

THE
BUREAU
SALES

JANE AUSTEN WRECKED MY LIFE

a film by Laura Piani

OFFICIAL SELECTION

tiff

TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2024

talking to another individual

and that is its strength. »

- Rachel Cusk

novel and the fact is
Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky
are more real to me
than my next door
neighbors and even
stranger to me is the
fact that even before
I was born Dostoyevsky
wrote the story of
me as a book
called 'Idiot' and
even reading it
I was searching

Logline

A contemporary and offbeat romantic comedy about a young French bookseller infused with the world of Jane Austen's novels.

Synopsis (short)

Agathe, hopelessly clumsy yet charming and full of contradictions, finds herself in desperate singlehood. Her dream is to experience love akin to a Jane Austen novel and her ultimate aspiration is to become a writer. Instead, she spends her days selling books in the legendary British bookshop, Shakespeare & Co, in Paris. Invited to the Jane Austen Writers' Residency in England, she must confront her insecurities to finally fulfill her ambition of becoming a novelist and put an end to wasting her sentimental life.



Synopsis (long)

AGATHE lives in Paris with her sister MONA and nephew TOM, who the sisters are raising together. She has been working for years at the legendary British bookshop Shakespeare & Co together with her “ladies’ man” of a best mate, FÉLIX.

Hopelessly clumsy, Agathe is as charming as she is full of contradictions. She is desperately single while her dream is to experience love like in a Jane Austen novel, and she sells books all day while her dream is to become a writer. Her frantic imagination constantly invades her thoughts while she abstains from any kind of social life. Literature always promised her great expectations but life never delivered on these promises, or anything close.

Unbeknownst to her, Félix submits Agathe’s latest writing attempt to a writers’ residency. As a result, Agathe is utterly surprised to see herself invited by the Jane Austen Residency in the UK. Félix uses his best efforts to force Agathe to come out of her shell – including a surprise romantic kiss.

Once she arrives at the writers’ residency, Agathe finds herself surrounded by a lovely bunch of eccentric Jane Austen fans, intimidating published writers, scones at teatime – and OLIVER, a handsome but snobbish lecturer of English literature.

Growing obsessed with Félix, who she thinks may well turn out to be the man Agathe had been hoping for her whole life, she can’t write a single line. Agathe will have to confront her pipe dreams and insecurities to finally fulfil her dream of becoming an accomplished writer. And stop messing up her love life.



Director's note

My love of cinema started with watching comedies like *The Shop Around the Corner* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1940) or *The Apartment* (Billy Wilder, 1960). I even stopped going to school as a young teen, too obsessed with discovering Paris' Latin Quarter's many theatres. I then became a bookseller at Shakespeare & Company nearby, during my film studies.

Every bookshop is a theatre but Shakespeare & Co was always more than that. An Anglo-saxon sanctuary in the heart of Paris' Latin Quarter and a unique venue, where hundreds of poets and writers have been welcomed since the 50's. This bookshop became my own haven and main inspiration for my film.

Established as a film and TV scriptwriter, I've written comedies, thrillers, adaptations and dramas for other filmmakers for more than ten years. But I have always dreamt of writing my own romantic comedy, and one about literature and poetry.

Also, I've always felt drawn to misfits, people and characters who are a little cracked – too soft, too sincere, too romantic. Those who do not fit in, who prefer to fool themselves. Those who do not want to grow up nor to dare trying, and all those who are afraid to suffer. I wanted to combine a comedy of manners and a romantic comedy. I wanted to draw the portrait of a quirky woman so strongly convinced that she doesn't fit in the society that she wishes she was born centuries ago, in her favourite novels. And who has thus reached a point where she needs to face her own desires. I wanted to fully embrace the genre's codes, but adapted to this lunar, clumsy and wistful protagonist.

