



Innocence

Lucile Hadzihalilovic

FRANCE, 2004
French

115 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Ex Nihilo**
Producer: **Patrick Sobelman**
Screenplay: **Lucile Hadzihalilovic**,
based on the novella "Mine-Haha"
by **Frank Wedekind**
Cinematographer: **Benoît Debie**
Editor: **Adam Finch**
Production Designer: **Arnaud de Moléron**
Sound: **Pascal Jasmes**
Music: **Leos Janacek, Pietro Galli,**
Richard Cooke
Principal Cast: **Zoé Auclair,**
Berangère Haubrigues, Lea Bridarolli,
Marion Cotillard, H el ene de Fougerolles

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Youthful joy and the menace of impending adulthood may seem the familiar stuff of cinema. But by knocking these themes out of the orbit of social realism and into a netherworld of seemingly utopian science fiction, Lucile Hadzihalilovic reconceives coming of age in unexpected and daringly original ways.

The bleary, primordial credits that begin *Innocence* transform into a breathless trip through underground caverns with a coffin. When the lid is popped off in the drawing-room of a country house, a gorgeous six-year-old girl named Iris is revealed. Confused yet curious, she is taken in hand by Bianca, the leader of a group of girls who live in one of five houses that make up a kind of boarding school. The only adults are old servants and two authoritarian teachers. Obedience is paramount; those caught trying to escape are either swallowed up by the horrors of the outside world or condemned to serve the other girls within the school walls for the rest of their lives.

The story gradually shifts its focus from Iris to her fellow housemates as they suffer the indignities of school life, longing for "outside." There is a feeling of menace throughout, a sense that this idyll is fragile and requires protection. Spookiest of all, the eldest girls disappear each night for several hours under orders not to reveal their whereabouts to the others. In the final segment of the film, we learn how these girls step into adulthood in this familiar,

but clearly alternate, universe.

Hadzihalilovic sees *Innocence*, which is loosely based on Frank Wedekind's seminal novella "Mine-Haha," less as a fantasy film than a story told strictly through a little girl's eyes and there is truth in this assessment: the film's visual and tonal ideas feel related to the most imaginative and frightening of children's stories. She is influenced in her approach here by her life partner and sometime collaborator, Gaspar No e; many of the cinematic innovations that first appeared in *Irr versible* are revisited here, albeit in gentler and sometimes more refined forms. Much like her earlier film, the haunting *La Bouche de Jean-Pierre*, *Innocence* is a complete and demanding vision.

■ **Noah Cowan**

Lucile Hadzihalilovic was born in Lyons and studied filmmaking at the Institut des Hautes  tudes Cin matographiques in Paris. She has worked as an editor of documentaries and features and is a long-time collaborator with Gaspar No e. Her work as a director includes the short films *La Premi re Mort de Nono* (87) and *Good Boys Use Condoms* (98) and the feature *La Bouche de Jean-Pierre* (96), which screened at the Festival in 1996. *Innocence* (04) is her second feature film.

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