



The Main Feature

Season 44 – Issue 11 – Screening 27 February 2025

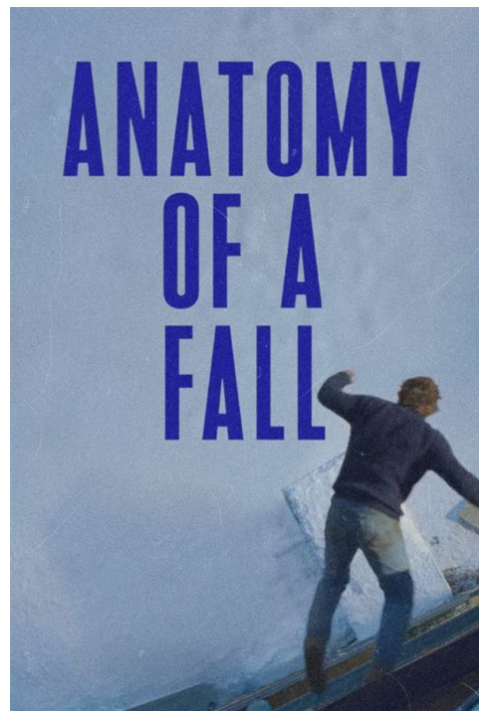
Anatomy of a Fall (Anatomie d'une chute)

France, 2023, 151mins, Cert 15

Director	Justine Triet
Written by	Justine Triet and Arthur Harari
Cinematography	Simon Beaufls
Production Design	Emmanuelle Duplay
Editing	Laurent Sénéchal
Music Supervision	Thibault Deboaisne

Cast

Sandra Hüller	Sandra Voyter
Swann Arlaud	Maître Vincent Renzi (Sandra's lawyer)
Milo Machado-Graner	Daniel Voyter (Son)
Antoine Reinartz	Avocat général (Prosecutor)
Samuel Theis	Samuel Maleski (Husband)
Jehnnny Beth	Marge Berger (Court-appointed chaperone)
Camille Rutherford	Zoé Solidor (Sandra's visitor)
Anne Rotger	Présidente du tribunal (Head Judge)
Messi (le chien)	Snoop (the dog)



Our presentation this evening won the Palme D'Or (the top award) at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2023. It is a twisty, multi-faceted psychological courtroom drama, that could just as easily have been titled 'Portrait of a Marriage.'

It was described by the Daily Telegraph as an 'intellectual thriller of rare calibre, assembled so precisely and deepening so richly it continually takes your breath away.' The poster just said 'Did She Do It?'

The film opens with a picture postcard view of the new family home, an isolated alpine chalet near Grenoble (Samuel's home town). We meet Sandra, a middle-aged German-born writer in informal (almost flirty) conversation with a young female student. Samuel is renovating the attic space but plays his music so loudly that Sandra is reluctantly forced to re-schedule the meeting. Meantime



their partially-sighted 11-year-old son (Daniel) forsakes his piano practice to take his beloved border collie Snoop for a walk. When he comes back to the house, his father lays dead in the snow having apparently fallen from the attic window. Sandra insists that the fall must have been accidental. Her old friend (flame?) and lawyer, Vincent, raises the possibility of suicide, prompting Sandra to recall her husband's apparent attempt to

overdose six months earlier, when weaning himself off antidepressants. After an investigation, Daniel's conflicting accounts of what happened shortly before his father's death, combined with the suggestion that Samuel sustained a head wound before his body hit the ground and an audio recording of a vicious recent argument between the couple, Sandra is indicted on charges of homicide. The prosecution, led by a zealous 'bully with a buzzcut', teases out Sandra's various resentments towards her husband (including partial culpability for the accident that impaired Daniel's vision 7 years earlier), and dissects their (sometimes violent) disagreements over literary plagiarism, infidelity, finances and marital roles and responsibilities. A distraught Daniel testifies (twice) with different perspectives on events and offers his views on his father's frame of mind.

