

Les Amitiés Particulières

("Special Friendships" – often mistranslated as "This Special Friendship")

France : 1964 : dir. Jean Delannoy :

: 102 min

prod: Christine Gouze Renal : scr: Aurenche & Boste : dir.ph.:

Didier Haudepin; Dominique Maurin

Francis Lacombrade; Michel Bouquet; François Leccia; Lucien Nat; Louis Seigner

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω 8 ♀ M ☿	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
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*A chaste homosexual infatuation – just the kind of "male bonding" we **don't** want in our schools, or anyplace else, and one of the primary arguments for mixed-sex education (bad as that obviously is). Source: Moving Picture Boy*

Speelfilm Encyclopedie review:

"Roger Peyrefitte's novel about the amorous friendship between a couple at a Jesuit internate, which results due to the interference of the priests in the suicide of the elder boy, was filmed in an appropriately serious tone with a virtually emotionless result. Lovely performance from Bouquet who, against his wishes, must play the disciplinarian. ** "

The Good Film and Video Guide review:

"Unlike the schoolboy friendship depicted in ["AMICI PER LA PELLE"]... this one is not without coquetry, as may be imagined from



Source: Award Films website

the one-time notoriety of the novel by Roger Peyrefitte on which it is based. Screenwriters Aurenche and Boste have constructed a solid, anti-clerical screenplay and the director manages all the tensions attendant on clandestine meetings in an all-male seminary. With Didier Haudepin and Francis Lacombrade as the boys, and Michel Bouquet, Louis Seigner and Lucien Nat among the masters. ** ”

Screening the Sexes – Homosexuality in the Movies analysis:

“...Like the conditions of prison and the army, the conditions of school impose a uniform merely by imposing a discipline and a segregation... This sequestering of sex develops its rituals. Monastery and prison, and at times the army, are only the more drastic aspects of monosexed regimentation. While a cynical, non-committal sadism may seem, from reputation, the more typical keynote of homosexuality in school life, homosexuality also breeds charms there. It has its tender, lyric, and intact stretches, where the authenticity of Homeros shows up early and romantically, perhaps definitively.

A charming film from France, a really inveigling film so artful it is, was **"THIS SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP"**, made from the novel by Roger Peyrefitte, **"LES AMITIÉS PARTICULIÈRES"**. It is hardly a major work but – like its counterpart, **"THE PIT OF LONELINESS"**, about a girls' school – it becomes rarely illustrious as a classical treatment of homosexual love: homosexual love as something at once poetic and potentially (if not actually) carnal; confirmed in sex and yet culturally liberal; something transcending brutality and vulgarity, alike, by the sheer sensibility for style, for natural elegance.

No nation so well as the French – moral epicures that they are – can furnish touches so sure when it comes to period mood and atmosphere and the human graces that show forth in them. Apart from genius, from all art bravura, there is a smoothness, a nicety, to French style that is as evident on film as in printed prose. The Nouvelle Vague in France of course, has altered this ingratiating style with things more fashionably icky, angular and *brut*. But the style I mean has not quite vanished from films or books. Such a book was **"LES AMITIÉS PARTICULIÈRES"**, and such a film emerged from it. The "period" is no more distant than an expensive French Catholic boys' school from the first half of this century. The school, ironically, has exactly that calm, tacit propriety that Vigo wished to demolish, not arbitrate with, in **"ZÉRO DE CONDUITE"**.

Here, the revolt is only the private revolt of intractable, very young Homeros, and technically it fails rather miserably – but not, you understand, because it is sick; rather, because it is *healthy*. The acting is in every case superlative; not through any individual genius, any profound insight or emotion portrayed, but because of an even instinct for the right sort of thing, the thing the story itself requires at every point. Jean Delannoy was the canny director of **"THIS SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP"**, and he was aesthetically uncompromising. Many gifted directors devise special editing to put across some brilliant idea; they have to do so for the idea's sake. The "idea" would be a bit ambitious, would demand a measure of bravura. From erring directors, of course, one gets bravura when they over-reach themselves, and the story too; when, in brief, bravura is not wanted. None is wanted in **"THIS SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP"**, and none appears; only a fluid, nourishing, never-too-much richness.



This Special Friendship

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"Did he play his role as if he were Simone Simon in short pants? He did not."

