research, while Cézanne’s truth went much farther than what we see, he was into other feelings. In fact, the two of them did not share the same preoccupations, and their paths diverged more and more…

**THE TRICKS I USE TO ACT.**

I was supposed to weep. I asked Danièle what touched her about this text. “The calanques, the fountains, all that…” So I asked her to send me some brain waves, to think of that for me while we shot the scene. She was a little surprised, but she must have done it, because she sent me some brain waves, to think of that for me while we shot the scene. She was a little surprised, but she must have done it… It was something mysterious that made me forget to act. I left, forgetting my cane. “Ah shit! My cane!” And I went back for it… It was a gust of mistral, a burst in the sky, in the pine forest.

**WHERE WAS THERE A SCENE YOU WERE PARTICULARLY NERVOUS ABOUT?**

Yes, just that one scene in which I read a passage from The Masterpiece and break down in tears, and say: “This title, The Masterpiece, doesn’t mean a thing!” I could tell that my emotion was coming at the beginning of the text, and not at the end, where I was supposed to weep. I asked Danièle what touched her about this text. “The calanques, the fountains, all that…” So I asked her to send me some brain waves, to think of that for me while we shot the scene. She was a little surprised, but she must have done it… It was something mysterious that made me forget to act. I left, forgetting my cane. “Ah shit! My cane!” And I went back for it… It was a gust of mistral, a burst in the sky, in the pine forest.

**HERE ARE SOME SCENES THAT ZOLA, WHO WAS BROTHER OPEN TO MODERNITY, COULD HAVE MISSED OUT ON CÉZANNE’S GENIUS! THE LAST SCENE WHERE HE CONDEMNS HIM FOR EVER.**

It’s horrible, but at the same time, did you see how he leaves, how he walks? He is not at all struck down, he is filled with rage… They walk? He is not at all struck down, he is filled with rage… They blame each other, it’s crazy! When I read Zola, there are moments of absolute genius, unbelievable sentences, but I don’t think that he was able to understand Cézanne. Zola needed naturalism, “true-to-lifeness”, research, while Cézanne’s truth went much farther than what we see, he was into other feelings. In fact, the two of them did not share the same preoccupations, and their paths diverged more and more…

**WHO IS THE CÉZANNE WHOSE DICTIONARY THE FILM TAKES ITS NAME FROM?**

All of a sudden, there was a gust of mistral, a burst in the sky, something mysterious that made me forget to act I left, forgetting my cane. “Ah shit! My cane!” And I went back for it… It was magical, like a state of grace… I also like what he says to Volland: “I’ve made some progress, haven’t I? It’s funny, I don’t at all identify with Cézanne, I feel light years away from him, but I like him a lot”
Interview with Guillaume Canet
WHAT APPEALED TO YOU IN DANIÈLE THOMPSON’S PROJECT WHEN YOU READ THE SCREENPLAY?

The screenplay actually. It was very well written. I liked the unstructured aspect that set it apart from traditional biopics. And I especially liked the story that goes beyond even Zola and Cézanne. I discovered their relationship, their friendship and then their quarrel. I saw endearing characters rather than emblematic figures. I first saw Emile and Paul, and I liked that. There was a story that could fascinate people today. And a theme that touched me personally, because in my last film I was confronted with criticism and audience indifference. It was a very violent experience. And that is what was at the core of Danièle’s project. I thought that the way her film expressed self-doubt, soul-searching, passion for one’s own work, whether it be pictorial or literary, what the characters go through, was accurate and magnificent. “What do you think? Do you think that I never wake up in the middle of the night to change a comma?”

When you create, when you write, when you paint, when you make films, those are things you go through every day. You know those situations, feelings, and self-questionings. Moreover, I fell head over heels for the character of Zola. I must admit that I was not much of a connoisseur of his work – other than The Masterpiece which I had actually read. I also read Germinal, and a few classics they make you read in high school, and which I read in fact rather tediously. I never wondered about the nature of the man Zola, and here all of a sudden I discovered someone who felt rather close to me…

HOW?

Someone with a particular itinerary, from a milieu light-years away from his aspirations. His earthy aspect, a little gruff, a peasant… The way that Charles Péguy describes him when he first sees him leaving his house is rather funny. He describes him as a peasant from some random province, a surly, bear-like man, but who little by little becomes likeable. That could sound a little like me, who on first sight can come across as a little reserved. I am also sensitive to Zola’s loyalty to his friends, his uprightness. In short, I could identify with lots of colors, lots of aspects, and that was exciting.

