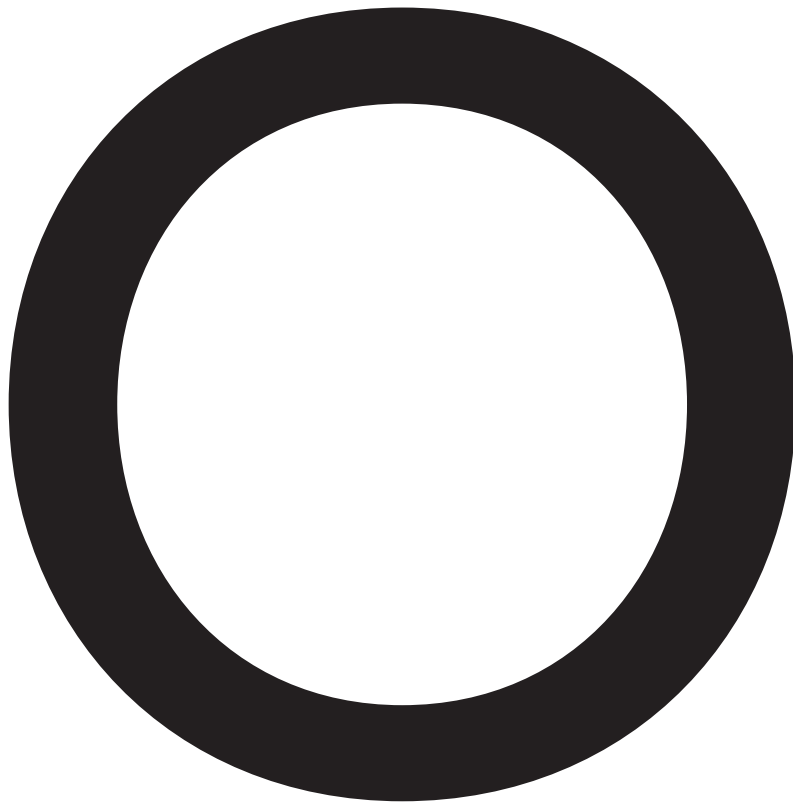


Writer of



a film by Pola Rapaport

A ZEITGEIST FILMS RELEASE

Writer of O

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Writer of O is a dramatic documentary on the long-hidden author of the world-famous, erotic novel *Story of O*. Known for forty years as Pauline Réage, the author chose at 86 to reveal herself as Dominique Aury, a mild-mannered literary editor for Gallimard, France's most prestigious publishing house.

The contrast of her two disparate personalities forms the center of this hybrid film, which sets documentary footage of her and her contemporaries against dramatized scenes from her erotic novel and fictionalized scenes from her life during the period in which she wrote her scandalous book.

The film treats the subjects of sex and love, literature, feminism, censorship, creativity and freedom. Central to the discovery of Aury's motivation for writing the book is the love story between her and her lover, the celebrated French man-of-letters, Jean Paulhan. Their clandestine affair inspired the book and is re-created here in moving scenes from Aury's essay "A Girl in Love."

Major figures in the film include the audacious publishers Jean-Jacques Pauvert in France and Barney Rosset of Grove Press in the U.S. The British author and journalist, John de St. Jorre, author of a revelatory article in *The New Yorker* which exposed Aury, leads us through the story. Regine Deforges, the novelist and journalist who conducted a revealing interview with Aury in 1975, *Confessions of O*, re-imagines that conversation with actress Catherine Mouchet playing the role of Dominique Aury.

Scenes from *Story of O* are also dramatized in the film, creating an atmosphere similar to that found at the chateau which Aury described in her book: frightening, visceral, mysterious, and profoundly erotic.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was thrilled and horrified when, as an adolescent, I read in secret the best-selling erotic novel *Story of O*. I always wondered who the real author was, hiding all those years behind the pseudonym Pauline Réage.

All my life I was interested in people who kept profound secrets about their personalities, and each time I heard about someone who did, it made me want to dig for the truth. So when I heard that a British journalist had written a book and article unveiling the secret identity of the real writer behind Pauline Réage, I went, as he had done, in search of her.

I visited Paris for ten days. If I could find her, I would ask her permission to make a film about her. After much searching, I finally discovered, in an estate in the countryside, the 89-year-old real writer of *O*.

