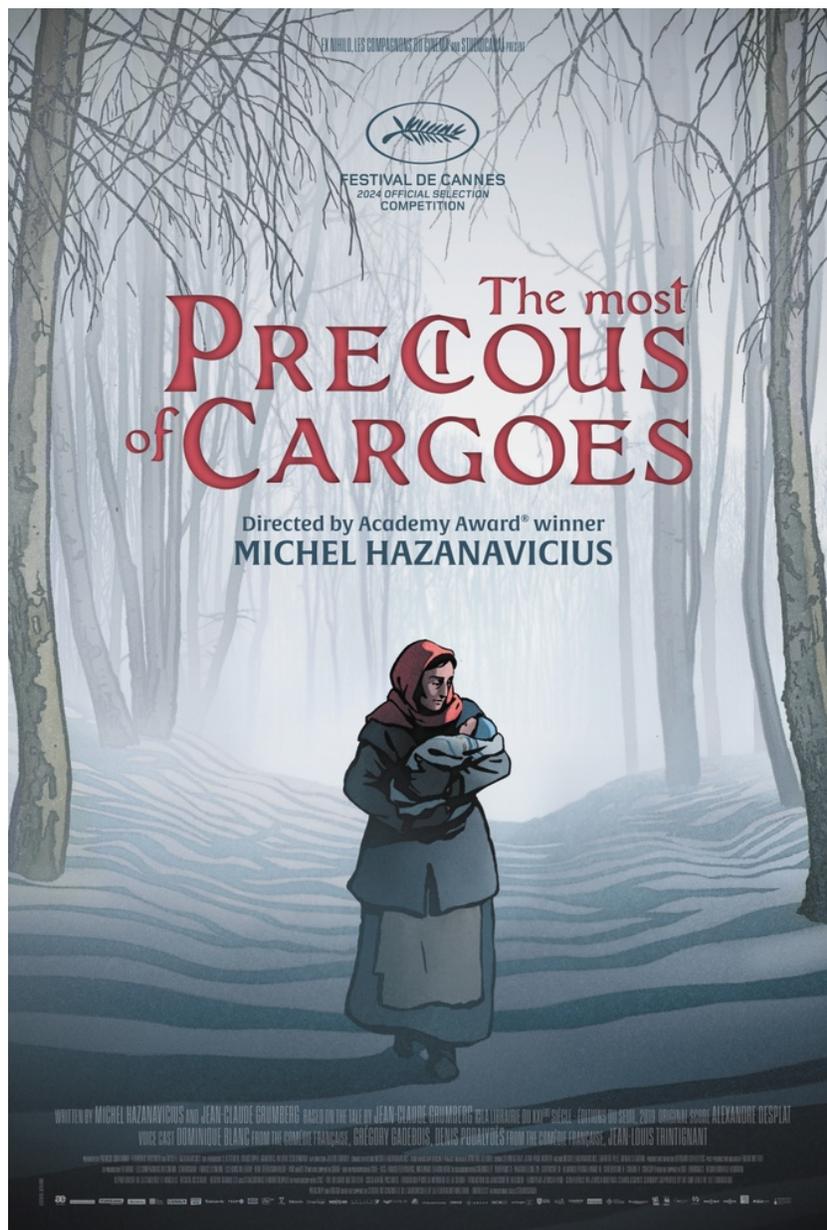


THE MOST PRECIOUS OF CARGOES

Original version: French / English subtitles



Director: *Michel Hazanavicius*

Release date (Quebec): *December 20, 2024*

Genre: *History, Drama*

Countries of origin: *France, Belgique*

Runtime : *81 min.*

CLASSIFICATION QUEBEC

<https://repertoire.cinema.mcc.gouv.qc.ca/film/la-plus-precieuse-des-marchandises-443794/>

La plus précieuse des marchandises

Autre titre : The Most Precious of Cargoes



📅 2024

🎬 Animation

Synopsis

Pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, un couple de pauvres bûcherons vit de froid, de faim et de misère. La femme, qui pense chaque jour au grand vide laissé par la perte de son enfant, se tourne vers la prière pour tenter d'apaiser sa solitude. Puis un jour, elle découvre un bébé dans la neige après le passage d'un train. Elle décide alors d'élever la précieuse petite marchandise qui représente tout ce qu'elle a toujours souhaité.



Motifs de classement

Premier film d'animation de Michel Hazanavicius, cette adaptation du conte de Jean-Claude Grumberg évoque la tragédie de l'holocauste. Alors que le récit débute en racontant de manière poétique l'histoire d'un couple qui recueille une petite fille juive près d'une voie ferrée, la seconde partie se transporte dans les camps de concentration. Ce segment, plutôt sombre et insistant, présente des dessins troublants pour illustrer l'horreur de la guerre.



