

FILM MOVEMENT®

presents

## Amour Fou

A film by Jessica Hausner

"An event that could hardly be described as a laughing matter somehow yields a dryly amusing and characteristically layered reflection on the absurdity of what humans call love."

– Justin Chang, *Variety*



**Austria / 2014 / Drama / German with English Subtitles**

**96 min / 1.85:1 / Stereo and 5.1 Surround Sound**

[Official Film Webpage](#)

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## Exclusive New York City Theatrical Engagement

Film Forum – 209 W. Houston St. [www.FilmForum.org](http://www.FilmForum.org)

Opens March 18, 2015 – ONE WEEK ONLY

Showtimes: 12:30, 2:40, 4:50, 7:00, 9:20

### Select Press For *AMOUR FOU*

A complex and exquisitely filmed exploration of a man's desire to find a woman willing to die with him...the performances have a hushed quality that constantly underplays the emotions, suggesting rationality is an option even in matters of love, life and death. The resulting visual classicism suggest[s] the oppressive and straitjacketed environment the characters are so desperate to leave behind.

-Boyd van Hoeij, *The Hollywood Reporter*

*Amour Fou* emerges as less a tale of mad, forbidden passion than a disquietingly funny essay on the human capacity for self-deception. It create[s] an effect that feels at once mundane, realistic yet strangely artificial. Imagine a Jane Austen drawing-room comedy as directed by Michael Haneke and you're halfway there.

-Justin Chang, *Variety*

Fans of austere auteurism, immaculate framing, and laughter that leaves lumps in your throat will be floating on cloud nine with this one...the film still screams for a spotlight to be directed at Hausner. *Amour Fou* is a delightful comedy of errors...Hausner's direction is assuredly controlled from start to finish

-Nikola Grozdanovic, *The Playlist*

The period suicide rom-com is born in droll, delightful *Amour Fou*. Hausner's unapologetically small, exquisitely designed chamber piece plays as a gentle challenge to the ways in which we define love and dictate courtship...rarely in romantic comedy are the stakes so high, and the touch so correspondingly light.

-Guy Lodge, *HitFix*

## FULL SYNOPSIS

Forever under-appreciated and melancholy, Heinrich is a young poet in Romantic Era Berlin who determines his best way out of despair is to end it all, so he sets about finding a woman to join him in his predetermined departure. Recently diagnosed with a terminal illness, the well-off but unremarkable Henrietta, fascinated by Heinrich's controversial "The Marquise of O," finds his offer intriguing, if a bit strange. And yet, she agrees to navigate the uncharted journey towards a suicide pact with him, at once awkward and enlightening for them both. Rather than a declaration of passionate devotion, *Amour Fou* - inspired by the actual suicide in 1811 of Heinrich von Kleist and Henrietta Vogel - goes against expectations to become a wry and curious denunciation of dying for love.

## SHORT SYNOPSIS

Heinrich is a melancholy young poet in Romantic Era Berlin who determines his best way out of despair is to end it all. Recently diagnosed with a terminal illness, Henrietta, fascinated by Heinrich's controversial "The Marquise of O," finds his plan intriguing, and she agrees to navigate the uncharted journey towards a suicide pact with him. *Amour Fou* – inspired by the actual suicide in 1811 of Heinrich von Kleist and Henrietta Vogel – goes against expectations to become a wry and curious denunciation of dying for love.

## LOGLINE

Based on the double suicide of German romantic poet Heinrich von Kleist and Henrietta Vogel, this period piece is a wry denunciation of dying for love.