Meeting the author was a great inspiration. Any doubt I had about wanting to make a film on the subject disappeared that afternoon. But it would take seven years to bring the project to fruition.

There were many things that kept me committed to the film during that time. One was the writer's unique personality, which was so opposite to what I had expected, and so full of humor and surprise. There was also the topic of literary freedom and censorship, which was becoming more and more important in the current climate of the U.S. And finally, there was the author's desire for personal liberation through artistic creation, the notion of which was very close to my heart.

—POLA RAPAPORT

on **STORY OF O**

"The free publication of *Story of O* in this country is an event of considerable importance...it is a significant measure of how far we have come in lifting the restrictions on art and our responses to it.... In brief, *Story of O* relates the progressive willful debasement of a young and beautiful Parisian fashion photographer, O, who wants nothing more than to be a slave to her lover, René. The test is severe—sexual in method, psychological in substance.... The artistic interest here has precisely to do with the use not only of erotic materials but also erotic methods, the deliberate stimulation of the reader as a part of and means to a total, authentic literary experience."

—Eliot Fremont-Smith, *The New York Times*

"That Pauline Réage is a more dangerous writer than the Marquis de Sade follows from the fact that art is more persuasive than propaganda....Aiming only to reveal, to clarify, to make real to the reader those dark and repulsive practices and emotions that his better self rejects as improbable or evil, Pauline Réage succeeds in drawing us irresistably into her perverse world through the magnetism of her own selfless absorption in it. Like some exquisitely balanced, gently undulating instrument, she carefully inscribes the cruel shocks inflicted on her heroine's refined sensibility—and we believe."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"An ironic fable of unfreedom, a mystic document that transcends the pornographic and even the erotic...[it] is so horrifying, outraging cherished beliefs in the sanctity of the body and in personal freedom.... To give the body, to allow it to be ravaged, exploited and totally possessed, can be an act of consequence."

—*Newsweek*

CAST BIOS

DOMINIQUE AURY (1907-1998)

Dominique Aury (néé Anne Declos) was born in 1907 and raised in Brittany, France, by her grandmother. In her teens she studied at the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, and later attended the Sorbonne where she earned an English degree. In her early twenties she was briefly married and had one son, Philippe, who was subsequently raised by her mother.

She took the name Dominique Aury as her journalistic pseudonym in the 1920s. At the beginning of World War II she met Jean Paulhan. At the time he was editor of a well-respected and influential literary review, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, as well as the Resistance journal *Les Lettres Françaises*, which she was clandestinely distributing. In 1946 Paulhan brought her to the prestigious publisher Gallimard, where she worked in translation, was a member of the Reading Committee, and served as the Secretary of *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, selecting and editing manuscripts from many of France's most important new writers. Through her work as a translator at Gallimard, Aury also introduced French readers to such English-language writers as Evelyn Waugh, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

During her long career in publishing she was also a highly respected author and critic. She was awarded such distinguished prizes as the Prix Clarouin (for translation), the Grand Prix de la Critique and France's Legion D'Honneur.

Beyond these accolades, Aury would cement her place in literary history with one piece of writing. Penned in 1954 under the pseudonym Pauline Réage, *Histoire d'O* (*Story of O*) quickly became a *succès de scandale* around the world and was awarded the Prix-Des-Deux-Magots. Fifteen years later, in 1969, Aury, again as Réage, published the second part of the story of O, *Return to Roissy*. Despite intense speculation for four decades, Aury's identity as the author of the novels was not revealed publicly until 1994.

Dominique Aury died on April 27, 1998.

JEAN PAULHAN (1884-1968)

Writer and director of the prestigious *La Nouvelle Revue Française* (published by Gallimard since 1925), and member of l'Académie Française, Jean Paulhan was at the center of French literary life for almost 50 years.

Paulhan met Dominique Aury at the beginning of World War II while she was clandestinely distributing his Resistance journal *Les Lettres Françaises*. It was the beginning of their professional relationship as well as a love affair which would inspire the creation of *Story of O* in 1954, and would last until his death in 1968.

JEAN-JACQUES PAUVERT

A strong supporter of free speech and anti-conformism, Jean-Jacques Pauvert is an unconventional figure in the French literary world. At the age of 20, he was the first to publish the works of the Marquis de Sade in their entirety. Having taken up an ongoing fight against censorship, he introduced the world to great authors such as Jean Genet, Georges Bataille, Raymond Roussel, and Boris Vian.