WE HAVEN’T OFTEN SEEN YOU PLAY CHARACTERS WHO REALLY EXISTED, OR PLAY CHARACTER ROLES, DID YOU HAVE TO WORK DIFFERENTLY THAN USUAL?

I had lately done that in several movies: IN THE NAME OF MY DAUGHTER, NEXT TIME I’LL AIM FOR THE HEART, THE PROGRAM, but this was different. Zola is an icon, a very well known figure. I was worried for a while because I did wonder if I would make a credible Zola. I had to find a new process, a new way of using my voice, I had to gain some weight, age… I began by steeping myself in the character and his times. I read or reread a good part of the Rougon-Macquart, I reread Germinal, I dissected The Masterpiece inside and out, because that is most plausible source of their quarrel, and it is an essential element in the explanatory scene that serves as the main thread of the film. I also read what his contemporaries had to say about him, like...
Peynén is very lucky to have such a job. She always wants to be the best. Her technique is very accurate. “It is like a game,” she says. “You have to be very precise.” She is not afraid to take risks and to push the boundaries of her work. “I am not afraid of failure,” she says. “I am ready to try new things.”

I would like to thank all the people who have helped me with this project. I would like to thank my students, my colleagues, and my friends. They have all been very generous in their support and encouragement.

I hope that this project will be successful and that it will help to bring attention to the importance of film and television productions.

Thank you.
Of course I was surprised when Danièle told me that Isabelle Candelier would be playing my mother. She can’t be more than ten years older than I am! But it worked out very well, especially since you often see us together when I play Zola young. I very much liked how she played the character, a very strong and very sensitive woman, funny even, a woman who does not hold back, who has an established place in the family, with a good mix of authority and finesse. I also liked working with Alice Pol, who plays Alexandrine. I love the scene in which she turns me on in front of the fireplace. Awesome. With simultaneous deftness and depth. She puts across all the ambiguities of their relationship, sometimes with nothing more than her eyes… all the feelings of this woman who has temperament, who can sense that her husband’s love is entirely sincere, albeit at the same time a little platonic, and who knows that she will always love him, and always support him… And Freya Mavor, who plays Jeanne, is fantastic too, even if she has so little dialogue. She manages such heavy stuff in very few scenes.

That he sticks to his desires, to his ideas. I expect him to make me vibrate, to make me want to act for him, to make me want to be up to what he imagined when he chose me. There is nothing more exciting on location than to play for a director. I love it. I realize that when I choose to do a film, it’s always as a member of the audience – will I want to see this film? Will I want someone to tell me this story? On the other hand, once I’ve decided to do it, my relationship with the director is the only thing that counts. I then embark on a process of collaboration and sharing that I adore. I had that on my first films, with Téchiné, with Anger, Frears and with Danièle. She’s made a beautiful film, and I loved working with her and for her. She gives you little information, but when she does, it’s precise, clear, even in your face even. She knows exactly what she wants, even if she remains open to all propositions. And then, she had put together a fabulous crew with Jean-Marie Dreujou, the director of photography – it was a wonderful encounter, not only does he light very well and is full of ideas, but he is passionate; he knows how to look at actors. The prop man Ludovic Guérit, whom I hired for my next film, by the way, the technicians, the production staff… Danièle was able to instill her own enthusiasm in all of them.

When you saw the film, which scenes touched you most?

Strangely enough, and I still don’t know why today, I was very touched by the scene in which I am young and bring back the sparrows, and my mother says: “Do you miss him?” and I change the subject and go out to get some coal, and when opening the door, I run into Guillaume with a hare and a bottle of olive oil: “You’re going to like this one”, and they fall into each other’s arms. Even when shooting it, I felt a surge of emotion at the end of the take that I didn’t see coming. And the same thing happened when I saw the film. I was also very touched by Guillaume’s look at me at the end when he hears me say about Cézanne: “An aborted genius”. And also the scene in the evening, when I go down to talk to him on the pontoon…. And obviously, the long scene in the study in which Zola suddenly lets down his guard. That scene was both pleasant and unpleasant to shoot, because I was unable to control the emotion that I had been holding back during entire shoot. Here I was submerged… And I really like the shot that Danièle chose, because you can tell that I’m fighting against the emotion, and it’s just too strong for me.
The women in Cézanne and Zola’s lives

