

MONGREL MEDIA PRESENTS

the
secret
life
of
words

a film by Isabel Coixet

(2006, Spain, 112 minutes)

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CAST LIST

HANNA

JOSEF

SIMON

DIMITRI

DOCTOR SULITZER

VICTOR

AND INGE

SARAH POLLEY

TIM ROBBINS

JAVIER CÁMARA

SVERRE ANKER OUSDAL

STEVEN MACKINTOSH

EDDIE MARSAN

JULIE CHRISTIE

MARTIN

LIAM

SCOTT

ABDUL

MANAGER

DANIEL MAYS

DEAN LENNOX KELLY

DANNY CUNNINGHAM

EMMANUEL IDOWU

REG WILSON

CREW LIST

An EL DESEO production with the participation of MEDIAPRO.

WRITER AND DIRECTOR	ISABEL COIXET
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS	AGUSTÍN ALMODÓVAR JAUME ROURES
PRODUCER	ESTHER GARCÍA
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER	JAVIER MÉNDEZ MISS WASABI
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY	JEAN-CLAUDE LARRIEU
EDITOR	IRENE BLECUA
ART DIRECTOR	PIERRE-FRANÇOIS LIMBOSCH
SOUND	AITOR BERENGUER
SOUND EDITOR	FABIOLA ORDOYO
RE-RECORDING MIXER	PATRICK GHISLAIN
MAKE-UP ARTIST	ANA LÓPEZ-PUIGCERVER
HAIR STYLIST	AINOHA ESKIZABEL
COSTUME DESIGNER	TATIANA HERNÁNDEZ
CASTING DIRECTOR	SHAHEEN BAIG

SYNOPSIS

When you finish making a film, it's always extremely difficult to talk about it. After sleeping, eating, living, dreaming and breathing it twenty-four hours a day, I feel that the words to describe what you've just done are never going to do justice to the adventures in which the actors, the crew and you have been involved. So, even though I feel that I'm betraying myself, that in the film there are many more things and many more layers than those I am going to tell, I'm going to try to say something.

An isolated spot in the middle of the sea. An oil rig, where all the workers are men, on which there has been an accident. A solitary, mysterious woman who is trying to forget her past (Sarah Polley) is brought to the rig to look after a man (Tim Robbins) who has been temporarily blinded. A strange intimacy develops between them, a link full of secrets, truths, lies, humour and pain, from which neither of them will emerge unscathed and which will change their lives forever. A film about the weight of the past. About the sudden silence that is produced before a storm. About twenty-five million waves, a Spanish cook (Javier Cámara) and a goose. And, above all else, about the power of love even in the most terrible circumstances.

SOME NOTES BY JOHN BERGER.

Watching the film, I don't think about actors performing or locations (settings). The protagonists are as they live. Their weaknesses are like our own – the consequence of having lived. The places - a factory floor, a depot zone, an oil rig, a helicopter landing pad, a canteen - are what we are all living near, whether we pay attention or not.

The distance between story and a daily life we recognise, is minimal. This is why I thought of certain films by Rossellini and de Sica, made in post-war Italy. This film's worldview is very different, as is also its aesthetic. (Its framing is often like that of a Renaissance painting - Mantegna, say.) What it has in common with Italian neo-realism is its sense of the everyday being sacred.

The Italian public sixty years ago immediately recognised themselves in those films, their dilemmas, their devastated streets, their tricks for survival and the particular historic moment they had been thrown into at the end of the Second World War.

Just as we recognise ourselves in this film about the beginning of what the Sub-commandant Marcos has called the Fourth World War. The Third was The Cold War. And the Fourth is the war of the organised rich against the poor, which began ten years ago. Everyone in this film has acquired a certain expertise in survival. All have been, in some sense, wounded. We never see a single one of them in his home. But they are aware of their destinies as the rich can never be.

Food, the pleasure of cooking and eating well (when the chance arises) is one of the film's recurrent themes. Another is joking - making a joke because, at that moment, nothing else is possible. Both are a reminder that, despite everything, life may be thought of as a gift. On the bottom deck of the oilrig there is a wild goose who has been partly tamed by an oceanographer who is measuring, day and night, the force of the waves. A harbinger. The film is

about the desire behind the thought that life is a gift. I'm using unnecessarily big words. Rather listen to the small words of the film - they say all.

Somewhere this film was conceived on the terrain which extends to the horizon beyond the notion of martyrdom. How many paintings over the centuries referred to this? A good number. Yet today in the mindset of the rich and of the media they control, every notion of martyrdom has been abolished and replaced by the notion of exemption. Exemption from pain and violence - proposed first by money, and then by the false promises of commodities. In this film there is no such exemption. Which is why we identify with it.

