



METAMORPHOSES

a film by CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

2014 / 102 min / France / French / Fantasy

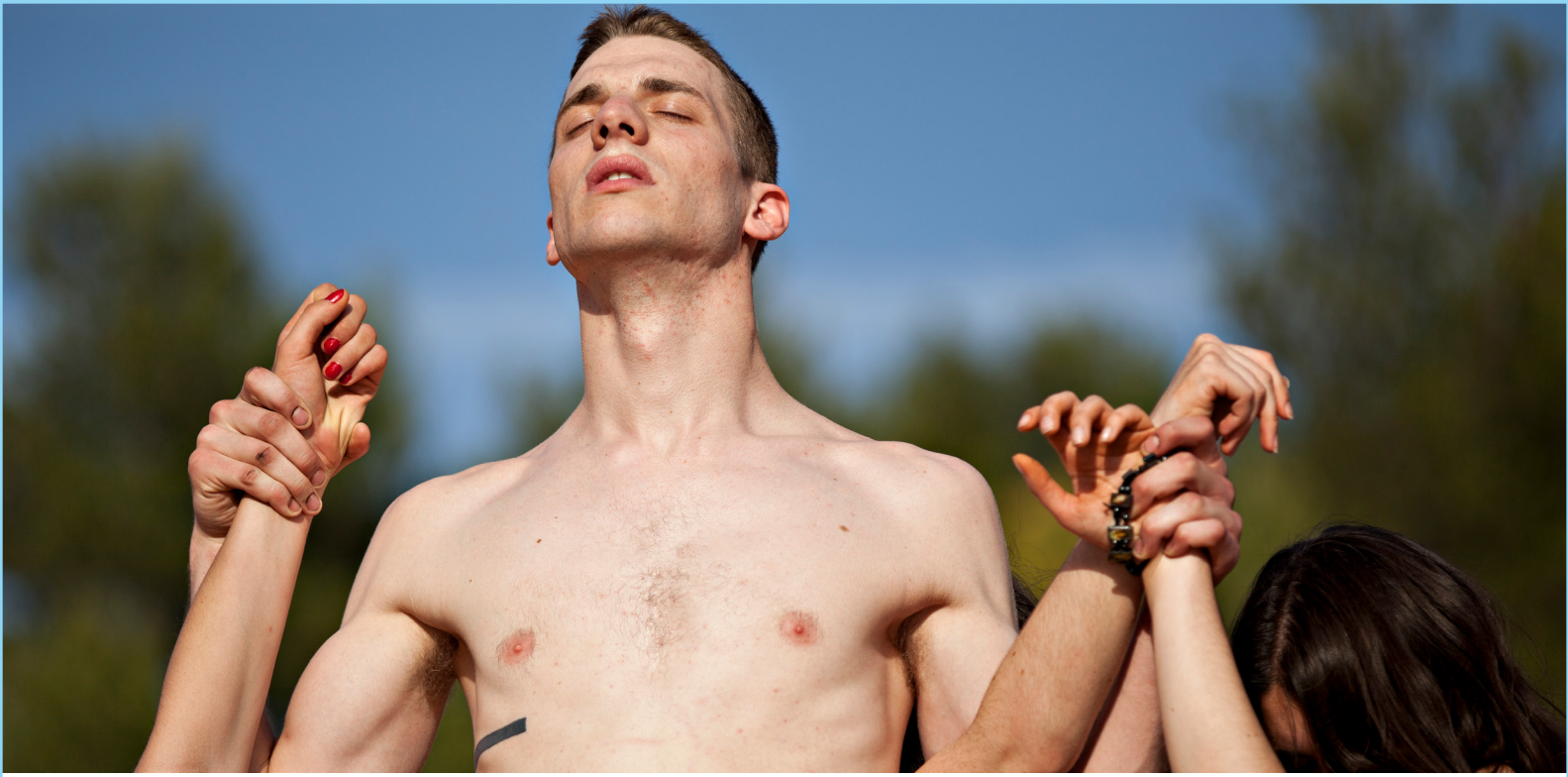
US Distributor:

