

AUGUSTINE

A film by Alice Winocour

Starring Vincent Lindon, Soko, Chiara Mastroianni, Olivier Rabourdin

Running time: 102'

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The Hysteria is a slave who looks for a Master on whom to reign over.... » used to say French psychiatrist Lacan... Paris, Winter 1885, Salpêtrière Hospital: is Hysteria an illness for big fakers or a powerful and a genuine uncontrollable disease? Meet Augustine, a 19-year old maid and immerse yourself in this beautifully crafted neo-victorian romantic thriller in the vein of the world acclaimed The Piano where natural instincts will overcome illness and rules of society



Synopsis

A hysteric is a slave looking for a master to rule over. Jacques Lacan.

Paris, winter 1885. At Salpêtrière Hospital, Professor Charcot studies a mysterious disease—hysteria. Augustine, 19, becomes his favorite subject, the star of his demonstrations of hypnosis. But from guinea pig, she gradually becomes an object of desire...

Professor Jean-Martin Charcot *biography*

A great clinician and neurologist

Son of a coachbuilder, born into a family of modest means in Paris in 1825, Charcot became a Senior Consultant at Salpêtrière Hospital in 1862 and worked there until his death in 1893. Jean-Martin Charcot initially devoted his work to "old folks" diseases, describing, for example, the symptoms of multiple sclerosis and then amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, better known now as Lou Gehrig's or motor neurone disease. He also paved the way for the acceptance of the revolutionary idea that the brain is not homogenous, but rather a combination of parts with distinct functions. Charcot's research and discovery of the correlation between specific brain lesions and physical deficiencies make him the father of modern neurology. He became a world famous expert whom many foreign patients traveled to consult. In his celebrated "Tuesday lessons," Charcot discussed the cases of—and examined—his patients in public. He based his diagnosis on meticulous observation of symptoms, taking photos at every stage of their development and sketching the characteristics of each disease (patient movements, malformations, contractures, etc...)

Hysteria and hypnosis

Charcot's research into hysteria greatly contributed to establishing his reputation worldwide and resulted in mental diseases beginning to be systematically analyzed and hysteria being distinguished from other "disorders of the mind." He completed his description of hysteria by using hypnosis to induce hysterical crises in a controlled environment. Charcot thus rehabilitated the use of hypnosis, which the public associated with healers, in scientific research.

Posterity and legacy

Charcot died in 1893. A few days later, as one of the moving forces behind modern medicine, he was given a state funeral. Charcot's students, however, gradually overshadowed their professor. Even so, by positing that hysteria resulted from a mental trauma locked in the unconscious or subconscious, he indisputably laid the foundations of psychoanalysis. Through his critical dialogue with Charcot, Freud realized the need *to release the hysteric through undergoing hypnosis* and convinced himself that *if the hysteric is overwhelmed by an affect, of whose cause his consciousness seems completely ignorant, there must be a mental process* (which he later termed "unconscious") *capable of understanding it*. During his fellowship studying with Charcot in Paris, Freud was fascinated by the professor. *No other man ever had such an influence on me*, he later wrote. He called his first son Jean-Martin. The impact of Charcot's work has only been fully appreciated in recent decades.

Augustine and Charcot

Augustine's arrival at the Salpêtrière in 1873 coincided with Professor Charcot beginning to use photography in his work, which explains the abundant photographic records of her. Very soon, thanks to her charisma and the attention she attracted in a hospital housing over 2,000 women, Augustine's renown spread far beyond scientific circles. Parisian high society flocked to Charcot's Tuesday lessons to glimpse the professor's latest muse. Her hysterical fits and the profanities she uttered drew gasps from the crowd. On May 13, 1885, her medical record reports, *Augustine escaped from the Salpêtrière disguised as a man*. Nobody ever found out what happened to her.

Interview with Alice Winocour

Writer-director

What made you want to be a filmmaker?