Nor is there a cult of pain. Simply a vision of how sometimes suffering leads to a shared salvation. Never simple. Never glib. Ancient. Something those without power often discover.

The burnt and blinded oil rig worker Josef (Tim Robbins) suffered his injuries in an attempt to save the life of a fellow-worker who wanted to kill himself - although Josef was not aware of this. Josef's wounds and solitude then allow Hannah to transcend what she has been subjected to, and to re-become - against all the odds - innocent again. Two person's names - Josef. Hannah - contain the words that fill a lifetime. And as the Vietnam writer, Lê Thi Diem Thúy, says so beautifully: Let the word be humble, let them know the world did not begin with words, but with two bodies pressed close, one crying and one singing.

SOME NOTES BY ISABEL COIXET

THE SECRET LIFE

Someone said that from the moment you have an inner life, you are already leading a double life.

Words –like shoals of fish- team around in our heads and crowd against our vocal chords, fighting to get out and be listened to by others. And sometimes they get lost on the journey from head to throat. This film is about those lost words that wander for a long time in a limbo of silence (and misunderstandings and errors and past and pain) and then one day come pouring out, and once they start nothing can stop them.

THE SILENCE OF WORDS

Hanna (Sarah Polley) lives in the silence that her deafness imposes on her, although very often it seems that silence is the only weapon she has to defend herself from the world. Josef (Tim Robbins) talks as if it is only through words – and irony and jokes and humour- that he can avoid going completely mad.

The encounter between them, the inevitable physical link that is established between a nurse and the patient she is caring for, will show them the other face of the reality in which both are immersed. The empathy, that mysterious ability to feel the other person's dilemmas, whatever they may be, as your own, that they manage to develop will break down all the walls –of silence, of cynicism- that there are between them.

SHOOTING ON AN OIL RIG

Eleven years ago I was on an oil rig in the south of Chile. Since then, not a day has gone by when I haven't thought of stories that could happen on one of

them. It is a fascinating place –well, I imagine that if your idea of what is fascinating is Las Vegas, then an oil platform is NOT-, in the middle of the sea, created by man, a microcosmos where people of very different nationalities are forced to live together –and create certain rules for coexistence- and work as a team, in extreme circumstances: if it's cold, you die of cold, if it's windy, you'd better put stones in your pockets and if it's hot (and believe me, in the engine rooms it is ALWAYS hot), you feel as if you're living inside an El Bosco painting. There is a monotonous, infernal noise. All the surfaces are slippery (with grease, with damp, with a mixture of both). There are times when you can make phone calls and times when you can't. The sense of isolation is such that, when you are back on land, for a few moments you feel that the rest of the world has disappeared and you're going to find the streets, the parks, the houses, empty. And yet I can't think of a better place for telling this story.

ACTORS, ROLES

SARAH POLLEY (HANNA)

I wrote the role of Hanna for Sarah Polley because I know, since I worked with her in “My life Without Me” of her extraordinary capacity for metamorphosis: that mysterious quality that means she can be surly and tender at the same time, sweet and strong, unfriendly and charming. This is a difficult, risky role, with no points of reference, we barely know where this woman is from, but we do know WHO she is. And Sarah gave herself to Hanna with closed eyes and a fierce passion which, for me and for all the crew members, left a lump in our throats on more than one occasion.

TIM ROBBINS (JOSEF)

When I finished the script of “The Secret Life...” I had one of those hunches that, very often, you never admit to yourself. I thought: “Now all I need is for Tim Robbins to play Josef”. Because I think that Tim is one of the best –for me, the best- actors of his generation, as well as a great director and an extraordinary human being. Josef is a complex character whose face has been burned and who is suffering from temporary blindness, which is only a pale reflection of all the battles that are being waged inside him. Tim has given him, as well as all that was on paper, an unsuspected tenderness and sense of humor, a human dimension, that I find impossible to imagine with another actor.

JAVIER CAMARA (SIMON)

Javier Cámara plays Simon, a Spanish cook who lives in the little world of his kitchen, yearning for the world of haute cuisine, offering his companions little marvels of cheese soufflé, beef with basil and mascarpone ice cream which they can't appreciate. He is a tender, idealistic character and Javier has given him an extraordinary vulnerability, a humanistic sense of hope. Thank to Simon's character, Hanna starts to open up to the world again. And, thanks to Javier, Simon remains in the spectator's memory.

