

F O C U S
W O R L D

RAW

a film by **JULIA DUCOURNAU**

with **GARANCE MARILLIER, ELLA RUMPF, RABAH NAÏT OUFELLA**

Run Time: 98 Minutes

www.focusfeaturespress.com

Synopsis

Everyone in Justine's family is a vet. And a vegetarian. At 16, she's a brilliant and promising student. When she starts at veterinary school, she enters a decadent, merciless and dangerously seductive world. During the first week of hazing rituals, desperate to fit in whatever the cost, she strays from her family principles when she eats raw meat for the first time.

Justine will soon face the terrible and unexpected consequences of her actions as her true self begins to emerge...

Interview with Julia Ducournau

Before Raw...

There was *Mange*, a 90-minute television movie made for Canal Plus, and *Junior*, a short (21 min). Each of my films has been about physical transformation. *Mange* was very punk, with lots of sex and drugs... it was rated 16+ on Canal. It's about a once-obese girl who runs into the person who made her school life hell and seeks revenge. In *Junior*, it's the reptilian mutation of a teenage tomboy into a young woman. *Raw* follows in the same path as my short. Both lead characters have the same name – Justine – and both are played by Garance Marillier.

Metamorphosis

Raw starts when Justine is just beginning veterinary college – the same college where both her parents studied – and meets up with her older sister Alexia. She feels totally at home but is in for a shock. She's vulnerable since she has no boundaries. For her, this is the end of innocence. The first cuts will be the deepest. I asked Garance to hold herself very straight and keep her chin up to suggest a kind of naïve self-confidence. Gradually her look and her posture change. Her chin lowers so her glance becomes oblique, piercing and disturbing. My acting directions tend to be mainly physical.

Grave (original title)

'Grave', the French title of my film, is a word incorrectly and excessively used in colloquial French, and in the process it's lost its strength and true meaning. Yet, 'grave' is gravity, in the physical sense, something that falls upon us, that nails us to the ground, that weighs on us. It's real, concrete, and important. The word is used in only one sequence in my film, when Adrien asks Justine: "I want to know if you're on an S&M trip, or if it's more serious (grave) than that." Justine doesn't reply. She goes to her bedroom, comes back and tells him: "It's serious (grave)". And immediately after, they have sex. It's because they tell each other the truth that they can make love.

Justine

The name of my character is a reference to *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue* by the Marquis de Sade, the story of an innocent young woman who becomes an object of sexual pleasure and ends up herself taking pleasure in it. *Raw* is centred on the construction of identity and moral standards inside a perverted system – that of 'hazing' and that of the family. If sex is significant, atavism is central. My Justine will shape herself around her urges – a family curse. Through contact with her older sister, who is afflicted with the same condition, she will become assertive, discover her true self and accept – or reject – her difference.

Garance

I met Garance Marillier while casting my short film, *Junior*. Her mother got in touch with us. Our ad was pretty loaded: I really didn't want a bunch of perfect little girls showing up so I'd stressed the masculine, raw aspect of the character. She turned up: shy, with the physique of a shrimp but when she started acting her charisma and power knocked us all out. Garance has an interesting physique: simultaneously like a child and a young adult. She has a sort of innocence yet there's something unsettling about her. It's easy to project myself into her: we're quite similar.

Autobiography

My mother is a gynaecologist, and my father a dermatologist, and I do have an older sister. I know, that explains everything! But that aside, my characters are not like my family. I always heard my parents talk about medicine from an early age, without any taboos. It was part of their daily life. My nose was constantly buried in their books. I remember a photo of a young boy with leprosy whose ear had been sewed back on with the aid of leeches! It had double effect on me: death and decay became normalised, and I became a hypochondriac. I fantasised constantly about disease. I watched my first horror movie when I was 6, by chance. My parents didn't know anything about it, of course. I realised later that I'd seen *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I was intrigued, not at all scared, as if prepared for this kind of images. In fact Leatherface is portrayed as an artist in his own chamber of horrors, so who knows... And my mother is a staunch feminist. Through her work she instilled in me her concern for women's paths and a sense of solidarity... She told me repeatedly that there's nothing a man can do that a woman can't.