I think I always wanted to make movies, but couldn't bring myself to admit it. I was studying to become an attorney when, without thinking it through, I applied to La Femis film school one day, and I was given a place. I've written stories since I was a little girl, so I studied screenwriting. I had an image of the writer's job that fitted with how it works in the States, not France. I thought you just had to pitch an idea and build around it, but I gradually realized that writers in France often serve to help directors give form to their personal projects. So, when I met my current producers and they suggested I direct a short, I took the plunge.

That first short was selected in competition at Cannes...

Kitchen is a film I have trouble relating to now, but it's like a snapshot of who I was in 2005. I learned a lot through making it. I realized there were limits to what you can control and that you have to capture what's happening on set rather than being constricted by what was planned.

How did you come across the story of Augustine?

By reading about Charcot's work. I was enthralled. The Salpêtrière Hospital was a kind of city of thousands of women under the authority of a handful of doctors. Half-naked women scrutinized by men in three-piece suits. As Charcot's muse, Augustine was the undisputed star, who was observed and photographed more than any of the other women, until she escaped dressed as a man. I did a lot of research on the brutal examinations to which she was subjected, and I began to wonder about what happened away from the cameras between examinations. What was Charcot's relationship with his star patient? That triggered my imagination.

Why did this disease upset the establishment?

Hysteria is rebellion. Charcot's patients were women of very low social rank, mostly uneducated maids living in horrifying conditions. They had no rights and frequently had been raped. Hysteria is a form of revolt against that violence. It was almost the first feminist protest. They expressed their distress and their demands with their bodies. Even if hysteria and society have evolved, that revolt is still relevant today.

Is hysteria also a way for women to take control?

Lacan wrote, *The hysteric is a slave looking for a master to rule over*. Women suffering from hysteria make their bodies the theatre of their suffering and desires. They're seeking an audience to entrance.

In your film, the atmosphere at the Salpêtrière is hair-raising...

It wasn't really a place where people received treatment, it was a theatre of experimentation, a mysterious, stifling, brutal world—just perfect for the movies, therefore. I have toned down the film in comparison to historical reality, but the craziest episodes are completely true. Charcot really did invent the ovary compressor, which we faithfully reproduced, even down to the decorative red pompom. To grasp the context, I did huge amounts of research, which I then tried to forget in order to write a story.

Your film is resolutely anti-naturalist...

I wanted to flee naturalism by taking a fantastical tangent. Hysteria *per se* is anything but natural. The body starts doing things it can't normally do. The body lies... Anyway, I personally prefer non-naturalist movies—Lynch, Cronenberg, films set in a kind of fantasy world.

How did you decide to film Augustine's fits of hysteria?

That was the big question. How do you stage a lie? I filmed Augustine's fits as if she were momentarily possessed. I watched so many exorcism movies that, at night, even my cellphone vibrating spooked me out. Like a possessed woman, Augustine is a victim of her own body, which escapes her control. Rather than ask Soko to act out a fit, we had to subject her to it. On set, her limbs are pulled in all directions by ropes. She has no control over them. Her body is a monster that has taken over.

You film Charcot like a real celebrity...

Charcot was a star. A medical star. The Emperor of Brazil and the wife of the Russian Tsar were among his patients. He was a great physician, a pioneer, the founder of modern neurology. His patients were in awe of him. I didn't want to film his rise, but his fall. The film deals with the total reversal of the balance of power between Charcot and Augustine, doctor and patient, middle-aged man and young woman, wealthy gentleman and working-class girl. Charcot discovers that he has a body, and loses control. Augustine discovers that she has a brain, and takes control over him.

How did you cast Augustine?

Initially, I wanted a young woman nobody had ever seen or filmed before—a girl with powerful inner strength and a hint of naivety, but not a victim. Soko is well known, lives in Los Angeles and makes music, so I refused to meet her. Even so, she came to our screen tests where I asked actresses to play out a fit of hysteria. Soko's test was astonishingly powerful. She has unrelenting willpower with an innocent, almost candid side. There is something raw and untamed about her. She is very modern and brings that to the character. At the same time, physically, she is a perfect fit for the 19th century, with her narrow waist and solid hips. All the period costumes we found in London were just right for her without any alterations. And facially, there's an incredible likeness with the real Augustine.