JULIE CHRISTIE (INGE)

What can I say about Julie Christie that hasn't been said? The recreation that this actress has made of a real character like Inge Genefke is sublime: her gestures, her accent, her voice, and her severe manner, which hides an incombustible love of humanity. Having Julie Christie was a privilege for all of us who worked on this film. She is one of the youngest women I have met.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHIES

SARAH POLLEY

- 2005 THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS (Dir. Isabel Coixet)
2005 BEOWULF (Dir. Sturla Gunnarson)
2005 DON'T COME KNOCKING (Dir. Wim Wenders)
2004 DAWN OF THE DEAD (Dir. Zack Snyder)
2004 THE INSIDE (Dir. Roland Suso Richter)
2003 MY LIFE WITHOUT ME (Dir. Isabel Coixet)
Genie Award - Best Actress in a Leading Role
2003 THE EVENT (Dir. Thom Fitzgerald)
2001 NO SUCH THING (Dir. Hal Hartley)
2000 THE WEIGHT OF WATER (Dir. Kathryn Bigelow)
2000 THE CLAIM (Dir. Michael Winterbottom)
1999 EXISTENZ (Dir. David Cronenberg)
1999 GUINEVERE (Dir. Audrey Wells)
1997 THE SWEET HEREAFTER (Dir. Atom Egoyan)
Boston and Chicago Critics - Best Actress in a Supporting Role
1994 EXOTICA (Dir. Atom Egoyan)
1988 THE ADVENTURES OF BARON MUNCHAUSEN (Dir. Terry Gilliam)

TIM ROBBINS

- 2005 ZHATURA (Dir. Jon Favreau)
2005 WAR OF THE WORLDS (Dir. Steven Spielberg)
2005 THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS (Dir. Isabel Coixet)
2005 CODE 46 (Dir. Michael Winterbottom)
2003 MYSTIC RIVER (Dir. Clint Eastwood)
Academy Award – Best Actor in a Supporting Role
Golden Globe - Best Actor in a Supporting Role
Screen Actors Guild - Best Actor in a Supporting Role
2000 HIGH FIDELITY (Dir. Stephen Frears)
1999 MISSION TO MARS (Dir. Brian De Palma)
CRADDLE WILL ROCK (Dir. Tim Robbins)
National Board of Review

Sitges Fantastic International Film Festival – Best Film & Director

1995 DEAD MAN WALKING (Dir. Tim Robbins)

Academy Award – Best Actress in a Leading Role (Susan Sarandon)

Silver Bear, Berlin Film Festival – Best Actor in a Leading Role (Sean Penn)

Prize of the Guild of German Art House Cinemas

Prize of the Ecumenical Jury

Reader Jury of the "Berliner Morgenpost"

Independent Spirit Award – Best Actor in a Leading Role (Sean Penn)

Screen Actors Guild - Best Actress in a Leading Role (Susan Sarandon)

David di Donatello – Best Foreign Actress (Susan Sarandon)

Humanitas Award

1994 THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION (Dir. Frank Darabont)

1994 THE HUDSUCKER PROXY (Dir. Joel Coen)

1994 PRET-A-PORTER (Dir. Robert Altman)

1993 SHORT CUTS (Dir. Robert Altman)

1992 BOB ROBERTS (Dir. Tim Robbins)

Tokyo Film Festival – Best Film

Boston Film Festival – Best Film, Director & Actor

THE PLAYER (Dir. Robert Altman)

Golden Globe – Best Actor in a Leading Role

Cannes Film Festival – Best Actor

1990 JACOB'S LADDER (Dir. Adrian Lyne)

1988 BULL DURHAM (Dir.: Ron Shelton)

JAVIER CAMARA

2005 ALATRISTE (Dir. Agustín Díaz Yanes)

2005 THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS (Dir. Isabel Coixet)

2004 LA MALA EDUCACION (BAD EDUCATION)(Dir. Pedro Almodóvar)

Unión de Actores – Best Actor in a Supporting Role

2003 LOS ABAJO FIRMANTES (Dir. Joaquín Oristrell)

Ondas Award – Best Actor

2002 TORREMOLINOS 73 (Dir. Pablo Berger)

Ondas Award - Best Actor

Málaga Film Festival – Best Actor

- 2001 HABLE CON ELLA (TALK TO HER) (Dir. Pedro Almodóvar)
European Film Awards – Best Actor, People’s choice Award
- 2000 LUCIA Y EL SEXO (SEX AND LUCIA) (Dir. Julio Médem)
- 1999 CUARTETO DE LA HABANA (Dir. Fernando Colomo)
Peñíscola Comedy Film Festival –Best Actor
- 1998 TORRENTE, EL BRAZO TONTO DE LA LEY (Dir. Santiago Segura)
Ondas Award – Best Actor
Peñíscola Comedy Film Festival –Best Actor
- 1996 CORAZON LOCO (Dir. Antonio del Real)
- 1995 ESO (Dir. Fernando Colomo)
- 1993 ALEGRE MA NON TROPPO (Dir. Fernando Colomo)