Source: Award Films website

An incontinent reviewer remarked of this film that, in his opinion, the two young romancers, a twelve-year old and a sixteen-year old, failed to project the homosexual attraction in histrionic terms. Alas! Reviewers perennially associate "French" eroticism with only one kind of thing, which itself they cannot define properly. The twelve-year old Alexandre is played by a boy with the magic name of Didier Haudepin, who has a charming oval face and great liquid dark eyes. He is a gem of a child,

a Tadzio, and a perfectly self-possessed actor. Did he play his role as if he were Simone Simon in short pants? He did not. And in that he was wise where his American critic was stupid. Didier is tenderness itself, guilefulness itself, like Cupid acting out a deliberate charade in order to triumph. Of course, the mask of innocence is there and it is partly inevitable: he is in many ways a child still, but the grown boy in him has been awakened, the supernatural spirit of Eros. He is becoming

self and super-self. Contrary to the surface meaning (this is part of the depth meaning) *he*, the younger boy, does the seducing.

The best part is that Didier behaves like one caught in his own spell. There is no measuring the contagiousness of this, in any sex, to one who somehow steps within its aura. Lolita, in her film, might have evoked it but did not; she was too carnal and grown-up. In this film, Georges, the older boy, finding himself in that aura, is effectually tempted and succumbs. At first Georges, four years the senior, regards the budding affair disdainfully and rather debonairly as an amusing intrigue, but finds himself willingly enmeshed almost before he knows he is a Don Juan really smitten. It climaxes, not carnally, but by a symbolic session of cigarette-smoking hidden away in a greenhouse where the pair have started to rendezvous. A decent but officious Father has scented the intrigue and spied on it. He surprises the boys lolling in the hay, and the wonderful dream is broken. By the law of protocol, the two have to be separated. As this happens, the younger goes into heartbreak.

If Georges has been the "master" in their affair, it is only because he is more mature in every way, not because he is less in love or just tough-minded. At the same time, his naturally greater detachment at the separation adds to the dimension of pathos because the younger, in the first flush of Eros, cannot be detached about such a stark, mysterious disaster. Objectively, it is all as clear as day, a *spring day*! The mistake of nannygoat critics (the supervising priests at the school are not, even at their worst, nannygoats) is to regard the subject of **"THIS SPECIAL FRIENDSHIP"** as essentially a juridico-ethical problem: Is he or isn't he (e.g. homosexual)? And: Is it or isn't it – indeed can it *possibly* be – real love, this affair between two young boys? In the abstract, those could be very legitimate questions. As seen on Delannoy's screen, they are poetic and human *données*, as plain as an exposed penis or a love lyric. *Disliking* the situation – well, *chacun à son goût*! *Questioning* it is out. The *données* are perfectly definite for the Fathers at this school, all enacting their parts with exceptional grace and understanding.

This intrusive love affair, for these spiritual guides, is a mere difficulty of religious protocol. Humanly speaking, it is one of the most normal of all the difficulties to challenge their authority and their administration of required chastity among schoolboys. They

take this enlightened view because, as the story wisely and ably reveals, they themselves are vulnerable to the same homosexual affections through their daily contact with boys. Woven into the main affair between the two boys is the erotic fixation one vulnerable Father has for a certain boy whom he repeatedly, against the rules, invites to his room for tea and "coaching". The coaching of course turns out to be sympathy that hovers on the verge of the physical. But this affair too is nipped in the bud by official alertness, and the priest must go through a persona Gethsemane like that of little Alexandre. Nothing, in its own terms,



could be more conventional or more naturally, humbly enchanting."

Alexandre and Georges teeter on the brink of doing what comes naturally – but audience blushes are spared by the judicious arrival of a priest who has spied on their triste. Source: Screening the Sexes

Films and Filming caption:

"An 18-year old boy has a homosexual affair with a younger boy in a boarding school in Delannoy's **"LES AMITIÉS PARTICULIÈRES"**."

The Moving Picture Boy entry on Didier Haudepin:

"His parents were schoolteachers. His younger sister, Sabine, worked for Truffaut in films as far apart as **"JULES ET JIM"** and **"LE DERNIER METRO"**. Didier was blessed (or cursed) with one of the most beautiful faces any child has brought to the screen: sensitive without being drippy,

thoughtful but not dopy, vulnerable yet with a certain sharpness. He was touching as Jeanne Moreau's little son in "**MODERATO CANTABILE**", and even more so as the hapless object of a schoolboy passion in the film of Peyrefitte's "**LES AMITIÉS PARTICULIÈRES**".

Between these, in the theatre, he had played the Barry Gordon role in "A Thousand Clowns", opposite Yves Montand, and for three years he was in another famous story of school-bound passion, Montherlant's "La Ville Dont le Prince est un Enfant".

His early performances brought him to international attention, and three of his four next films had Spanish or Italian connections. Further ones included "**TOP CRACK**" (IT 66), "**HELLO - GOODBYE**" (US 70), "**PROMISE AT DAWN**" (US/FR 70), "**TIME FOR LOVING**" (GB 71) and "**HELLÉ**" (72). He has since worked for such directors as Carné ("**LES ASSASSINS DE L'ORDRE**", 72), Tavernier ("**LE JUGE ET**

L'ASSASSIN", 75), Visconti ("**L'INNOCENTE**", FR/IT 76) and Goretta ("**LES CHEMINS DE L'EXIL**", 78).