How did you film Vincent Lindon?

Vincent is a very physical actor, with real violence within him. I constrained his physical side by confining him in his costume. It was new for him to be confronted with the violence of repressed sexuality. Vincent was always on the side of the movie. He had faith in the story and trusted the script so completely that I sometimes worried he wouldn't let me change anything on set. But he soon realized things were coming out of him of their own accord and that reassured him. I'm very grateful for the trust he placed in me. We understood each other, without words sometimes. Actually, I think we're very similar, very controlled but with an unconscious that wins out.

How did you choose the extras?

Most of them had been patients in the hospital until recently or were still under medication, but for me they were actresses that I needed something from. I think they were happy to put on costumes and be part of the shoot, part of our little family. Our goodbyes were very emotional. The stories they tell to camera are real-life stories, told in period costume by the people they are happening to now.

What was the shoot like for you?

I wanted to tear down what was established, create disorder and bring life onto the set. Chaos reassured me because it opened everything up and took us away from a mere reenactment of history. Scripts are inert. It's not enough just to film them. We worked hard to find the supporting cast. I chose each face so that we could film them like paintings without anything being starchy or dated.

How would you describe Charcot's wife, Constance?

Constance is intelligent and very beautiful. A strong woman. I was delighted when Chiara Mastroianni accepted the part. She plays Constance with great finesse and a very contemporary feel, which suits the film perfectly. She had to rein herself in to play this very cold, almost frosty woman, who is totally unlike her. I wanted Charcot to be above Augustine, but Constance to be above Charcot.

There are two strikingly different dinner parties in the film...

The first is a middle-class dinner party. All the participants are actors. The second, at Charcot's house, is a high society affair. To capture the dazzling company, I used one actor, Grégory Gadebois, who very kindly accepted this single scene, and surrounded him with real Parisian intellectuals, directors, press barons and journalists...

Is the film's opening, featuring a crab, intended to reflect the feral nature of hysteria?

Unwittingly, I reproduced the beginning and ending of my first short film, which opened with a live lobster and ended with a woman running away... When she sees the crab in the boiling water, she's witnessing her own animality—when the crab's legs twist, there is a resemblance to the way the hysteric's arms twist during a fit.

It's a strongly sensual movie...

I wanted to film this entomological regard on women thrashing around like moths in a lampshade, and the raw eroticism of a voyeuristic situation excused by a medical alibi—the spectators at Charcot's lessons are goggle-eyed as if they were at a peep show. I tried to picture Charcot's examinations of Augustine as sex scenes, with an occasional sado-masochistic subtext. Except the final scene between them, the real sex scene, which paradoxically ends their relationship. From then on, Augustine is emancipated and free to seize her destiny.

Alice Winocour

biography

Born in 1976 in Paris, Alice Winocour is a graduate of the screenwriting department at the prestigious Fémis film school. She has directed several award-winning shorts, including *Kitchen*, which screened in competition at Cannes, and *Magic Paris*, winner of the Grand Prix at the Cabourg Festival. *Augustine* is her first feature film.

Interview with Vincent Lindon
Professor Jean-Martin Charcot

What made you accept the role of Professor Charcot?