Body

When you're young you construct your identity as a rebellion against your parents but also against your elders. A sister is also an accomplice with whom you can share an intimacy without any real embarrassment. Justine and Alexia for example, have fun peeing standing up on the roof. Only two sisters can share a moment like this. I like my female characters to have an organic, uninhibited relationship with their bodies, and intimacy to be linked with bodily fluids. Between sisters, the body is never a source of shame.

Trajectories

Justine develops morally in accordance with her sister, who represents a form of letting go. We presume Alexia has gone through the same things as Justine. At first Justine behaves like her, in an instinctive, animal way, without any moral straightjacket. That's

why she's not outraged. She's hungry, so she eats. Gradually she will distance herself from the sister she doesn't want to be like. For Alexia, on the other hand, the arrival of this little sister afflicted with the same condition will trigger her downfall. She, who thought herself unique, special, will be deeply shaken, so she will push the horror to its limits, to reassert her difference. Justine and Alexia have opposing trajectories paths that intersect.

Gender

I stand by the shifting nature of my film and wouldn't want it to be locked into any specific compartment. Just as in life I don't believe in a male or female gender, even less in a clear definition of sexuality... I see constant metamorphosis. Life is too short to be only one thing.

Cronenberg

He's a director who means a great deal to me. In his films we see a lot of mutilated, wounded bodies... It could seem overly violent, but he doesn't compromise with death. He doesn't use words, to try and intellectualise or soften it, but images. It's very real. I like that. If the image says something, there's no reason to add words to explain it. Cronenberg is the director who has best filmed the psychoanalytic aspect of metamorphosis.

Hazing

Hazing is a kind of anti-hero in my story. It allows us to accept the violence inside Justine. If you want a tainted personality in a main character to be accepted, you need the others – who are supposed to represent the norm – to be worse. Hazing has very precise rules, fixed and unfair. The audience rebels against that. It allows us to see Justine as a victim trying to find her identity in the midst of this organised chaos. But as Adrien says, "Hazing, it's just hot air!". It's like theatre, or a movie: it has a certain running time. At the end, everyone can go back to reality. For the students, it was only a game, nothing really terrible happened. For Justine, on the other hand, this is real life. The theatrical, and the artificial, have triggered a reality.

Veterinary

At first, I'd thought of setting the film in medical school, but I soon gave up the idea, it didn't work. It was too simple; there was no longer a film there. Besides the idea of shooting cadavers the whole time wasn't inspiring. I don't like sleazy movies. I hope my film isn't like that and that it brings a breath of liberating air.

Slow motion

It's difficult to get the right measure. Here I see it as an airlock, a way of immersing us into the subconscious of one or several characters.

Light

The DP is Ruben Impens, Felix Von Groeningen's partner in crime (*The Broken Circle Breakdown, Belgica...*). I loved his work in *The Misfortunates*, his raw, high contrast lighting. I'm not crazy about polished lighting that prettifies everything. I want to see sweat, pores, rings under the eyes... At the same time, the image mustn't be ugly or murky. It has to be colourful, the shades have to stand out. My approach is expressionistic and I am not scared of lighting continuity errors.

Music

Jim Williams is British. He has composed several scores for Ben Wheatley (*Kill List, Sightseers, etc*). The music had to contrast with the action; it had to be stripped down. Jim had some brilliant ideas, like adding organ to the 'finger scene', giving it a gothic touch. On the other hand, I asked him not to skimp on lyricism for the end. I see *Raw* as a modern-day Greek tragedy.

CAST

Justine Garance Marillier
Alexia Ella Rumpf
Adrien Rabah Naït Oufella
Mother Joana Preiss
Father Laurent Lucas
Truck driver Bouli Lanners
Nurse Marion Vernoux

CREW

Producers Jean des Forêts
Julie Gayet & Nadia Turincev
Coproducers Jean-Yves Roubin & Cassandre
Warnauts
D.P. Ruben Impens
Original Music Jim Williams
Editor Jean-Christophe Bouzy
Sound Mathieu Descamps
Séverin Favriau
Art Director Stéphane Thiébaud
Makeup Laurie Colson
Special makeup effects Laura Ozier
Costume Designer Olivier Afonso
Production Manager Elise Ancion
Continuity Thomas Jaubert
Bénédicte Kermadec (L.S.A.)