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LOGLINE

In this modern-day retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a young girl named Europa is seduced by a magnetic stranger named Jupiter and embarks on a mythical journey to a land of powerful gods.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

When Europa skips class and meets a magnetic young man named Jupiter, she embarks on an unexpected and magical journey. Travelling aboard Jupiter's eight-wheel truck, they arrive in a mythical land inhabited by powerful gods who can transform humans into plants or animals in the blink of an eye. Europa watches, listens, and plays in their immortal home, becoming acquainted with Jupiter's friends, Bacchus and Orpheus. As the confrontation between seductive, yet vengeful gods and innocent mortals unfolds, Europa grasps a greater sense of life and love in this revelatory modern-day retelling of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

TECH SPECS

Run Time:	102 min
Aspect Ratio:	2.39:1
Shooting Format:	HD
Sound:	5.1 Dolby Digital
Country:	France
Language:	French



CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

Writer & Director

Christophe Honoré is an internationally celebrated French screenwriter and director. Considered by many critics as the spiritual heir to the French New Wave, Christophe began his career as a writer at the famed Cahiers du Cinéma. The prolific filmmaker quickly moved on to create his own acclaimed body of work, working closely with frequent collaborators like the César-winning actor Louis Garrel, with whom he has made five features. His 2007 film *Love Songs* screened in the Official Selection at the Cannes Film Festival. Together with *Dans Paris* (2006) and *The Beautiful Person* (2008), the groundbreaking trilogy addresses the questions of family, death, and

sexual desires in France's contemporary cultural landscape. Christophe's ninth feature, *Metamorphoses*, premiered in the Venice Days section of the 2014 Venice Film Festival and was nominated for the Venice Days Award.

CRITICAL PRAISE

"A remarkably beautiful film."

FILM COMMENT

"Playful, dirty, edgy, and wondrous."

TWITCH FILM

"Not only bold, but intelligent and inventive."

ION CINEMA

"As fluid and light as the heroes that are transformed before us."

FLIX

"An homage to the art of cinema."

CINEUROPA



INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ

Metamorphoses appears to have very little in common with *Beloved* (2011), your last film...

I've often felt the desire to construct a new film in opposition to the previous film, or films. After having worked on novelistic films with well-known actors, after knowingly citing the great models, I felt like entering completely unfamiliar waters, which is rather new for me. I needed to escape from romantic fantasy, from tales about characters that follow their respective biographical and psychological evolutions. I think I wanted to shed the need for characters, in the traditional sense of the term.

Did you need a change of scenery?

It's actually more a question of finding another form, one that can question my own work... To try and follow a form that creates a new way of composing a story and displaying the body. Some time ago, I was reading Russell Banks's last novel, *Lost Memory of Skin*. In it, he features a quote from Ovid: "My intention is to tell of bodies changed to different forms." I took this sentence as a plan of action and returned to its source by rereading *The Metamorphoses*. This sentence resonated in me: in it I saw the very definition of cinema, or at least of a possible cinema, and a direct imperative to perform the experiment. It is a question I often ask myself: what is it about film that attracts me, if not metamorphosing reality into something new? This was a challenge that interested me, that could allow me to escape the illusion of realism. Since realism was not a concern for the film, it allowed me to take a look at the Greek myths as told by a Roman.

How exactly did you work?

The Metamorphoses is gigantic. There are several hundred fables, and I obviously couldn't keep everything. My first concern was to choose the episodes allowing me to compose a single tale, to select what could be a part of what I wanted to say. I took around twenty stories for my storyline. Within each story, I remained faithful to Ovid. What required more work was linking them together, embedding them: I wanted to go from one story to another by choosing the right people.

Is there a narrative thread running through your film?