The story, always the story. The script is everything. If a script starts really well, I sometimes put it to one side, waiting for my excitement to diminish, perhaps so I won't be disappointed. When I see the words *The End* and I like what I read, I think, *Phew! I'll do it!* Sometimes, when I'm very eager to read a project, I leave it out on my desk for a few days because it will be what I want it to be until I've read it. With *Augustine*, I read it in one sitting and called Alice Winocour right away. When she heard me say, *I've read it and I wanted to call you right away to give you my answer*, she thought I was going to turn it down. When I said yes, she asked me to repeat it. I said, *It's an unconditional yes, but I have to warn you, I don't want to see your short films. If they're wonderful and the film is less so, I'll regret not acting in the shorts. If they're not wonderful, I won't be so enthusiastic about making the movie. So, I'm in, but don't show me a thing.* That's one of the exciting aspects about working on a first feature—giving your trust. Directors often wait so long to make their debut feature that they put all they have into it. Alice and I met a few days later, in a café. I immediately got a good impression—her singularity and intelligence. She's like some American actresses whose beauty grows as the film progresses. At the same time, our conversation was almost surreal, along the lines of, *What time is it? Wednesday. Thanks, that's my stop.* We were both intimidated, totally incapable of understanding each other. Suddenly, she said something that gave me pause, and when I replied in kind, she said, *We've been talking at cross purposes for an hour, but we're on precisely the same wavelength.* On set, it became our specialty—understanding each other without words. If we talked, we muddied the clearest of waters. Alice is great at letting people think they've come up with a wonderful idea, when in fact she leads them around to it. I'm the same. We were a bit like two Alpha males, but the main thing is that we always went in the same direction. When she opened her mouth, I knew what she was going to tell me, and vice-versa. You know within a half-hour of starting a shoot if you're going to get on with or be bored out of your mind by a director. After forty minutes, I knew Alice was tough, she was there, she knew what she wanted, and we were going to get on.

The fact that it was her debut feature didn't make you think twice?

My approach is simple, otherwise I'm screwed: when I make a decision on a script, it's the right one. Period. I don't care if it's me against the whole world, I'm the one in front of the camera, so I decide because I know what feels right for me and nobody else does. I have to believe I know better. Advisors aren't putting themselves on the line. Obviously, it's not an infallible technique. I guess I'm just like everybody else, in fact.

How did you prepare to play Professor Charcot?

That's not my concern.

Do you arrive on set with a carefully defined vision of the role?

Yes. I don't have forty different versions of Charcot within me. Just one. But I'm working for a director, like a co-pilot, like the most devoted servant. I'm always there. Tireless, with the energy of a 15-year-old. I never leave the set, I never go to my trailer, I never sit down, I'm never tired. First there and last to leave.

Alice Winocour was surprised you're so often asked to play people from humble backgrounds...

I get on with people like that. Most likely, I get it from my father, who was a real aristocrat but preferred the company of ordinary people. I like cafés, craftsmen, country folk... The way people move fascinates me. Also, I have the physique for those roles. I have a proletarian build. Those are contributory but not crucial factors. I guess there's something very working-class about me, but that's not my concern either.

In Charcot's relationship with his wife, would you agree she has the power?

Charcot comes from humble origins. His wife is an aristocrat. It's always a fascinating combination. This woman from a very noble family offers Charcot her fortune and contacts. The city slicker devotes herself to the country bumpkin. We can only imagine the power of the physical attraction that seduced and captivated her. She has power over a man who makes everybody else quake, but he is awed by her beauty and charisma. She is intimidating. Perhaps that explains the attraction he feels toward Augustine.

Soko says you taught her a lot...

I simply tried to teach her not to compromise in any way before a take, or you're not as good when the camera's rolling. You can cheat in real life—everybody does—but when you're acting you must never cheat. Sincerity always wins out over technique and know-how. And I tried to show her how, to capture a character, you sometimes have to put up with a little discomfort—acting with the character's wet shoes rather than fashionable boots even if they're not in shot. In terms of her acting, I had nothing to teach her. She's a very gifted actress. Without realizing it, she helped me because, when I was telling her all that, I was also reminding myself of it. It can slip through your fingers at any moment. By trying to guide her, I was making sure I stayed on track.

For someone who is so present on set, isn't it painful leaving your character as soon as a shoot wraps?

I spend my whole life trying not to think about that, so please don't ask. I am my character, so I leave a little bit of myself behind, and it takes time to get over that. But the character also gives me something. The important thing is for it to be a two-way affair. Charcot finally has a face and I've saved patients' lives.

You don't see the psychology of a character as your concern?

