

The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec Study Notes



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Directed by: Luc Besson
Certificate: 12A
Running time: 107 mins
Release date: 22 April 2011

Synopsis:

The year is 1912. Adèle Blanc-Sec, an intrepid young reporter, will go to any lengths to achieve her aims, even sailing to Egypt to tackle mummies of all shapes and sizes. Meanwhile, in Paris, it's panic stations! A 136 million-year-old pterodactyl egg on a shelf in the Natural History Museum has mysteriously hatched, and the bird subjects the city to a reign of terror from the skies. But nothing fazes Adèle Blanc-Sec, whose adventures reveal many more extraordinary surprises...

These Study Notes are intended for use in Film and Media Studies or related subjects at GCSE and AS/A2 or equivalent.

Before Viewing

Luc Besson the director of *Adèle Blanc-Sec*, is associated with the idea of 'Cinema du Look'.

- Conduct some online research into the 'Cinema du Look'. What definitions of this can you find?
- What criticisms have there been of this kind of filmmaking?

Search for images of 'Tardi Adèle Blanc-Sec' on the internet. You should find some images from the 1970s graphic novel by Tardi on which the film is based.

- Why do you think graphic novels are such a popular source of inspiration for filmmakers?
- What sort of ideas do the images from the graphic novel conjure up for you in terms of:
 - Music and soundtrack for the film
 - Casting – who should play Adèle and what qualities would be crucial in realising her character?

After Viewing

Does Meaning Matter?

A number of critics have suggested that while *Adèle Blanc-Sec* is 'a gorgeous folly' and 'a tasty trifle', it is 'altogether without point'¹.

- To what extent do you think that these criticisms are legitimate?
- Does a film need to be 'about' something?

A Cinema of Spectacle

Besson has said that the global financial crisis cast a shadow over the making of the film, yet argued that filmmaking is one means of escape from this, saying: '*I can't do anything about the crisis, but I can at least make you smile for a couple of hours, and give you a little happiness*'².

- To what extent do you agree that film should offer escapism?
- Do you have any sympathy with the idea that film should be socially responsible and try to make sense of the world rather than provide a means of escape?

Consider the sorts of films you enjoy.

- How important is a sense of spectacle (rather than narrative) in these films?
- Do you think an emphasis on spectacle means that films have less substance and like *Adèle* are essentially 'daft but charming' ³?

***Adèle Blanc-Sec* - A Postmodern Film?**

Adèle Blanc-Sec's emphasis on style over substance and its emphasis on visual pleasure over meaning are characteristics commonly associated with 'postmodern' cinema. Postmodernism, amongst other things, is associated with ideas of self-reflexiveness and intertextuality (look these concepts up if you've not come across them before).

It could be argued that *Adèle Blanc-Sec* is self-reflexive in that it actually draws attention to its own process of construction – for example, the pterodactyl in the film looks 'constructed' rather than convincingly realistic.

- Do you feel that the director does not really mind us 'seeing the joins'?
- To what extent does part of the film's 'daft' charm come from the fact that we are all too aware that some of the effects are a little clunky?

Similarly, think back to the early scenes set in Egypt.

- To what extent do these scenes attempt to present a realistic view of ancient Egyptian treasures being examined in 1912? Does it feel like the treasures are really ancient? Does it feel like 1912?
- In what ways do you think this sequence refers more to other film representations of Egypt (notably *Indiana Jones*) rather than to Egypt itself?

Besson and Women

Besson is well known for his empowered and powerful roles for women, most notably in *Nikita* (1990). He has described *Adèle* as '*the grandmother of Lara Croft and the mother of Indiana Jones*' ⁴ that indicates a further degree of intertextuality.

- What qualities does she appear to have compared to the men in the film?
- In what ways do you think the comparisons with *Indiana Jones* and *Tomb Raider* are valid?

The film has a 12A Certificate and is targeted at a family audience. The fact that it contains an apparently needless scene in which the star, Louise Bourgoin takes a bath has met with some critical disapproval.

- To what extent do you think that this scene compromises the enlightened representation of Adèle in the rest of the film?
- Does the scene add anything to the film as a whole?

What next?

The film's ending, featuring the Titanic, seems to be something of a coda in that it is tagged on to the film rather than being integral to the film's narrative. It has been suggested that this is designed (perhaps mockingly, perhaps seriously) to pave the way for a sequel.

- Based on your understanding of Adèle's character and the style of the film, write a brief synopsis for a sequel.
- Try to storyboard some sequences for a sequel.

1. *The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec: 'A gorgeous folly' – video – available at*

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/video/2011/apr/22/extraordinary-adventures-adele-blanc-sec>

2. *Interview with Luc Besson: The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec, Leon, Taken 2, and more available at*

http://www.denofgeek.com/movies/850837/luc_besson_interview_the_extraordinary_adventures_of_adle_blancsec_leon_taken_2_and_more.html

3. *Anthony Quinn on The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec, available at*
<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/reviews/the-extraordinary-adventures-of-adele-blancsec-12a-2270996.html>

4. *Luc Besson interview available at*

www.littlewhitelies.co.uk/interviews/luc-besson-14914

Written by Adam Robbins