BY DANIÈLE THOMPSON
Madame Zola is a fascinating character. You could make a movie about her. She was a young girl born into poverty, an unwed mother who gave up her baby at birth, and who lived hand to mouth. She became the perfect housewife, a respectable bourgeoise who spent her whole life caring for her husband and his work. And who was able nevertheless to rise up above the notorious Jeanne affair, the laundrywoman with whom Zola fell in love, and with whom he had two children, whereas they were never able to have any. Worse yet, she learned it all from an anonymous letter! Zola was able to persuade her to remain and to accept his double life: he wrote in the morning, joined his mistress and children for lunch, spent the afternoon with them, and came home for dinner and slept with his wife. Even if she travelled a lot then, she still took care of everything. She lived through the Dreyfus Affair with him. For all, she was Madame Zola, the model wife of a world-famous writer. She never wanted to see Jeanne again, even though she had liked her a lot when she was in their service, but she did see her children. After Zola’s death, she approached Jeanne and offered to adopt the two children, so that the Zola name would not die out. I noticed Alice Pol in Danny Boon’s SUPERCONDRIAC. She is a very good actress. She also impressed me because she’s a real woman. She’s beautiful, but not too much so. She has real personality, real sensuality, without any artifice. Her last for life comes through in the way she acts. She stayed in the back of my mind, and when I began casting CÉZANNE ET MOI, I thought of her for Alexandrine. And especially because she can play a young girl, and once transformed, a mature woman with something matronly about her.

Unlike the Zolas who are a very close-knit couple, and who will remain so, whatever happens, the Cézannes are a bizarre kind of couple. Let’s say that Paul tolerates Hortense more than he loves her. They had a son whom he loved dearly, but that was never what counted most in his life. He hid her existence from his father, and for a long time refused to marry her. There is not much written about her and so in a certain way I felt a little freer. I made her an awkward woman, not very astute, or very tactful, but touching because she was not very popular. On the other hand, Cézanne painted lots of portraits of Hortense, in which she is almost always in blue, so Catherine Leterrier and I decided to dress her in blue. But there are no nude portraits of her. And so I imagined that they were part of the paintings that Cézanne destroyed! There’s something beautiful about a woman posing nude for a painter… Especially since that can show to what degree painters can be real tyrants, true torturers, and their wives martyrs, condemned to sit motionless for hours… I always liked Déborah François very much. She is beautiful and, at the same time, she has a kind of veiled look, there’s something mysterious in her eyes that touches me deeply. I asked her to audition, to play a scene I had written on purpose, a scene of revolt, much the same as in the film, in which she no longer accepts being treated like an object, and she was great – and unbelievably in key. And, which also counted, she can look 20 just as well as 35. She has a very interesting combination of youth and maturity.
Jeanne, the young laundrywoman who was to wreak havoc on Zola’s heart and life, was a difficult role to cast, because the film only shows their encounter, and not the life in common that followed. She’s a very important character, but it was almost a silent role. I was afraid that it would scare away all the actresses I would offer it to. I was totally bowled over by Freya Mavor in Joann Sfar’s film, THE LADY IN THE CAR WITH GLASSSES AND A GUN. I thought she was magnificent. And I was both amused and delighted that she accepted to play a character with no dialogue. She was right, her silent presence is impressive… Freya has the same simplicity, the same sensuality, the same youth as Jeanne – all those things that set the heart of the ‘old’ 48 year-old Zola on fire…

Emile and Paul had their love for their mothers in common. I found it interesting to take advantage of the bond that mothers necessarily feel with their son’s best friend. When children grow up, when they become “old”, their childhood friends become “old” too, but there always remains a special indulgence, a kind of tenderness… Hidden within the old gray-haired man there is still the little boy who used to come for late afternoon snacks. I thought it was nice to play on that, because that is also part of the story of the friendship between these two boys. Emilie, Zola’s mother, and Alexandrine, his wife, did not get along at all. That made him suffer, because he worshipped his mother. Besides, he always wanted her to live with them, which was a source of conflict – even if Alexandrine took good care of her during the last months of her life. Cézanne’s mother did not always understand her son or his aspirations, but he was her son, and she had simpler, more affectionate relations with him than her husband, who was very harsh…
I have loved Sabine (Azéma) for a long time. She made several films with my father. I loved working with her on SEASON’S BEATINGS, and it was a great pleasure to work with her again. Especially since for the secondary roles, like Tanguy or Vollard, I needed actors who can make their mark on the film the moment they appear. Who take over the scene, who appropriate the dialogue. Whenever Laurent Stocker or Christian Hecq appear, the scene immediately comes to life. It’s the same with Sabine. And Isabelle Candelier too. I liked her work a lot, but I didn’t know her personally. She wasn’t really old enough to play Guillaume Canet’s mother! But I sent her the screenplay anyway, and when we met, I knew she could be Zola’s mother, and that she would be able to look at Cézanne with great tenderness. She has tremendous gentleness, modesty and subtlety.
The sources of inspiration

