



# Lincoln Film Society

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**Friday November 23rd, 2018**

## L'Amant double (18)

*dir:* François Ozon

*starring:* Jérémie Renier, Marine Vacth

*sponsor:* Andrew Howard

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**Synopsis:** Paris, present day. 25 year-old Chloé is plagued by stomach pains. Her doctor refers her to psychoanalyst Paul, but he ends their consultations when they fall in love. Chloé is very happy until one day, she sees someone she believes to be Paul, talking to another woman. Paul denies it was him but Chloé decides to find out more. She discovers that Paul has an identical twin brother, Louis. Paul denies this too. Chloé visits Louis (also a psychoanalyst) and begins a very intense physical relationship with him, which she hides from Paul. Over time, Paul and Louis begin to merge in Chloé's mind. She investigates their past and finds a troubled family history. Paul also discovers hidden secrets in Chloé's past, including the possibility of her having a twin who died, which may explain the stomach pains. Chloé begins to accept she imagined Louis. She and Paul resume their relationship.

Does François Ozon deliberately open his lurid psycho-sex-thriller ("inspired by *Lives Of The Twins* by Joyce Carol Oates" per the credits) by evoking Nakata Hideo's *Ring* diptych? A woman's long dark hair conceals her face in a salon. As the face is revealed, her gaze seems deranged. Then we get a huge close-up of her eye. This, we soon discover, is not the face of a vengeful wraith like *Ring*'s Sadako but of Chloé, a chic, damaged young woman who is attracted to and repulsed by rough sex. An entirely different kettle of fishy backstory, but Ozon's mini prologue tips us the wink that it's the woman we need to watch out watch out for in his story, not the man (or is that men?). Add *L'Amant double* to the long list of entertainments about dangerously psychotic women who threaten the sanity and safety of everyone around them, few of them created by out gay men like Ozon.

The plot is set in motion by an ethical decision: psychoanalyst Paul Meyer (Jérémie Renier, back with Ozon after *Criminal Lovers* and *Potiche*) stops treating Chloé (Marine Vacth, back with Ozon after *Jeune et jolie*) for a seemingly psychosomatic pain in her gut because he has fallen for her. But that's the last time that ethics get much of a look in. Chloé and Paul are shacked up together in no time, their bliss clouded only by Paul's dislike of Chloé's cat and by the old crone next door, who's had her late cat stuffed. Chloé soon discovers that Paul has a randier and altogether less ethical twin named Louis Delord (Renier again, just ahead of Jacqueline Bisset in playing two roles in the movie), and he - being another psychoanalyst - is soon 'helping' her to overcome her sexual inhibitions in the back room of his consulting room. Battered emotionally and physically by seeing both men and frustrated by Paul's denial that he even has a twin brother and caginess about his adoption of his mother's maiden name, Chloé starts researching that the Delord family and uncovers an exceedingly complicated history of sibling resentments and rivalry for the affections of the same girl, now a bedridden victim. The proliferating live-and-dead



cats turn out not to be very relevant, but her enquiries are crammed with other directorial red herrings, not to mention two Jacqueline Bissets, one benignly matriarchal, the other gone to the dark side. The story suggests that Chloé eventually finds peace and understanding - until the closing punchline brutally snatches away that illusion.

This is all even sillier than it sounds, with the brothers at one point sharing Chloé's bed and kissing each other as gay lovers and Chloé later wrapping on a dildo to penetrate Paul from behind. (perhaps she got the idea from seeing Joao Pedro Rodrigues's masterly *Odete* (2005))? Despite the escalating absurdities Ozon can't resist the Hitchcockian impulse to provide 'scientific' explanations for the various derangements, so we're also treated to a mini lecture on the 'parasite twin' - a malformed foetus which shrivels and dies in the mother's womb while its healthy sibling grows normally. Chloé immediately accepts this as the complete answer to her questions about her mysterious gut pains: her own 'parasite twin' turned into a cyst, she thinks, and is now causing her distress. Inevitably, this heralds the appearance of the parasite as a phantom monster from the id.

In short it's an absurd farrago, but farrago embellished with Ozon's lavish design ideas and *mise en scène*. He fills the screen with visual echoes and opposites, reversed mirror images and CGI assisted 'twinning' motifs, and uses quasi-organic sculptures and installations in the art museum where Chloé works as an attendant to suggest the evolution of her monstrous inner self. In the presskit, Ozon refers respectfully to Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* as another inspiration (he asked his actors to see it; Vacth declined) but the exuberance he builds brings to the task of realising Chloé's fantasies takes the film into Brian De Palma territory: out of control psychosis runs wild! Most viewers will have forgotten about the *Ring* like prologue by the time that the revelations about Chloé in the closing scenes come along, so they may be surprised to discover that so much of the film has occurred in her mind; even in the light of those revelations, it's quite hard to say what, if anything, was 'real'. But it doesn't really matter. The film may have classy actors and smart visuals but it's ultimately a typical movie ride on a tacky ghost train.