I concentrated on the confrontation between the gods and mortals over three stages. First, the encounter with Jupiter, who attracts Europa, and tells his own story: it's the self-portrait of Jupiter as seducer, as Pygmalion, as initiator. Then comes Bacchus, and everything at that point is about belief: one must believe the tale of the gods because they can avenge the disbelief of certain men or certain women. Finally, Orpheus arrives, and I follow him in his proselytizing, his teaching, his predictions. A cult forms around him until his death – obviously violent – at the hands of the Maenads. To tie these three moments together, I looked for a single point of view that would unite them all along a common thread. This is how I imagined Europa: a very young woman initiated by three different characters. She watches them, follows them, and relates her experience, her encounters with the gods, with the myths... The idea was to give this character back her original innocence, her first morning.

Was there a particular guiding principle when preparing the film?

It was important for me to not shoot *Metamorphoses* as a cultural object, or a book of old images divorced from our present reality. I was not looking to make a clever re-enactment. I wanted to confront these tales with France, as I might film this country today. I began to cast for the film, but in an unorthodox way: few of the people appearing in the film are true, professional actors. I wanted to work with people who had no experience of being filmed, that were either very young, or foreign men and women. I didn't imagine – or, rather, I imagined all too well – Louis Garrel as Jupiter... So I took a perilous leap founded on the spectators' suspension of disbelief. Because the "actors" they see on-screen... they're seeing them for the first time and have to believe in them. Those who have no prior experience of acting are often stranger than actors, they're not concerned with a style of acting based on conventions founded on a contract of appreciation with spectators. They let themselves be looked at in their solitude, their own truth, all of which escapes verisimilitude. I needed that strangeness. It corresponded to the strangeness of the Greek gods suddenly appearing in contemporary France.



What is contemporary about Greek mythology for us today, in France?

This film is also a way of paying back the Greek debt! They have given us so much. Greece isn't in debt, it is our contemporary world that owes Greece and its gods. I had this idea in mind, which inverts the pressures of the current economic system, in the name of history and the myths. I therefore wanted to talk about Greek heritage in contemporary France: we come from Greece far more than we do from America. We can (we must!) assert this as a rebirth of paganism! My wager consisted in saying, and showing, that these myths are the – sometimes unconscious – foundations of our current society, a sort of palimpsest, or subtext today that people, if they just scratch the surface a little, can retrieve quite easily. It is a culture that does not want to die, that refuses to be erased, and that I put out there for young French people to rediscover. I wanted something indecisive, a mix of historical periods and people.

Which is the reason why you chose the suburbs as the place where gods and men coexist...

The word that came to me during location scouting, and then during the shoot, was “peri-urban.” I wanted to find traces of nature in the city, traces that have resisted aggressive urbanization. Or a conserved stretch of nature, but right next to the city: on the side of highway exits and access roads, malls, wastelands... This is where I could define a fictional territory that has been rarely filmed, or rarely visited. This is where I could tell my viewer, “You’ve never seen Greek gods because you’ve never come here...”

One gets the impression there is a strong contrast between characters...

I would say it's a “very populated” film, with different body types ranging from a baby to an old couple. People in the film are fat, tiny, beautiful and ugly. I had to find a simpler way of seeing them. I wasn't expecting them to act in a “natural” style, but something that was as close as possible to them. No one speaks comfortably in the film. Jupiter, for instance, is a strange and attractive man from a foreign place, but still very close, speaking in an unusual way with a lot of style but never looking anyone in the eyes. He refuses conventions. This way of avoiding clichés fascinates Europa who, in her case, cannot be pinned down to conventional representation, which often makes her out to be a young beautiful, rather Nordic blonde... In the film, like in the myth, she is truly torn between the East and the West.

One of the risks the film takes is with the representation of nudity...

With Ovid, nudity poses no problem. It is wholly generous and beautiful. Obviously, in a current-day suburban city, with its housing projects, this is more problematic for a young woman. But, I was surprised: a lot of the young people I selected were very comfortable with it, undoubtedly because the film and the shoot protected them. I never met with any resistance. Everyone liked being nude in nature and being filmed that way. Even next to a highway. The film in no way aims at promoting a “return to nature,” but wishes to display the body in a hedonistic way. Nudity is not a return but a prerequisite, the primary condition for men and women. Initiation is founded upon the possession of a body – one's own or someone else's. Knowledge of the gods, of myths, of history, of origins, is also founded upon the carnal encounter. The scenes featuring nudity, sensuality, or sexuality, all talk about this: it is a means of accessing knowledge, both of the Other, and of the world. It is a powerful experience: the corporeal confrontation with the gods renders mortals unfit to return to the life they led beforehand.