The film opened in France the same weekend as *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* – and beat the latter to finish a solid second at the local box office. Total French cinema admissions of 1.9m (and a gross of \$14.6m) were deemed remarkable for an 'art house' film. Aside from the Palme D'Or the film won the Best Original screenplay at the Oscar, BAFTA and Global Globe ceremonies and secured 6 Césars in France (including Best Film, Director and Actress). And Messi (who played Snoop) won the "Palm Dog" at Cannes for best canine performance (I am not making this up – it is a real award!).

Sandra Hüller is magnetic in the lead role. She was previously best known for the German comedy-drama *Toni Erdmann*. Here, she is all controlled - but vulnerable - defiance, refusing to be cowed by the (frankly misogynist) prosecution team. The Hollywood Reporter called her performance 'brilliant, sensational' and the Guardian praised her 'calm directness as an actor [which] gives the film its texture, substance and emotional force.' She was nominated for Best Actress at the 2024 Oscars (losing out to Emma Stone in *Poor Things*). Hüller was the first German actress to be nominated since 1937 (Luise Rainer if you're interested!).

Discussing the film with the Hollywood Reporter, the director Justine Triet (who co-wrote the screenplay with her partner Arthur Harari) commented that 'first was the idea of wanting to dive into a relationship and a couple and into their complexities. And then the second idea was wanting to have this tandem between a mother and a child, and this child trying to figure out who his mother really is. The idea of the trial came after that, to supplant and tie these [ideas together].' In the same interview, Harari commented 'we worked to keep it as ambiguous as possible. Not because it's a game but because the main thing in this film is to get to that point where the child is really in a dilemma, because he understands that he probably will never know, and it is torture for him. We had to put the audience in the same position.'



Triet also confirmed that the choice of the aggressively percussive music that Samuel loops to annoy Sandra ('P.I.M.P.' by the Bacao Rhythm & Steel Band) stemmed from the failure to secure the rights to use Dolly Parton's 'Jolene.' (If they originally picked I Will Always Love You we might have had a different film).

The film is overlong (the last 15 minutes does drag) and the deliberate ambiguity and long, wordy discussions could annoy some audiences. But this (as the Times said) is 'sober and mature film-making' and the central performance and the (very distinctive) French courtroom process are fascinating.

Eugene Smith

The Taste of an Anatomy of a Dispute

After Justine Triet won the Palme d'Or, she was heavily critical of the French state's arts policies ('the commercialisation of culture this neoliberal government supports is in the process of breaking France's cultural exception') and its violent response to the pension reform demonstrations ('these protests were... repressed in a shocking way'). The French Culture Minister (Rima Abdul Malak) was unimpressed, replying that she was 'flabbergasted' (according to the Times) or 'gobsmacked' (as reported by the BBC News website).

The selection of the official French entry for the 'Best Foreign Language film' Academy Award is made by the National Cinema Centre (NCC), whose 7 members are appointed by the Ministry of Culture.

Anatomy of a Fall was the clear favourite – critical acclaim, the prestigious Palme D'Or, and solid global box office. And the crowning affirmation – ex President Obama placed it in his Top 10 for the year. However, the NCC chose *The Taste of Things* to fly the tricolour in Hollywood leading to allegations of a spiteful intervention by Malak to blackball the film.

When shown by our Club last November, *The Taste of Things* was rated fondly (score 7.16) but it did receive mixed reviews in France, including 'outdated and indigestible' (Le Parisien) and 'soulless and lacking delicacy' (L'Obs). Le Monde said it generated 'perplexity' and 'boredom' adding 'we can legitimately ask how such a conventional film could find itself ... representing France in the Oscars'.

Télérama, a French 'Radio Times', suggested that the minister had taken her revenge on Triet's remarks by proposing the names of the seven producers, directors and other film industry figures who sat on the NCC's 2024 Commission. The magazine said four members had voted for *The Taste of Things*

to 'please the minister', whereas three had opted for *Anatomy of a Fall*.

Malak said: 'The insinuation that I intervened in the choice of the film that would represent France at the Oscars is serious, false and extravagant ... I approved the make-up [of the commission] but at no time did I communicate with its members.'

The NCC also denied the allegations of ministerial manipulation.