## ASSETS

Official US Trailer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLsFy343V8g>

Downloadable hi-res images:

<http://www.filmmovement.com/filmcatalog/index.asp?MerchandiseID=400>

## **FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

### OFFICIAL SELECTION:

Un Certain Regard – Cannes Film Festival

Karlovy Vary Film Festival

Toronto Int'l Film Festival

Vienne Int'l Film Festival

First Look Film Festival – Opening Night Selection



## AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR JESSICA HAUSNER

*Originally, AMOUR FOU wasn't even planned as a film about the joint suicide of Heinrich von Kleist and Henriette Vogel. Where did the project start?*

Jessica Hausner: About ten years ago I wrote a draft script about a double suicide for love. But I felt that what I had written was in some way not close enough to life and was too constructed. Then about five years ago I got it back out of the drawer and worked on it again. I still didn't like it, but then I stumbled upon an article on Kleist and Vogel in a magazine. What interested me



*Filmmaker Jessica Hausner*

about it was that Kleist had apparently asked several people whether they wanted to die with him - his best friend, a cousin and then ultimately Henriette Vogel. I found that a little grotesque. He gave this romantic, exaggerated idea of double suicide for love a banal, slightly ridiculous side. And that was what was missing from my old drafts. The ambivalence of that which we know as love.

*You mean: is double suicide an act of love or rather the expression of two egoistical situations? Could you say it like that?*

J.H.: Yes, the image of a joint suicide for love is generally a very romantic one. I was interested in bringing things back to the shaky foundations of reality, in which even dying together is in fact each person dying separately. A pair, but not together.

*So what interested you wasn't the historical figure of Heinrich von Kleist, but rather the double suicide, and you wrote a free adaptation of that. Could you tell us where the freedom started and where it ended?*

J.H.: The love portrayed in the film is relative and actually based on misconceptions. In that respect, the key part of Kleist's biography which interested me most was the fact that his partner in death was somewhat coincidental. For me, that's the hook of the whole film, and I have changed some of the details which may have been different in the biography a little accordingly, based on this point of view.

*That also includes the fact that Henriette was ultimately not ill?*

J.H.: The 1811 autopsy report was analyzed again by modern doctors, and from a later perspective it is possible to say that at the time they believed it was a malignant tumor, but

from a modern day perspective that may not necessarily have been the case. It may also have been a cyst or a benign tumor, at the time they wouldn't have known. So the assumption that what she had wasn't even terminal is a justified one. So she wouldn't necessarily have died as a result. In that respect, I condensed the facts to form a particular truth. What I wrote or showed in my film isn't false, it's just exaggerated.

*What was the reason for her ultimately not being ill at all in your film?*

J.H.: To bring the entire situation to the extreme. It's about a chain reaction of misconceptions.

*Ten years ago, as a very young filmmaker, what made you consider making a film on this topic?*

J.H.: To me, it's a paradox to think that you can "die together." At the point at which you die, you are inevitably alone, and death will always separate you from the other person. Like many others, this paradox interested me. It has to be said that AMOUR FOU is not a naturalistic story. It's not about a specific "case," but rather it's more a reflection or an "essay" on the subject of love as an ambivalent feeling. In one moment you're close to another person, you're one with that person, you understand one another, and in the next moment you notice how misleading that is. The fact that at the same time you can have the opposite feelings for the person, who may not have loved you any more for a long time anyway.

*Reflection or "essay." That fits with Heinrich von Kleist in every respect. An author who frequently used real occurrences to determine the emotional and societal consequences. You just have to think of "The Marquise of O.", "The Earthquake in Chile" or "Michael Kohlhaas"...*

J.H.: Exactly. A specific example is used to showcase a general human situation. But for me, in all my films actually, but this film in particular, it's not so much about a specific historical case but rather about the various different variants of an assertion, in this case love.

*In AMOUR FOU, the highly elaborate dialogue borders on the absurd. It's absurd if a man simply turns to people and says "would you be interested in taking your own life with me?"*

J.H.: I was looking for a form that also had something artificial about it. So the story doesn't stick to the biographical facts - it's not a biopic - but merely based on an example. Geraldine Bajard, who worked on the script with me, and I developed it together in a sort of ping pong system. Dialogue, linguistic cascades which continue to increase. For example when Henriette is hypnotized and formulates a deep insight into herself in the most beautiful, complicated German, at the same time that's also a joke. Clearly almost nobody would speak in such an elaborate way under hypnosis, right? I was also inspired by the great scene in Woody Allen's film 'Zelig' in which he is also hypnotized, and in response to the question of why he always takes on the shape of others says "I wanna be liked." He really hits the nail on the head. He simply tells the truth without beating about the bush. It's the

same with us and Henriette Vogel, she just says what's wrong: she's worried about daily life.