See over for credits

## Credits

Chloé Morton  
Dr Paul Meyer/Louis Delord  
Madame Schenker/Chloé's mother  
Rose  
Gynecologist/Dr Agnes Wexler  
Sandra Schenker  
  
Director  
Screenplay  
Director of Photography  
Editor  
Art Direction  
Original music  
Sound  
Costume

Marine Vacth  
Jérémie Renier  
Jacqueline Bisset  
Myriam Boyer  
Dominique Raymond  
Fanny Sage  
  
François Ozon  
François Ozon  
Manu Dacosse  
Laure Gardette  
Sylvie Olivé  
Philippe Rombi  
Brigitte Tallandier  
Pascaline Chavanne  
  
**France/Belgium 2017**  
**107 mins**

## Another View

The title of François Ozon's latest may seem silly in its obviousness, but he isn't the first director to give away a key plot point of double vision before the opening credits roll. Brian De Palma's *Body Double*, in which a man finds himself spying on the grisly murder of a woman, uses the protagonist's arduous discovery of the titular duality as the source of all its suspense. The way he deals with the consequences, meanwhile, makes for a series of unpredictable and surreal events.

*L'Amant Double* is no doubt indebted to De Palma beyond its title. Like the American director did with films such as *Body Double* and, even more evidently so, *Dressed to Kill*, Ozon explores psychoanalysis with a schlocky, literal approach and through the use of arresting, graphic visuals. He makes Freud's well-known (or at least popular) ideas about transference perversely fascinating and cinematic.

Chloé, played with utmost French grace by Marine Vacth (the star of Ozon's 2013 film *Jeune et Jolie*), has forever been tortured by strange stomach aches that no doctor has been able to explain. The problem, it seems, is psychological. She starts seeing Doctor Paul Meyer (the excellent Jérémie Renier). Typically, the psychoanalyst doesn't say much during their sessions, allowing the lonely 25-year-old to talk about her fears and, naturally, her mother.

Ozon films these musings with a deconstructing camera. Chloé is reflected in mirrors, seen from all angles, her face doubled as she talks of contradictory emotions that add up to a broken person. Her pain is palpable, if not explained. Ozon wastes no time on the medical particulars: soon enough, sweet-natured Paul admits to having feelings for Chloé and refuses to keep treating her. She starts feeling better and they move in together.

Paul does indeed turn out to be a sort of double lover: after Chloé discovers that he adopted his mother's name when he started his practice, she sees a man who looks exactly like him outside another psychoanalysis office. On this doctor's plaque, the last name is the same as Paul's father's.

Dead ringer stories have to go beyond the idea of two people being the same to be truly worth telling. What keeps *L'Amant Double* exciting is Ozon's careful crafting of the narrative around Chloé and her game of double duty with Paul and Louis, his twin brother. With her lies she builds a house of cards that threatens to fall at any moment, especially with Louis' ruthless nature making her that much more anxious. Renier is able to show off his acting chops as the two doctors are radically opposite: Paul is as kind and conventional as Louis is cruel and perverse.

"When I'm with you, I think about him. When I'm with him, I think about you," Chloé tells Louis (who unapologetically revels in

his own opinion that he must give more pleasure to Chloé than Paul ever could), summing up the nature of her fractured identity. Ozon, as the ambitious and eccentric director that he is, takes this psychoanalytic dimension to another level when Chloé's bipolar existence becomes too much for her. His editing masterfully blends routine and anxiety throughout, but it is when he falls into the dreamlike and the depraved that his diagnosis becomes amusingly twisted and formally exciting.

Ever determined to unsettle and entertain, Ozon also grounds his film in reality with a resolution that ties (most of) the threads together. Chloé's ordeal can be explained, but the psychological dilemmas of which it comprises are more interesting than the hard science. Her profound sadness is what remains most striking, and Ozon's unusual yet tender approach to a female character in crisis is admirable. A genre film taking a woman to the extremes of sanity while always honouring her emotions, *L'Amant Double* is a bold and often disturbing spectacle. In many ways, this is what cinema is all about.

**Manuela Lazić: Little White Lies**

## Our next screening: Friday November 30th, 7.30pm

### The Breadwinner (Ireland/Canada 2017. Cert PG)

Deservedly nominated for Best Animated Film awards in this year's Oscars and Golden Globes, *The Breadwinner* tells a compelling tale of modern-day Afghanistan. The film fuses the drama of a young girl falling foul of the tyranny of the Taliban and learning to fight back, with an ancient Afghan fable which she uses to illustrate the courage needed to face down your worst fears. It's an inspiring and quite beautiful work that shows animated film off at its very best and is a fitting way to close our 65th anniversary year.

The Committee would like to remind everyone - especially our guests - that half season membership (valid from January 4th) remains available until next weekend. For £25, it offers the chance to see the remaining 16 films in the season at no extra charge. It's the perfect inexpensive for a friend or relative.