Not mine. The director's, the script's, the audience's... A scene is grounded in the scene that precedes it and gives life to the one that follows. Life isn't about psychological continuity because you never know what's going to happen the next second. I read the script once and then I arrive on set to devote myself to doing a little bit more of it every day, as if I were discovering things at the same time as Charcot, as much as possible at least.

Vincent Lindon

selected filmography

- 1984 : *Notre histoire* by Bertrand Blier
- 1985 : *37°2 le matin* by Jean-Jacques Beineix
- 1988 : *Quelques jours avec moi* by Claude Sautet
- 1988 : *L'Étudiante* by Claude Pinoteau
- 1990 : *La Baule-les-Pins* by Diane Kurys
- 1991 : *Gaspard et Robinson* by Tony Gatlif
- 1992 : *La Crise* by Coline Serreau
- 1993 : *Tout ça... pour ça !* by Claude Lelouch
- 1995 : *La Haine* by Mathieu Kassovitz
- 1996 : *La Belle Verte* by Coline Serreau
- 1997 : *Fred* by Pierre Jolivet
- 1997 : *Le Septième Ciel* by Benoît Jacquot
- 1998 : *L'École de la chair* by Benoît Jacquot
- 1998 : *Pas de scandale* by Benoît Jacquot
- 1999 : *Ma petite entreprise* by Pierre Jolivet
- 2000 : *Mercredi folle journée* by Pascal Thomas
- 2001 : *Chaos* by Coline Serreau
- 2001 : *Vendredi soir* by Claire Denis
- 2002 : *Le Frère du guerrier* by Pierre Jolivet
- 2004 : *La Moustache* by Emmanuel Carrère
- 2004 : *L'Avion* by Cédric Kahn
- 2006 : *Selon Charlie* by Nicole Garcia
- 2007 : *Je crois que je l'aime* by Pierre Jolivet
- 2007 : *Ceux qui restent* by Anne Le Ny
- 2008 : *Pour elle* by Fred Cavayé
- 2009 : *Welcome* by Philippe Lioret
- 2009 : *Mademoiselle Chambon* by Stéphane Brizé
- 2011 : *La Permission de minuit* by Delphine Gleize
- 2011 : *Pater* by Alain Cavalier
- 2011 : *Toutes nos envies* by Philippe Lioret
- 2012 : *Quelques heures de printemps* by Stéphane Brizé

Interview with Soko

Augustine

How did you hear about this project?

I have a great agent, Grégory Weill, who told me about it, saying, *It's totally for you, but I should tell you the director and her producers refuse to meet you. You're not what they're looking for.* Eventually, he got the script to me. I read it and I went absolutely crazy because I just knew the role was for me. I live in L.A. and I was recording my new album, but I harassed Grégory, telling him, *I'll fly over specially to see them. All I ask is for them to let me do a screen test, that's all.* But they still didn't want to meet me. Every week I called Grégory to find out who they had seen and were planning to see, thinking, *I have no chance. Those actresses are light years from what I am.* That lasted eight long months, and it was the worst feeling in the world. I've never wanted a role so much. I kept bugging Grégory, who kept bugging them until they agreed to see me as a kind of favor almost, most likely just to get me out of their hair because I wouldn't let it go. So, I did my test with Alice and she said, *Okay, that's an interesting angle on Augustine. We haven't decided if we want a wild child or something more polished. We'll think it over.* I went home and waited, with no idea if my version would convince them or not. After three weeks, Grégory called and told me, *You got it.* I didn't believe him until Alice called to tell me herself. Much later, I found out that as soon as I had left the audition, she said to her producers, *We've found Augustine.* But it took them three weeks to tell me.

What was it about the script that made you so sure it was for you?

Everything! The period, the challenge, the subject matter, therapy... I'm very interested in the mind's relationship with the body, the disease and the desire to get better, and the relationship with the doctors. Hysteria is fascinating. It took society forever to classify these women as "patients," not as "witches." In its modern forms—cutting, bulimia, anorexia—hysteria still is an important social issue. For a feminist like me, it's a big step toward emancipation for society to acknowledge that these women were not crazy but sick.