*Obviously you've also studied texts from Kleist's time extensively to get this special tone right.*

J.H.: It was reasonably lengthy and meticulous research, we read a lot of correspondence from the period. Diaries and so on. Obviously spoken language is not passed on, and with a diary or letters you're as close as possible to dialogue. I transcribed some of the sentences I liked to practice the language. I also took some full sentences from Kleist's letters. Only a few stayed in as we worked on the script, but the linguistic style influenced it.

*As well as the linguistic 'corset' which comes with the conventions of a certain era, in this case there were also the constraints which are typical for period dramas such as external appearance, set design, costumes and so on. At what point was the 'set' for AMOUR FOU finally decided?*

J.H.: Yes, 'set' really is the right word. As in my last film, LOURDES, the eponymous pilgrimage site was the set, in this case it was 'the historical film'. That was definitely one of the reasons why I ultimately chose the Kleist story. I felt that if I set the story in the past, it would naturally get a much greater, ironic distance, which would also provide the opportunity to include the reflexive moments I value so highly in films. The design of the room was also very helpful for this. For me, it's less about designing a naturalistic image and more about designing a realistic one. To do this, I base my work on visual arts, where you can make this difference. In film this difference is not so significant. We studied images from the period for a long time, also so that we could design the inner rooms. Almost everything is built in the studio - not only because it's simpler and because we don't have such beautiful palaces like that anymore these days, but also to design the whole thing in a distinctive way, so you can actually feel the will to present in every sense of the term.

*What did that mean in terms of working on the set? Did the actors do a lot of rehearsing? At first glance, the composition of AMOUR FOU doesn't leave much room to maneuver, except in terms of getting the right tone that you had in mind. How often did scenes have to be filmed?*

J.H.: We filmed most of them around 15-20 times. But this was actually only because of all of the "theatrical" detail. I sometimes see it as space for the soul. The people who are in a scene don't show psychology, they are elements in the room, like a sofa or a table. The whole thing is, as it were, an image, and everyone has their own place in it. The staging is like choreography; the parts that are spoken are text; and the whole thing is effectively like a tableau vivant. This meant that working on set was therefore easy, because everything was clear from the start: we drew a storyboard, the actors knew their roles and their lines. In my films I mostly work very hard beforehand during the casting and try out a large number of scenes with the actors. Once I have chosen an actor, everything is normally sorted. We've done every scene during the casting anyway, then we simply go to the set and do it.

*This is very specific to this film. The characters express themselves not via a form of mimicked virtuosity, but rather through the fact that they function in an almost cold manner alongside language, like in a text by Heinrich Müller.*

J.H.: Yes, and actors react to that very differently. Some find it very easy, some find it very difficult because they would prefer to shape their own character in a more differentiated way. But that in itself is also good. That fact that I have very clear guidelines in terms of image detail, choreography and text which cannot be breached makes it really difficult. Where is the tiny gap where an actor can bring life to the role? And that's why I'm actually always very happy when an actor resists the corset, when they try to bring something else to the role, because otherwise the whole thing would be too dry. I am most pleased when somebody surprises me and opens up a new character style for me. Then it gets really interesting.

*Henriette Vogel - what do you think is special about this female character?*

J.H.: Not a lot of material about her has survived. A few letters, a portrait or two of her. But I had the impression that if a woman allows herself to be seduced, under whatever circumstances, into committing joint suicide with a man, that indicates at least a certain passivity - that she may be easily led or swayed or at least that she appears to be. I am particularly interested in female figures who appear to be good at the start and then as the story develops you notice that they are contradicting everything you thought about them in a relatively stubborn, obstinate manner. At the start, a woman like that appears to be soft and nice, and then you figure out that she's squeezing her hands into fists in her pockets. Henriette Vogel was probably one of these types of women.

*AMOUR FOU is probably your most comic film to date, as strange as that sounds based on the topic. Could you see yourself making a real comedy in the foreseeable future?*

J.H.: Well, what is a 'real comedy'? I like laughing about a realization. You laugh because you suddenly understand...