The core of the film is our protagonist's emancipation: her writers' residency in England will turn into an eye-opening

experience for Agathe. A journey which will reveal to herself her true romantic, sexual and creative nature – often thanks to her eccentric co-residents, who certainly are as ill-adjusted to modern society as she is. And if this film was greatly inspired by the many years I spent at Shakespeare & Co, it was also fueled by several stays in Chawton (where Jane Austen spent her last years) where I went to write my script.

Once specific quote by Wilder about Lubitsch guided my writing and directing: “He could do more with a closed door than other directors could do with an open fly”. I love this quote because it’s funny, of course, but more importantly because it evokes the off-screen and the clever delicacy that one has to engage, I believe, to achieve satisfying romance in a film, with all the randomness and magic it necessarily involves. This quote, for me, also sums up all it takes to achieve filming both a romance and a comedy, two ambitious genres to tackle and combine.

Mike Leigh’s and Roger Michell’s comedies were of great inspiration to me, as well as James Ivory’s more classic pieces such as *Howard’s End* (1992) for its cinematography, light and tone. Unlike most romantic comedies that appear bright and glossy, I indeed wanted to impose strong pictorial references and considered elegant framing, in contrast with the story’s apparent lightheartedness and frivolity. Additionally, opting for a Scope ratio and embracing larger spaces allowed me both to enhance Agathe’s loneliness and to impose the distance with plain reality that I was looking for – and thus, convey better how Agathe feels completely at odds with the world she lives in.

Music was also a key element in building up my film, both in terms of original score and additional tracks. I had very clear references for specific scenes: for instance, *Cry To Me* (opening cue) was a deliberate homage to *Dirty Dancing* although we decided to modernize the track with the composer’s (Peter von Poehl) own arrangements and Marie Modiano’s vocals. *Je T’aime À l’Italienne* (Frédéric François) was also very deliberately chosen for its kitschy and funny lyrics, giving the chance for an unlikely duet between Agathe and Félix. And I insisted on using Schubert’s famous piece (*Fantasia in F Minor, 4 hands in F Minor D940*) not only because I find it brilliantly simple, delicate and beautiful, but also because it was symbolically interesting to play around the “missing hands” in some interpretations, thus enhancing the love triangle of our protagonists.

Aside from these specific cues, I also wanted music to underline the total freedom of tone and era that I was claiming by telling the story of a young woman feeling completely at odds with the world that surrounds her, making her both very contemporary and timeless as a result. Peter von Poehl suggested to incorporate instruments such as the oboe, flute and clarinet from Agathe's arrival in England: I find that they instantly bring a delightful strangeness to Agathe's journey, also helping the viewer to being lost in time and space, like Agathe.

For me, a good romantic comedy is a delicate choreography mixing bodies and emotions, and I wanted to fully embrace its codes without reinventing the genre. The idea was never to confound the audience but to make sure our hopeless protagonist's inner feelings would be portrayed in the most accurate way possible. I also wanted my film to pay tribute to the close relationship most of us have kept with the romance novels we've devoured and in which we could picture ourselves.

If romanticism can somehow sound a bit outdated, our film does not forget that romanticism is on the contrary very much linked to contemporary struggles. I wanted to draw the portrait of a young woman who – because she is blocked in many ways, mourning her parents - believes so strongly that she doesn't fit into this society that she wishes she was born centuries ago, in her favourite novels. But unlike most romantic comedies, she won't be “saved by the man” but by her own efforts. Indeed, Agathe will eventually fall in love with the right man only after she has proved to herself that she was able to write and to exist by herself.

I chose Camille Rutherford very early on to play the lead part of Agathe: I just knew that her wonderful sensibility, her unique clumsiness, in addition to speaking fluent English, would perfectly fit the singularity, melancholy and empathy that I needed Agathe to convey. When I met Pablo Pauly, I saw right away that he had the charm and comic skills that I was hoping to find for Félix to turn into this desperately childish and irresistible ladies' man. In deliberate contrast with Félix' character, Charlie Anson (Oliver) ended up completing the trio perfectly, with his typically British elegance, gentleness and dry humour.