What was it like working with Vincent Lindon?

I was so proud to be working with him. He's a major figure in French cinema. It was crazy to be sharing scenes with him. I've never seen an actor commit so much to a project. He's in complete control and what he brings to the movie is huge. No actor had ever given me the advice Vincent gave me—just simple things but totally on the button, and nobody had ever said them to me before. For example, the importance of being on the ball, and on your marks, from the very first second of a scene because, if you're not, you'll never make it back into the scene. Stuff like that. And he gave me so much support. We hadn't met before the shoot because Alice didn't want there to be any familiarity between us, seeing as we get to know each other during the film. When he arrived on set for the first time, it was my fourth day already, so I was up and running compared to him. We started with the scene in his office when I tell him the days of the week. It took us a while to get into harmony. I was worried and convinced he thought I sucked. When we wrapped that day, Alice told me, *Vincent wants a word.* I was terrified. He came over and said, *First of all...* And I immediately thought he was going to chew me out. *First of all, it's great that you're playing Augustine. Secondly...* And I thought, okay, now he's gonna kill me. *Secondly, I was only saying last night that you're an amazing woman. Thirdly...* He was so sweet and I kept waiting for the *But I have to tell you, you'll never make it and it was a huge mistake to cast you...* It never came. Quite the contrary. That evening, he said to me, *You can rely on me, you can tell me anything. We're doing this film together. I'm here to help you be amazing.* And he was always there, always completely giving and always positive.

Did you do a lot of work with Alice before the shoot?

We worked on the part for four months before the shoot. We talked about everything, about Augustine and Alice's vision of her. I didn't want to do any reading that would distract me from the movie. I wanted to be Augustine as Alice imagined her and nothing else. Anyway, Augustine is a victim of what happens to her, so I didn't need too much knowledge about her fits. I had to suffer them, not understand them. I focused instead on the information Alice shared with me. We worked on the body position, defining how I would keep my arm folded and my eye closed. We worked on the special effects to see how we would shoot the scenes where she has a fit. But I only really felt ready when I put on the corset and dress. I need the character's costume to feel I'm where I need to be.

What seemed the toughest part? The fits of hysteria?

Absolutely not. That was the part that scared me the least. On the other hand, I was very apprehensive about the scene where Augustine is completely naked and Charcot writes on her body. With Alice, though, as soon as something scared us, we laughed about it or started talking about it really vulgarly to make it seem less threatening. Anyway, Alice said from the start that she planned to shoot every scene as if it were a sex scene. One day, it was SM, another day it was exhibitionism... When he feeds her soup, it was the fellatio scene. The scene I remember most fondly is the one with the chimp because when you work with an animal you can't cheat or anticipate anything. It's total spontaneity. We know where the scene has to go and what it needs to

express, but you're doing it on the fly. It's magical. Of the hysteria scenes, the one at the beginning, at the first dinner party, was the hardest because we shot it over two days. On the second day, I spent eight hours on the floor surrounded by broken glass, shellfish and seaweed, with my dress and hair soaking wet. After getting a bucket of water in the face for the sixth time, I totally lost it. I can still see myself, shivering with cold and exhaustion, soaking in a warm bath at last, with the lady who owned the house where we were shooting constantly coming into the bathroom to see if I needed anything. A towel? Some music? She was very sweet but I was so tempted to yell at her. Or pass out.

How does Alice work on set? Does she do a lot of takes?

Alice keeps shooting until she feels I've nailed it. That suited me fine. I didn't want her to go easy on me. I know this sounds like the usual blurb, but the shoot really was a dream come true. We were completely frank with each other. We were making exactly the same film. I never imagined being in such symbiosis or having such a perfect relationship with a director.

Did you always want to be an actress?