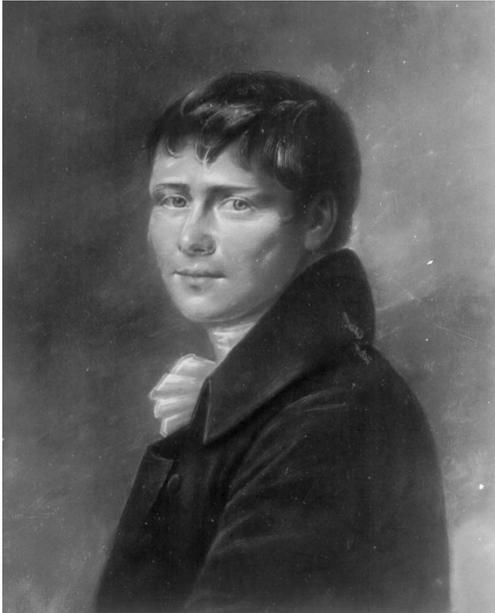
*A laugh of enlightenment?*

J.H.: You laugh because you suddenly understand what a tiny speck you are in the universe, or how laughable some things are, and significant things suddenly crumble into the banal. It's also liberating in terms of coming to the conclusion "Okay, I recognize that I'm part of a big, fat nothing. What of it?!"

A laughing grain of sand

J.H.: Yes exactly, something like that.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND – Heinrich von Kleist



*Heinrich von Kleist, 1801*

Kleist was born into the von Kleist family in Frankfurt an der Oder in the Margraviate of Brandenburg. After a scanty education, he entered the Prussian Army in 1792, served in the Rhine campaign of 1796, and retired from the service in 1799 with the rank of lieutenant. He studied law and philosophy at the Viadrina University and in 1800 received a subordinate post in the Ministry of Finance at Berlin.

In the following year, Kleist's roving, restless spirit got the better of him, and procuring a lengthened leave of absence he visited Paris and then settled in Switzerland. There he found congenial friends in Heinrich Zschokke and Ludwig Wieland (de) (1777–1819), son of the poet Christoph Martin Wieland; and to them he read his first drama, a gloomy tragedy, *The Schrockenstein Family* (de) (1803).

In the autumn of 1802, Kleist returned to Germany; he visited Goethe, Schiller, and Wieland in Weimar, stayed for a while in Leipzig and Dresden, again proceeded to Paris, and returning in 1804 to his post in Berlin was transferred to the Domänenkammer (department for the administration of crown lands) at Königsberg. On a journey to Dresden in 1807, Kleist was arrested by the French as a spy; he remained a close prisoner of France in the Fort de Joux. On regaining his liberty, he proceeded to Dresden, where, in conjunction with Adam Heinrich Müller (1779–1829), he published the journal *Phöbus* in 1808.

In 1809 Kleist went to Prague, and ultimately settled in Berlin, where he edited (1810/1811) the *Berliner Abendblätter* (de). Captivated by the intellectual and musical accomplishments of the terminally ill Henriette Vogel, Kleist, who was himself more disheartened and embittered than ever, agreed to do her bidding and die with her, carrying out this resolution by first shooting Vogel and then himself on the shore of the Kleiner Wannsee (Little Wannsee) near Potsdam, on 21 November 1811.<sup>[1]</sup>

According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica Eleventh Edition*, "Kleist's whole life was filled by a restless striving after ideal and illusory happiness, and this is largely reflected in his work. He was by far the most important North German dramatist of the Romantic movement, and no other of the Romanticists approaches him in the energy with which he expresses patriotic indignation.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich\\_von\\_Kleist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_von_Kleist)

## CREW

### **JESSICA HAUSNER, Writer/Director**

Hausner was born the 6th of October 1972 in Vienna, Austria. She studied directing at the Filmacademy of Vienna, where in 1996 she made the short film *Flora*, which won the Léopard de Demain at the Locarno Film Festival. *Inter-View*, her thesis film, won the Prix du Jury of the Cinéfondation at the Cannes Film Festival in 1999. Two years later, *Lovely Rita*, her first feature film, was presented in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival before being distributed in twenty territories around the world. Her second feature film, *Hotel*, was again selected in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival 2004; *Lourdes* had its premiere at Venice Film Festival 2009 in International Competition where it won the FIPRESCI Prize.