Laura Piani



Cast

Camille Rutherford	AGATHE
Pablo Pauly	FELIX
Charlie Anson	OLIVER

Annabelle Lengronne	CHERYL
Liz Crowther	BETH
Alan Fairbairn	TODD
Lola Peploe	OLYMPIA
Alice Butaud	MONA
Roman Angel	TOM

And with the friendly participation of

Frederick Wiseman	POET
Pierre-François Garel	GABRIEL

Crew

Writer-director

Laura Piani

Producer

Gabrielle Dumon

Cinematographer

Pierre Mazoyer (she/her)

Sound operator

Lucas Héberlé

Script supervisor

Marie de Chasse

Casting director

Lucciana de Vogüe

1st ADs

Quentin Janssen, Ludovic Giraud

Hair & Make-up

Mademoiselle Jenny

Set decorator

Agnès Sery

Costumes

Flore Vauvillé

Picture editor

Floriane Allier

Sound editor

Carole Verner

Re-recording mixer

Laure Arto

Composer

Peter von Poehl

Line producer

Monica Mele



Laura Piani (writer-director)

After studying Film and Literature in Paris and in Rome, Laura Piani worked as a bookseller at Shakespeare & Co, Paris, while graduating in Scriptwriting at the Conservatoire Européen d'Écriture Audiovisuelle. She was part of the first Showrunner training initiated by the FEMIS Film School and works as scriptwriter for Film and TV.

Over the last ten years, she has worked on numerous theatrical and TV feature scripts as well as TV series, with filmmakers such as Edouard Deluc, Diane Bertrand, Cristina Pinheiro, Marion Laine or Guillaume Gallienne. Also a Script Consultant, she regularly collaborates with the European Writers Club, Groupe Ouest, the TorinoFilmLab, the Krakow Film Festival, the Pop Up Residency in Bratislava or the TRT 12 Punto in Istanbul. She also taught Scriptwriting at Beaux-Arts (Paris), ESRA, Cinéfabrique, CEEA and Emergence's TV Series Workshop.

In 2022, she wrote and directed her first fiction short film, "Prudence Ledoux a le Vent en Poupe" starring Alice Butaud and Pierre-François Garel (OCS). "Jane Austen Wrecked My Life" is her first feature film.



Contacts & main info

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Shooting dates	17/10/23 - 24/11/23
Shooting languages	French, English
Format	Scope – color – 5.1
Delivery	Fall 2024
Film duration	94 min

LES FILMS DU VEYRIER & SCIAPODE present a film by LAURA PIANI starring CAMILLE RUTHERFORD – PABLO PAULY – CHARLIE ANSON – ANNABELLE LENGRONNE – LIZ CROWTHER – LOLA PEPLOE – ALAN FAIRBAIRN original screenplay by LAURA PIANI producer GABRIELLE DUMON co-producer BERTRAND FAIVRE associate producers VINCENT GADELLE & ÉMILIE BLÉZAT line production MONICA MELE casting LUCCIANA DE VOGÜÉ cinematography PIERRE MAZOYER sound LUCAS HÉBERLÉ – CAROLE VERNER – LAURE ARTO picture editing FLORIANE ALLIER set design AGNÈS SÉRY costumes FLORE VAUVILLÉ original score PETER VON POEHL a LES FILMS DU VEYRIER & SCIAPODE co-delegate production with the participation of CANAL+ and CINÉ+ in co-production with PICTANOVO with the support of Région Hauts-de-France in partnership with the CNC and of Région Île-de-France in partnership with the CNC in association with INDÉFILMS 12 with the development support of PROCIREP – ANGOA – CINÉVENTURE DÉVELOPPEMENT 6 international sales THE BUREAU SALES French distribution PANAME DISTRIBUTION



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