I always wanted to tell stories. Around age 19, I wanted to do things on my own. I found the autonomy I needed in music. Cinema caught up with me because directors like Xavier Giannoli and Virginie Despentes offered me parts. *Augustine* was the first time in my life I've fought to land a role, but I have to say that acting in this movie is the fulfillment of a childhood dream. I see making movies as playing a hyper intense character that's nothing like me, so I have to transcend myself every day, constantly rise to the challenge, wear period costumes with fairytale hairstyles, and mutate physically to the point that nothing in the character is me.

But there is something in you that attracted you to her...

For the final scene in the film, I found myself on the pavement in the Salpêtrière, exactly where she had been and from where she had run. I fell to my knees on the stones and broke down in tears. I was talking to her in my mind, telling her, *I want to thank you so much, I want you to be proud of me*. I wanted her to help me and I talked to her a lot. I think I'll only let her go the day I see the completed film. Just as theatre actors need the audience's applause to shuck their characters and become themselves again, I need to see the film with an audience to let Augustine go.

Soko

biography

Born in 1985 in Bordeaux, actress and singer Stéphanie Sokolinski first made her name thanks to MySpace and a DJ on Danish radio station P3, who gave her track *I'll Kill Her* prominent airplay. In spring and summer 2008, Soko played at several festivals, including Le Printemps de Bourges. After taking a break from music, she joined Pete Doherty on stage to perform The Libertines' *Albion* and *Can't Stand Me Now* at the 2011 We Love Green festival. In February 2012, the album *I Thought I Was An Alien* was released along with the single *First Love Never Die*, for which she co-directed the video with Spike Jonze. In 2007, French audiences could appreciate Soko's performances in two movies, *Dans les cordes* by Magaly Richard-Serrano and *Ma vie n'est pas une comédie romantique* by Mac Gibaja. It was her role in Xavier Giannoli's *In The Beginning* that made Soko a household name, however, and secured her a César nomination for Most Promising Actress in 2010. Since then, she has played young Béatrice Dalle in *Bye Bye Blondie* by Virginie Despentes and appeared in a Spike Jonze short titled *Mourir auprès de toi*.

Interview with Chiara Mastroianni

Constance

Who is Constance?

Above all, Constance is a woman in love. She loves and supports Charcot. It becomes apparent that she helped him financially and introduced him to people he could never have hoped to meet. As the film progresses, she senses that something is going on, which she has no control over and which goes beyond medical research. But she remains solidly in love with her husband. I thought she was the perfect incarnation of her name and went off on a wild tangent about the alchemy that must occur to make people's names dictates their personalities. Then I found out that she was actually called Augustine, like Charcot's patient, and Alice changed her name for the script to avoid any confusion. So, it's fair to say, that her name defines her character. She is a woman who weathers the storm and, through thick and thin, stays at her husband's side.

Alice Winocour says that the trap would have been to make her the heroine of a bourgeois melodrama...

That might have been a risk if we had made her a disenchanted woman, but she is very solid, very smart and deeply in love. There is no rancor. She is hurting and it's hard for her, so she can appear cold and aloof, but she doesn't shut down, she's still there. That's what I like about the last shot of her, gazing at him in the crowd at Salpêtrière. He is alone and bewildered, and her gaze pays tribute to her strength of character. She knows, yet she won't leave him. Her love for him is more powerful than everything else.

Did the constrictive costume help you develop the character?

It certainly taught me a lot about the everyday life of women who were utterly unable to dress on their own, given the constraints of the corset and the weight of the dresses, which they changed several times a day. They were like dolls being dressed and undressed. It can't have been a very exciting existence. I was delighted to get a chance to wear costumes like these because I haven't often acted in period movies. Of course it helps you by forcing you into an unfamiliar, stiffer posture, although women back then had never known anything else, so you mustn't appear awkward or clumsy when you move. Above all, it helped me to understand how much women of the period were constrained in their bodies, whatever their social standing. The film shows Charcot's lack of respect for his patients' bodies. We also sense, in a scene where Constance undresses, that society ladies, under their refined elegance, were stiflingly corseted. It was a century that imprisoned the bodies of women from every background.

What attracted you to the project?