### **SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY**

2014 Amour Fou  
2009 Lourdes  
2006 Toast  
2004 Hotel  
2001 Lovely Rita  
1999 Inter-View  
1995 Flora



## CAST

### **CHRISTIAN FRIEDEL, Heinrich**

Born in Magdeburg, Germany in 1979, Friedel is a well-known actor of stage and screen, having studied acting at Munich's Otto-Falckenberg School. His theater roles include serving as a cast member with the Schauspielhaus in Hanover, the Dresden State Theater and more. In 2013 he directed *The Confessions of Marion Krotowski* at Theater Augsburg. His film credits include 2008's *The White Ribbon* by Michael Haneke, winner of the Golden Globe for Best Foreign Language Film.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

2014 *Amour Fou*  
2012 *Ende der Schonzeit*  
2011 *Chicken with Plums*  
2009 *The White Ribbon*

### **BIRTE SCHNOEINK, Henriette**

Birte Schnöink was born in Bremen in 1984. Pursuing her life-long passion for acting, she studied at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Arts in Berlin from 2006 to 2010; since 2009, she has been a permanent cast member of the Thalia Theater in Hamburg. She takes on her first major film role with *Amour Fou*.

### **FILMOGRAPHY**

2014 *Amour Fou*  
2012 *Komms Hinters Licht* (short)  
2012 *Lore*  
2011 *Remembrance*

### **STEPHEN GROSSMANN, Friedrich Louis Vogel**

Stephen Grossmann is a prolific German actor, seen often on both stage and screen. The son of teachers, he studied his craft at the Konrad Wolf Film University of Babelsberg. In 1992, he won the Best Actor Award from the Federal Ministry of Science and Culture; most recently, he has starred on stage in Maxim Gorky's *summer visitors* and a new production of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His screen credits date to 1992, and include several television series and films.

### **SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY**

2014 *Amour Fou*  
2014 *Schmitke*  
2014 *Miss Sixty*  
2013 *The Dad Test* (tv movie)  
2012 *Fly Away*  
2011 *Men in the City 2*

## CREDITS

### CREW

**Director and Screenwriter**  
**Director of Photography**  
**Production Design**  
**Costume Design**  
**Casting**  
**Make-up**  
**Sound Recordist**  
**Sound Design**  
**Sound Mixer**  
**Editing**  
**Script Consultant**  
**Producers**

Jessica Hausner  
Martin Gschlacht  
Katharina Wöppermann  
Tanja Hausner  
Ulrike Müller  
Meiko Schmidt and Kerstin Gaecklein  
Uwe Haußig  
Nicolas Tran Trong  
Michel Schillings  
Karina Ressler  
Géraldine Bajard  
Martin Gschlacht  
Antonin Svoboda  
Bruno Wagner  
Bady Minck  
Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu  
Philippe Bober

### CAST

**Heinrich von Kleist**  
**Henriette Vogel**  
**Friedrich Louis Vogel**  
**Additional Cast**

Christian Friedel  
Birte Schnoeink  
Stephan Grossman  
Sandra Hüller  
Holger Handtke  
Barbara Schnitzler  
Alissa Wilms  
Paraschiva Dragus  
Peter Jordan  
Katharina Schüttler  
Gustav Peter Wöhler  
Marie-Paule von Roesgen  
Marc Bischoff

## **About Film Movement**

Launched in 2002, Film Movement is a full-service North American distributor of award-winning independent and foreign films, based in New York City. Film Movement has released more than 250 feature films and shorts from 50 countries on six continents, including top prize winners from Sundance, Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Berlin, Tribeca and other prestigious festivals. Film Movement releases its films through numerous distribution channels, including thousands of art-house cinemas, universities and libraries; home video; television outlets; Cable Video on Demand (including its very own branded cable VOD platform—Film Festival on Demand—available in over 40 million US homes); In-flight Entertainment; and broadband outlets. For more information, please visit [www.filmmovement.com](http://www.filmmovement.com).