Story of O is one of Pauvert's greatest publishing successes. In 1954, when Jean Paulhan had him read the manuscript by Pauline Réage, he enthusiastically predicted, "this book will be significant in the history of literature."

JOHN DE ST. JORRE

When author and journalist John de St. Jorre began to write *Venus Bound* (Random House, 1994)—the true story of British publisher Maurice Girodias and the Olympia Press—he realized that he would need to track down Pauline Réage, the pseudonymous author of Olympia's most scandalous publication, *Story of O*. His research uncovered that Pauline Réage was in fact literary editor Dominique Aury, who was still working—in her late eighties—at the prestigious French publisher Gallimard. His discovery solved one of the world's most stubborn literary mysteries.

The same year that *Venus Bound* was published, St. Jorre excerpted the chapter on Dominique Aury and *Story of O* for an article in *The New Yorker* magazine. It immediately made literary history and set off a flurry of tabloid articles in the French press.

St. Jorre was educated at Oxford and worked as the London *Observer's* correspondent in Africa, Paris, the Middle East and New York. With his wife and three children, he divides his time between Mallorca and Rhode Island.

BARNEY ROSSET

Barney Rosset, born in Chicago, is a tireless crusader for First Amendment and free speech issues. As the owner of Grove Press, he did more than perhaps any other individual in America to break down the walls of literary censorship. Grove Press published, along with *Story of O*, such controversial works as Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch*.

Grove Press has been called "the most influential alternative book press in the history of American publishing." He introduced American audiences to Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, Kenzaburo Oe and many other writers who have since joined the pantheon of world literature. Rosset created the prestigious literary journal *The Evergreen Review* in 1957 and later branched out into distributing arthouse films, the most controversial of which was the 1967 Swedish erotic film *I Am Curious (Yellow)*.

He sold Grove Press in 1985 and has continued publishing under the imprints Blue Moon Press and Foxrock. He lives in Greenwich Village with his companion Astrid Myers.

CATHERINE MOUCHET (Young Dominique Aury)

Catherine Mouchet is best known for her role in Alain Cavalier's 1986 film *Thérèse*, for which she won a César (French Oscar) for Best Female Newcomer. Mouchet then concentrated on her first love, the theater, until the late 1990s. She has since returned to the cinema, acting in films for such well-known directors as Olivier Assayas (*Les Destinées*), Jean-Jacques Beineix (*Mortel Transfert*), Patrice Leconte (*Rue des Plaisirs*), Pierre Jolivet and Pascal Bonitzer.

PÉNÉLOPE PUYMIRAT (O)

Pénélope Puymirat studied philosophy and psychology at University in Bordeaux and theater at Cours Florent in Paris. In addition to her role in *Writer of O*, she has also worked on several short films and TV movies. Her recent theater work includes a portrayal of the Russian author Danil Harms in *Souvenirs d'un vieux sage et autres absurdités* as well as a starring role in Eric-Emmanuel Schmidt's *Milarepa*. Some of her other performances include her role as "Séductrice" for designer Philippe Starck's exhibition at the Pompidou Center in 2003.

FILMMAKER BIOS

POLA RAPAPORT (Writer and Director)

Pola Rapaport was born in Madison, Wisconsin, and grew up in New York City where she graduated from the Institute of Film and TV at New York University.

Her previous work includes *Family Secret*, the story of the filmmaker's discovery of her long-lost secret Romanian brother; *Blind Light*, about a photographer's peak experience in a villa in Italy, starring Edie Falco (*The Sopranos*), and *Broken Meat*, a portrait of the mad poet Alan Granville.

Her films have shown on PBS, the Independent Film Channel and Sundance Channel in the U.S., and on Arte, SBS, and RAI internationally. They have screened at festivals including Sundance, Toronto, FIPA, Rotterdam, NY Docfest, Oberhausen, Amsterdam IDFA, South by Southwest and many others.

In 2005 she served on the jury of the French FIPA Film Festival and in previous years she sat on the jury of the Newport Film Festival and the grant panel of the Jerome Foundation in Minnesota.