JULIE CHRISTIE

- 2005 THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS (Dir. Isabel Coixet)
- 2004 HARRY POTTER AND THE PRISONER OF AZKABAN (Dir. Alfonso Cuarón)
- 2004 TROY (Dir. Wolfgang Petersen)
- 2004 FINDING NEVERLAND (Dir. Marc Forster)
- 2001 NO SUCH THING (Dir. Hal Hartley)
- 1997 AFTERGLOW (Dir. Alan Rudolph)
Independent Spirit Award – Best Actress in a Leading Role
New York Film Critics Circle – Best Actress
National Society of Film Critics – Best Actress
Evening Standard British Film Award – Best Actress
- 1997 KENNETH BRANAGH’S HAMLET (Dir. Kenneth Branagh)
- 1996 DRAGONHEART (Dir. Rob Cohen)
- 1991 FOOLS OF FORTUNE (Dir. Pat O’Connor)
- 1986 POWER (Dir. Sydney Lumet)
- 1982 HEAT AND DUST (Dir. James Ivory)
- 1982 THE RETURN OF THE SOLDIER (Dir. Alan Bridges)
- 1978 HEAVEN CAN WAIT (Dir. Warren Beatty)
- 1971 MCCABE AND MRS. MILLER (Dir. Robert Altman)
- 1970 THE GO BETWEEN (Dir. Joseph Losey)

- 1969 IN SEARCH OF GREGORY (Dir. Peter Wood)
- 1968 PETULIA (Dir. Richard Lester)
- 1967 FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD (Dir. John Schlesinger)
- 1966 FAHRENHEIT 451 (Dir. François Truffaut)
- 1965 DOCTOR ZHIVAGO (Dir. David Lean)
- 1965 DARLING (Dir. John Schlesinger)
 - Academy Award – Best Actress in a Leading Role*
 - BAFTA – Best British Actress*
 - National Board of Review – Best Actress*
 - New York Film Critics Circle – Best Actress*
 - Golden Laurel Award - Dramatic Performance, Female*
- 1964 YOUNG CASSIDY (Dir. Jack Cardiff / John Ford)
- 1963 BILLY THE LIAR (Dir.: John Schlesinger)
- 1962 CROOKS ANONYMOUS (Dir.: Ken Annakin)

ISABEL COIXET

Graduated in Contemporary History, Isabel Coixet comes back with THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS, after the success of MY LIFE WITHOUT ME. She has also written and directed the feature films A LOS QUE AMAN (TO THOSE WHO LOVE) (1998), the internationally acclaimed THINGS I NEVER TOLD YOU (1995) and DEMASIADO VIEJO PARA MORIR JOVEN (TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG) (1986).

She joined the advertising agency JWT as creative director. She also founded the advertising agency TARGET, for which she also worked as creative director, as well as the production company EDDIE SAETA. She has obtained the most prestigious advertising awards for her work in this field. In 2000, she founded the production company MISS WASABI FILMS, with which she made several documentaries and video clips.

Isabel Coixet has recently directed a stage play for the first time, “84 Charing Cross Road”, based on a book by the American writer Helene Hannf.

Filmography:

2005 THE SECRET LIFE OF WORDS

2003 MY LIFE WITHOUT ME

Goya Awards – Best Adapted Screenplay & Song (“Humans Like You” by Chop Suey)

Berlin Film Festival - Prize of the Guild of German Art House Cinemas

Sant Jordi Award – Best Spanish Film

RNE’s “Ojo Crítico de Cine” Award

El País de las Tentaciones – Best Director

Cien de Cine del Público Award – Best Film & Director

Unión de Actores – Best Actress in a Supporting Role (Leonor Watling)

Atlantic Film Festival – Best Canadian Feature

Genie Awards – Best Actress in a Leading Role (Sarah Polley)

Bordeaux International Festival of Women in Cinema – Best Actor (Scott Speedman)

Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos – Best Adapted Screenplay

1998 A LOS QUE AMAN (TO THOSE WHO LOVE)

1995 THINGS I NEVER TOLD YOU

Fotogramas de Plata – Best Spanish Film

Ondas Award - Best Director

Sant Jordi Award – Best Spanish Film

Círculo de Escritores Cinematográficos – Best Original Screenplay

Silver Alexander Award – Tesalonica Film Festival

1986 DEMASIADO JOVEN PARA MORIR VIEJO (TOO OLD TO DIE YOUNG)