Haudepin has also made a film of his own: "**PACO L'INFALLIBLE**", starring Patrick Dewaere, which won a prize at the 1979 Cannes Festival. Writing and directing are his main aims now."

[no listing in "Children in the Movies", "Classic Foreign Films from 1960 to Today", "Classics of the Foreign Film", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "The Critics' Film Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Recommended. And why is this title conspicuously absent from so many film guides? Wouldn't have anything to do with homoeroticism at school being portrayed sympathetically, would it? No, it's French, and that's cause enough.

It's not even as though the "special friendship" in question were overtly sexual (as for example between the older boy and the junior in "if...", coy though that was). The film is unambiguous on this point, when Alexandre cautiously questions his older friend to reassure himself no impropriety is intended. Homoerotic it certainly is, however, and young Didier Haudepin is as delightful as his exquisite name suggests. It is of course he and not Georges who is ultimately driven to suicide, throwing himself from a train after mentor Bouquet manages to bully Georges into writing the younger boy a note definitively terminating their friendship. Or love, to give it its proper name. A delicate and humane film, shot while even homosexuality was still an unspeakable topic, it does inevitably seem wistfully naive now. Today the older boy would be whisked off for police interrogation on the adults he has known, and some "corrective therapy", the younger boy to a police doctor's examination room.

The film is not fresh enough in my memory to add a more substantial review, but Parker Tyler's perceptive analysis will more than suffice. His comments on the critical response to the film, in particular, point out the wilful blindness most adults adopt to the existence of homosexual feelings and impulses in boys of 12 – or even 16. Age of consent laws continue to reflect this self-reinforcing ignorance, but most adult homosexuals will recall that their own identity did not spontaneously erupt at the age of 18.

"**AMICI PER LA PELLE**" ("Friends For Life") apparently touched on similar themes nine years earlier, but in less chaste surroundings than a catholic internate. Those surroundings were not quite so chaste in Australia's "**THE DEVIL'S PLAYGROUND**" (76), in which the central figure's tentative heterosexuality seems the only impediment as horseplay with other boys grows less and less ambiguously sexual, while in the glum French title "**ANTHRACITE**", also set in a Catholic internate, one teacher's obsessional protection of a "sensitive" boy leads ultimately to his (the teacher's) being clubbed to death by boys in the school forecourt as the principal looks sadly on.



Delannoy is perhaps at too great pains to cast Haudepin in the role of "blameless innocent", as though the private tragedy would be undermined by any glimmer of self-knowledge on his part. His Alexandre is made into a schoolboy Tess of the Durbervilles, the hapless victim of his own sensuality. It's a minor concession to society's lingering homophobia. Boyish romance is only forgivable when it catches them unawares.

Source: NAMBLA Bulletin

Occasional films have cast a sympathetic, if nervous, eye on the phenomenon of pederastic affairs or infatuations, but only one – to my knowledge – has portrayed homosexual feelings between two young boys as a valid and positive relationship which did not wend its inevitable path toward personal tragedy. And that, nota bene, was a Danish children's film: "[DU ER IKKE ALENE](#)" ("You Are Not Alone"), made with the express purpose of reassuring children who were experiencing just such emotions. That film too will look winsomely naïve today, but that it exists at all must be reckoned a minor miracle. Montherlant's parallel story "[LE VILLE DON'T LE PRINCE EST UN ENFANT](#)" was made for French TV in 1997.

The lovely [Didier Haudepin](#) was 13. His three films the following year were "**LOS PIANOS MECANICOS**" (in Spain), "**COTOLAY**" (in Spain) and "**LA COMMUNALE**", but English-speaking audiences only really encountered him again as a late teenager in titles like "**LA PROMESSE DE L'AUBE / PROMISE AT DAWN**" (70). Nothing else is known of Francis Lacombrade, who plays Georges, but Dominique Maurin (son of singer Mado Maurin) was 15. His only other known films as a boy were "**DU RIFIPI CHEZ LES HOMMES**" (54) and "**MONSIEUR PIPELET**" (55). He hailed from a clan of productively photogenic children.

See subject index under [BOARDING SCHOOL / PUBLIC SCHOOL](#), [DEATH / DYING CHILDREN](#), [RECOMMENDED TITLES](#), [RELIGION](#) and [SEX & SEXUALITY](#). The subject index heading **SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS** generally indicates an unusually close bond between a child and unrelated adult.