As a film and sound editor, Pola Rapaport has worked for Maysles Films, Columbia Artists, National Geographic and others. She received an Emmy Award nomination for sound editing in 1994.

Pola Rapaport won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2002.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2004 **WRITER OF O** (80 mins)
- 2002 **SEPTEMBER ELEVENTH: EYEWITNESSES** (11 mins)
- 2000 **FAMILY SECRET** (58 mins)
Winner Grand Prix SCAM, France, Best Documentary of the Year
- 1998 **BLIND LIGHT** (58 mins)
- 1990 **BROKEN MEAT** (50 mins)
- 1989 **JOANNA'S JOBS** (9 mins)
- 1988 **TOOTH AND MASK** (12 mins)
- 1984 **0,1,1,2,3,5, OR THE WALLS HAVE THE FLOOR**

WOLFGANG HELD (Director of Photography)

Wolfgang Held has been the director of photography on 18 feature films, including Mo Ogradnick's *Ripe*, Rob Morrow's *Maze*, *The Tic Code* starring Gregory Hines, and *Poster Boy*, which will be released this summer.

His documentary work includes *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*, *Children Underground*, which was nominated for an Oscar in 2002, and *Wigstock The Movie*, as well as three other films by Pola Rapaport: *Family Secret*, *Blind Light* and *Broken Meat*.

Wolfgang emigrated from Bonn, Germany, in 1988 to attend film school at Temple University. He and Rapaport are married and live in New York.

VARIETY MOSZYNSKI (Editor)

Variety Moszynski was born in Uruguay and is now working and living in Paris. She is an editor and a filmmaker and has specialized in films about writers and artists.

In 1994 she programmed a theme evening for Arte Television on French novelist Romain Gary entitled *Gary-Ajar le double je (The Double I)*. Among her other documentaries is *William Styron: The Way of the Writer*, which she directed for PBS and France-3 in 1996. She edited *Ezra Pound, an American Odyssey* for the 1984 PBS series on poets, *Voices and Visions*. She moved to France from New York in 1984 to direct an earlier documentary on Romain Gary.

HÉLÈNE BLAZY (Composer)

Hélène Blazy is one of the most important young film composers in France. She started as a violinist with the National Orchestra of the Paris Opera from 1987 to 1994, after attending the National Music Conservatory in Paris.

She has composed and conducted the scores for six theatrical features including the HBO production *Murder on a Sunday Morning* which won the 2002 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. She has composed scores for over two dozen other documentaries. She also wrote the opening music for the 2002 Cannes Film Festival, entitled "Music Lovers." She has published five CDs of her original music.

SYLVIE CAZIN (Producer)

Sylvie Cazin has worked as a producer at INA since 1992. She has produced documentaries on social subjects, on history and on art, as well as a series of portraits of and interviews with intellectuals.

ANNE SCHUCHMAN (Head of Production Department)

Anne Schuchman is the director of production and publishing at INA (National Institute of Audiovisual). She joined INA in 2000 after several years as director of development at Arte/La Cinquième where she was responsible for cultural and multimedia publications.

Writer of O

CAST AND CREW

Starring

CATHERINE MOUCHET as Young Dominique Aury

PÉNÉLOPE PUYMIRAT as O

CYRIL CORRAL as René

ALAIN RIMOUX as Jean Paulhan

THIERRY DE CARBONNIERES as Man in the Chateau

JEAN-YVES ROAN as Man in the Chateau

Featuring

DOMINIQUE AURY, JOHN DE ST. JORRE,

JEAN-JACQUES PAUVERT, RÉGINE DEFORGES,

BARNEY ROSSET, NICOLE ABOULKER

and ELISABETH PORQUEROL

Written and directed by POLA RAPAPORT

Produced by INA (l'Institut National de l'Audio-Visuel)

Co-Produced by ARTE and BLINDING LIGHT, INC.

Head of Production Department: ANNE SCHUCHMAN

Producer: SYLVIE CAZIN

Director of Photography: WOLFGANG HELD

Editor: VARIETY MOSZYNSKI

Music composed and conducted by HÉLÈNE BLAZY

Sound Design and Mix: MYRIAM RENÉ

Assistant director: ESTHER DE BEAUCÉ

Line Producer: MICHÈLE BOIG

USA/France • 2004 • 80 minutes • Color and B&W

In English and French with English subtitles

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