What were the choices made when staging the nude scenes?

Natural and tender. I wanted something simple, direct, and above all to not film a performance, or make a challenge out of it, but to imagine these scenes as privileged moments, where meaning is revealed naturally, evidently. It's a type of nudity that is non-provocative, and I hope sensual and enticing.

And, for the scenes of metamorphosis?

I also wanted to flee the idea of performance. These metamorphoses are not visual transformations, using excessive make-up or CGI. This isn't a conservative position, but an aesthetic, an ethical choice: not making one see, but making one believe. This film in no way belongs to the fantasy genre. It is more of a manifesto for the most simple belief in the "magical" power of cinema – precisely, its power to metamorphose. In this respect, editing is the most appropriate tool because it is the most effective: bringing together and splicing two consecutive shots of a man and a stage, lo and a heifer, three young women and three bats, two old people and two knotted tree trunks... One must make an effort to believe in order for this to work. Otherwise, everything falls apart. My film is ultimately constructed by the spectator through fear, but also through magic. Furthermore, there is a great diversity of metamorphoses in Ovid, a variety of tones, of pitch, and my own cinematic tools of montage, collage, off-screen space, the relationship to sound, all allow me to vary the effects. It was a lot of fun, including the CGI effects we used for certain scenes, in our own unique way.

How did the shoot unfold?

On set it could be very complicated, especially for the amateurs. They were often nude, outdoors in a natural setting, in situations that were very far from anything they were used to dealing with. But everyone was very enthusiastic, joyful, and patient. Everybody believed in it. I knew I had to remain stubbornly and assertively faithful to my vision. I had a credo, taken from St. Paul, "One must understand the invisible with the visible..." And, it was especially important for me to not shy away from the true incongruities in the film... It is also what interested and amused me: venturing out onto unstable and unknown terrain, doing something that, in theory, I didn't know how to do...

Seeing beauty in the confrontation between myths and men, in the relationship between nude bodies and nature, you had any number of possible references, namely Pasolini...

Obviously, Pasolini and his "Trilogy of Life". Thanks to him, it is still possible to think we can escape the fatality of a prosaic cinema in order to reach a more poetic cinema. That is his legacy. But I must say, I more consciously thought of Godard, the Godard of Carmen, and Hail Mary. Of bringing an ancient, mythical beauty into the present, bringing contemporary beauty closer to the ancient myths. These are the shots that kept me afloat during shooting. Or, better yet, Youssef Chahine and how incredibly happy he is to believe... his pleasure in getting people to believe through cinema. I felt right at home with the idea of taking a simple palm tree and giving people Hollywood, to accept both the experience of beauty and of popular myth.

Interviewed by Antoine de Baecque



THE JOURNEY OF METAMORPHOSES

The Metamorphoses is one of the greatest poems Latin Antiquity has handed down to us. It is also the longest: 11 995 verses, spread over fifteen volumes. Ovid began writing it in the year 3, CE. He was 46 years old. Five years later, for reasons unknown, he was exiled by order of Emperor Augustus to Tomi, from which he was never to return. Out of desperation, he burned his manuscript, but copies of his masterpiece were already in circulation. His success was immediate, and has never slackened since. *The Metamorphoses* are one of the sources of inspiration for much of medieval literature. Shakespeare, no less, studied them closely and very often found inspiration (especially for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*).