Supporters of *The Taste of Things* contended that it was a better choice as Oscar voters were likely to prefer its succulent French gastronomy to the psychological drama of *Anatomy of a Fall*. It was also noted that 'only' 59% of the dialogue in *Anatomy* was in French (Sandra Hüller's character mainly speaks English) – whereas *The Taste of Things* was unsullied by such étrangeté.

In the event, the Academy did not even shortlist *The Taste of Things* (though like *Anatomy of a Fall* it received 5 other Oscar nominations). The Best Foreign Language Film Oscar was won by the UK for its (German language) submission *The Zone of Interest* – which at least starred Sandra Hüller!

Well – we've now shown both films. Which do you think would have been the better choice to represent French cinema?

Eugene Smith



We thank Red Eye for subsidising the cost of printing these notes. Red Eye Print, Unit 2D, Lansbury Estate, 102 Lower Guildford Road, Knaphill, GU21 2EP Tel: 01483 772111

Club website: www.wncc.org.uk. Prefer to leave your comments on the film and your score online rather than on paper? Email to reactions@wncc.org.uk by Wednesday 5 March 2025
Discs of previous shows are available to hire for a modest fee.

Comments and reactions to: **Maudie**

No of reaction slips received = 30

Average score = 7.97

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	~	~	~	~	~	1	6	17	5	1

A lovely, moving film, beautiful scenery, and a wonderful portrayal of Maud by Sally Hawkins. It was difficult to hear some of the dialogue though. **Loved this film. Brilliantly acted**

Brilliant acting

Remarkable performance by Sally Hawkins

A tour de force by Sally Hawkins. Sad but joyful; ultimately uplifting

I am a working artist. Fascinating to see her pathway

Beautiful portrayal. Enjoyed immensely

Fascinating story and great performances. She was certainly a real character!

Charming and so well-acted. I want to know more about her now!

Good film well presented

Lovely crafted characters that came together perfectly. A thoroughly enjoyable film

Clarity of sound from actors quite difficult to comprehend

Very moving, well cast

Wonderful film documenting the fascinating life of an artist and very clever woman

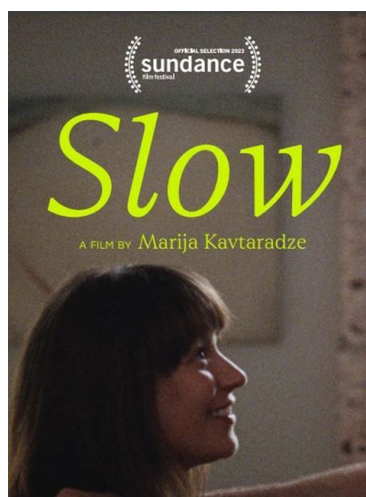
An unusual but good choice for a pre-Valentine's Day film. However, I enjoyed the film. Excellent acting by Sally Hawkins and Ethan Hawke

A rather gentle film which I thoroughly enjoyed

Excellent cinematography, excellent acting, very atmospheric. But too slow for me

Position	Film	Average score
1	One Life	8.80
2	Maudie	7.97
3	The Great Escaper	7.96
4	Wicked Little Letters	7.66
5	The Holdovers	7.62
6	The Taste of Things	7.16
7	The Color Purple	6.77
8	Past Lives	6.46
9	Winners	5.88
10	Barbie	5.59

Forthcoming attraction: 13 March 2025 – **Slow**



The dialogue is an engaging mix of emotional honesty and trivial musings and the leads are as charismatic as they are natural, while the handheld camerawork emphasises the film's sense of authenticity. Radio Times

The lack of subplots and supporting characters eventually becomes limiting but there are great performances, and you'll admire Kavtaradze's easy-going shooting style. Times

What keeps Slow buoyant is the rapport between its very convincing leads — the wry, saturnine Cicėnas and Grinevičiūtė, who exudes humour and no-nonsense sensuality. Financial Times

With strong performances by Grinevičiūtė and Cicėnas, Elena and Dovydas's relationship unfolds at a gentle, unhurried pace, their growing attraction indicated by small details that reward attentive viewing. Guardian