I loved the script, but I think meeting Alice before reading it would have been enough to convince me to work with her. Behind her long bangs, there is an extraordinary, magnetic and charismatic young woman. She is also very determined in a totally non-aggressive way. She constantly thinks things over, but it's never unnerving because she knows exactly what she doesn't want, as well as what she wants. She appears to be very fragile, but she is much tougher than she looks. I loved the gentle atmosphere she engendered on set. With her amazing smile, she possesses very delicate steely resolve. She wavers constantly between control-freakery and gentleness. I felt she had complete trust in me. From the very start, I loved her vision of the movie and her desire to make something that seems more dream than reality. I love movies like that and I find the idea of taking this love story to the verge of the fantastical very appealing. There was a shot in Charcot's house that reminded me of a shot in *Gaslight* by George Cukor. On set, the way she framed things, you could sense Alice's determination not to be lured into making a docudrama TV movie. She constantly resisted the temptation to film a detail of a dress or a drape, and remained focused on her story of desire and feelings without being illustrative or demonstrative. She didn't film all the etiquette, which might have imprisoned the film. She encouraged me to plunge into the character and period, and to feel like an Edith Wharton heroine. I did so even more gladly in the knowledge that Alice had kept one foot firmly in the 21st century and had the skills to make this story timeless and modern.

Chiara Mastroianni
selected filmography

1987: *Les Yeux noirs* by Nikita Mikhalkov

1993: *Ma saison préférée* by André Téchiné

1994: *Prêt-à-Porter* by Robert Altman

1995: *N'oublie pas que tu vas mourir* by Xavier Beauvois

1996: *Trois vies et une seule mort* by Raoul Ruiz

1996: *Comment je me suis disputé... (ma vie sexuelle)* by Arnaud Desplechin

1996: *Les Voleurs* by André Téchiné

1997: *Nowhere* by Gregg Araki

1998: *À vendre* by Laetitia Masson
1999: *La Lettre* by Manoel de Oliveira
1999: *Le Temps retrouvé* by Raoul Ruiz
2002: *Carnages* by Delphine Gleize
2003: *Il est plus facile pour un chameau...* by Valeria Bruni Tedeschi
2005: *Akoibon* by Édouard Baer
2007: *Les Chansons d'amour* by Christophe Honoré
2007: *Persepolis (voix)* by Marjane Satrapi et Vincent Paronnaud
2007: *L'Heure zéro* by Pascal Thomas
2008: *Un conte de Noël* by Arnaud Desplechin
2008: *La Belle Personne* by Christophe Honoré
2008: *Le crime est notre affaire* by Pascal Thomas
2009: *Un chat un chat* by Sophie Fillières
2009: *Non ma fille tu n'iras pas danser* by Christophe Honoré
2011: *Les Bien-aimés* by Christophe Honoré
2011: *Poulet aux prunes* by Marjane Satrapi et Vincent Paronnaud
2011: *Americano* by Mathieu Demy

Cast

Professor Charcot	Vincent Lindon
Augustine	Soko
Constance Charcot	Chiara Mastroianni
Bourneville	Olivier Rabourdin
Rosalie	Roxane Duran
Head Nurse	Lise Lamétrie
Blanche	Sophie Cattani
Verdan	Grégoire Colin
Pierre	Ange Ruzé

Crew

Directed by	Alice Winocour
Written by	Alice Winocour
Produced by	Isabelle Madelaine Emilie Tisné Michèle & Laurent Pétin
Director of Photography	George Lechaptois
Film Editor	Julien Lacheray
Sound	Jean-Luc Audy
Costumes	Pascaline Chavanne
Production Designer	Arnaud De Moléron
Make-Up	Michelle Constantinides
Hair	Milou Sanner
A DHARAMSALA production in coproduction with	ARP FRANCE 3 CINEMA DARIUS FILMS
With the participation of	Canal + Ciné + France Télévisions

With the participation of the CNC

With the support of Région Ile-de-France la Fondation Groupama Gan pour le cinéma

Aspect ratio: 1.85