The Metamorphoses is both a collection of tales and an encyclopaedia. The magnitude of its agenda, which justifies the size of the work, can be summed up in four verses, the first four: "My intention is to tell of bodies changed / To different forms; the gods, who made these changes, / Will help me – or so I hope so – with a poem / That runs from the world's beginnings to our own days." Ovid's ambition therefore comes back to composing a sort of universal history that he more or less divides into three great sections. The first takes us from the chaos of the origins up until Perseus, founder of Mycenae; the second, focussing on the Argonauts and Hercules, ends at the dawn of the Trojan War; and the last one, from the heroic age sung about by Homer, to the Rome of Augustus, who is himself promised this ultimate and sublime metamorphosis of divinization. In the over ten thousand verses he wrote, Ovid tells nearly 250 fables of metamorphoses. Some are relatively famous and have inspired many poets, painters, or sculptors: Actaeon devoured by his own pack of dogs (admirable painting by Titian at the Tate Gallery in London – the stag head hunter seems to dissolve into the vague half-light of the forest, while Diana, stone-faced in the foreground, draws her bow); Narcissus in love with his reflection, who eventually gives birth to a flower (in the Louvre, Poussin offers an unforgettably subtle interpretation: in the background, Echo the nymph is almost nothing more than a shadow on a rock); Daphne becoming a laurel tree to escape Apollo's embrace (extraordinary sculpture by Bernini at the Villa Borghese, in Rome: the nymph's spread-out fingers extending into marble leaves so thin they are translucent). Other episodes are only known by specialists.

Adapting *The Metamorphoses* cannot be done by arbitrarily choosing this or that pleasant tale. One must determine a point of view, establish a gaze through which (and, more deeply, from which) the poetic thread can unfurl without breaking. The film must impose its laws, exactly like the poet imposes a voice through which all is said and all depends.

These laws, this gaze, are first of all those of a contemporary witness: the young Europa, both our guide in these *Metamorphoses* and their main heroine.

MAJOR FESTIVALS

Venice Days at Venice Film Festival
(World Premiere)

International Film Festival Rotterdam

BFI London Film Festival

Rendez-Vous with French Cinema

Festival International du Film Francophone de Namur

Warsaw Film Festival

Thessaloniki International Film Festival

Sydney Film Festival

Busan International Film Festival

Melbourne International Film Festival

CAST

EUROPA	AMIRA AKILI
JUPITER	SÉBASTIEN HIREL
JUNO	MÉLODIE RICHARD
BACCHUS	DAMIEN CHAPELLE
ORPHEUS	GEORGE BABLUANI
ACTAEON	MATTHIS LEBRUN
DIANA	SAMANTHA AVRILLAUD
IO	CORALIE ROUET
MERCURY	NADIR SÖNMEZ
ARGUS	VINCENT MASSIMINO
PAN	OLIVIER MÜLLER
SYRINX	MYRIAM GUIZANI
BAUCIS	GABRIELLE CHUITON
PHILEMON	JEAN COURTE
TIRESIAS	RACHID O.
NARCISSUS	ARTHUR JACQUIN
THE MINYADES	ANNA CAMPLAN, ELÉONOR VERGEZ, MARGOT GUITTON
HERMAPHRODITUS	JULIEN ANTONINI
SALMACIS	SMARLÈNE SALDANA
PENTHEUS	YANNICK GUYOMARD
CADMUS	JIMMY LENOIR
ATALANTA	VIMALA PONS
HIPPOMENES	ERWAN HA-KYOON LARCHER
VENUS	KETI BICOLLI

CREW

DIRECTED BY	CHRISTOPHE HONORÉ
PRODUCED BY	PHILIPPE MARTIN
CINEMATOGRAPHY	ANDRE CHEMETOFF
SOUND DESIGN	GUILLAUME LE BRAZ, VALERIE DELOOF, CYRIL HOLTZ
PRODUCTION DESIGN	SAMUEL DESHORS
COSTUME DESIGNER	PASCALINE CHAVANNE
MAKE-UP	CAROLINE PHILIPPONNAT
EDITED BY	CHANTAL HYMANS
FIRST ASSISTANT	JULIE GOUET
PRODUCTION MANAGER	NICOLAS LECLERE
PRODUCTION	LES FILMS PELLÉAS
IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH	FRANCE 3 CINÉMA / LE PACTE