Danièle Thompson carried out a great deal of research before directing the film. Here are some examples.
SELF-PORTRAIT
Paul Cézanne Self-Portrait 1873/1875 Musée d'Orsay
PORTRAITS OF ZOLA
There are many photos of Emile Zola.

GUILLAUME CANET
In Emile Zola’s actual office at Médan.
(under renovation until the opening of the Zola-Dreyfus museum in 2017)
“Monsieur, I recently had the honor of writing to you about two paintings that the jury has refused. (…) I would only like to reiterate that I cannot accept the illegitimate judgment of colleagues to whom I have never entrusted the task of appreciating me (…) I would like to appeal to the public and be shown nevertheless (…) Let the Salon des Refusés be reopened. Even were I to find myself alone, I ardently desire that the crowd knows at least that I no more want to be confused with the gentlemen of the jury than they seem to want to be confused with me… I trust, Monsieur, that you will agree to break your silence. It seems to me that any reasonable letter merits its response.”

Paul Cézanne

LETTER SENT 22 APRIL 1866
To the Comte de Nieuwerkerke, Superintendent of the Beaux-Arts. (Zola wrote part of it with his friend Paul)

The band arrives at the official salon, the artists are in high spirits, handing a bottle round.
Filmed at the identical location: Paul and Hortense arrive for their last visit at the Zola’s.
A RARE DOCUMENT
Emile Zola in his study in Paris, rue de Bruxelles.

“Emile goes to sit at his desk. He picks up a fountain pen to incite Paul to leave.”
“In front of the house in Médan, Alexandrine, Hortense and Eugénie spread sheets to dry on the lawn.”

**HOUSE IN MÉDAN**

Scenes were shot in the garden and in the laundry room of the Zola house in Médan. A moving and magical moment thanks to Martine Leblond-Zola, the author’s great-granddaughter, and to the generosity of Pierre Bergé, who has undertaken the renovation of the house.
Caillebotte was a source of inspiration.

CANOTIER COSTUME
A copy of the costume in “Oarsman in a Top Hat” 1878, Private collection, Paris, worn by Frédéric Bazille in the film.

For the picnic scene, an homage to Jean Renoir.
Danièle Thompson showed Déborah François this pastel by Degas. *Nude Reclining Woman, 1886/1888* – Paris, Musée d’Orsay.
Cast

GUILLAUME CANET
Emile Zola

GUILLAUME GALLIENNE
Paul Cézanne

ALICE POL
Alexandrine Zola

DÉBORAH FRANÇOIS
Hortense Cézanne

SABINE AZÉMA
Anne-Elisabeth Cézanne

GERARD MLEYN
Louis-Auguste Cézanne

ISABELLE CANDEJIER
Emile Zola

FREYA MAJOR
Jeanne

with the participation of

LAURENT STOCKER
Auguste Volland

Crew

A FILM BY
Danièle Thompson

SCREENPLAY
Danièle Thompson

PRODUCER
Albert Koski

COPRODUCER
Ahin Yeziain

executive producers

Romain Le Grand
Vincent Adesran

ADJACENT PRODUCERS
Nadia Khamsi

ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS
Gilles Watterkens

LINE PRODUCER
Bastien Stivelot

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Florian Genetet-Morel

ORIGINAL MUSIC
Armand Sufares

CINEMATOGRAPHY
Michel Schonhak

EDITING
Jacques Arhex

COSTUMES
Enri Nacouz

SET DESIGNER
Jean-Marie Dreuju, AFC

HAIR
Sylvie Landra

SFX
Catherine Levaillier

SOUND
Michèle Albe

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
Dominique Callaudant

with the participation of

Stéphane Lepart

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
Nicolas Canetti

WITH THE AID OF
Dominique Collaudant

THE TAX SHELTER OF
Denis Bergonhe

FRANCE 2 CINÉMA

1234567890