Date de classement

19 décembre 2024

<https://www.bbfc.co.uk/release/the-most-precious-of-cargoes-q29sbgvjdgvlbjpwwc0xmdi4mtm5>

Content Advice (may contain spoilers)

Overview More Info



Violence



Threat and horror



Language



Sex



Discrimination



Injury detail



Disturbing images



Theme

Sex & Nudity

+ Add an item

NONE 5 of 7 found this to have none [Vote](#)

Violence & Gore

+ Add an item

MILD 5 of 7 found this mild [Vote](#)

Profanity

+ Add an item

MILD 2 of 3 found this mild [Vote](#)

Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking

+ Add an item

MILD 2 of 5 found this mild [Vote](#)

Frightening & Intense Scenes

+ Add an item

SEVERE 4 of 6 found this severe [Vote](#)

SPOILERS

Montage perturbant avec des corps squeletiques en agonie, la musique est très intense. Le montage est surprenant au début, et peut mettre mal à l'aise.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10462154/parentalguide/>

Sex & Nudity: None

Violence & Gore: Mild

Profanity: Mild

Alcohol, Drugs & Smoking: Mild

Frightening & Intense Scenes: Severe

Cinéfranco recommendation: 15 years and over

"The drawing hardens, scratched and brittle. It imposes an almost monochrome violence, from the ghostly figure of the father of the little girl who survived to a chaos of screaming faces, frozen in absolute despair, like a terrifying proliferation of Edvard Munch's famous Scream. »

Translated from an excerpt of a Telerama review

SYNOPSIS

Once upon a time, a poor woodcutter and his wife lived in a great forest. Cold, hunger, poverty and a war raging all around them meant their lives were very hard. One day the woodcutter's wife rescues a baby. A baby thrown from one of the many trains that constantly pass through the forest. This baby, this "most precious of cargoes", will transform the lives of the poor woodcutter's wife and her husband, as well as those whose paths the child will cross, including the man who threw her from the train. And some will try to protect her, whatever the cost.

Queens Film Theatre

REVIEWS

Director Michel Hazanavicius finds a poignant way to address not only the horrors of the Holocaust, but the kindness that combated it, crafting an indelible parable destined to be watched and shared by generations to come.

Variety

There is no denying the contemporary relevance of the themes of man's inhumanity given our present-day litany of atrocities, conflict and refugee crises as well as the dehumanization of many societies.

Eye for film

More than anything, though, the movie stresses that every single life is sacred. It doesn't shy away from the ugly realities of the Holocaust, like the eerie animation of the train passengers' faces. But it also won't let us forget that the victims were real people with families, hopes, and dreams, just like us. Even one small act of mercy, like taking in that abandoned baby girl, could honor their memory in a small way.

(...)

In the end, *The Most Precious of Cargoes* proves to be a poignant and memorable film. Though not without some missteps, Hazanavicius' adaptation honors the difficult subject matter with artistic elegance and impactful emotional resonance. Its animated portrayal makes the film an especially worthy educational tool for sharing the lessons of the Holocaust with new audiences.

Gazettely

DETAILS

LANGUAGE

As the English subtitled version of “La plus précieuse des marchandises” was not available, this document is the English translation of the French “dossier de classification” and does not delve into the exact translation of the dialogues.

The language itself is not coarse except for a few words here and there, as in the sentence pronounced by the lumberjack about what the trains are falling:

"*Rubbish* children" or "It's us the *idiots* who are obliged to feed them".

The vocabulary is mainly oriented towards the hatred and prejudices that the woodcutters and villagers have for these Jews whom they do not name:

They are "thieves", "heartless" (although for this remark the lumberjack will change his mind). To call the child a "branded commodity" is a dehumanizing language in the same vein as the discourse of the village lumberjacks who are beginning to suspect that the little girl is Jewish in this hateful tirade:

"They killed God. They wanted this war. They don't deserve to live. The war will be over when the earth is cleared forever. Let them kill the heartless! »

As the "poor" lumberjack seems not to agree, his colleagues think he has drunk too much: "He is delirious. He's completely drunk."

The voice-over of the animation sets a tone that is both dramatic and very moving. As the film leads to the concentration camp where a prisoner shaves a young man's head, the voice-over gives the pulse of the situation as if it were an everyday occurrence: "heroes followed heroes... In their sealed wagons, humanity was dying, the sobs of the mothers mingling with the rattling breaths of the old people, with the prayers of the credulous, with the moans and cries of the children separated from their parents who had already gone into the limbo of the paradise reserved for the innocent...".

In the life of the “poor woodcutters,” God plays a very important role: the poor woodcutter’s wife prays for a life that is less lonely, less miserable. When she takes in the child whom her husband wants to hand over to the authorities, the couple hurl mutual curses at each other, such as “you will be cursed forever and ever,” says the poor woodcutter’s wife to her partner, who answers in kind. With the progression of the war, the poor woodcutter’s wife acknowledges that the baby’s life was not saved by God. It is not “thanks to you.”

The poor woodcutter ends up admitting that “the heartless do have a heart,” but at what price! The poor woodcutter’s wife is threatened with death by the “Broken Face” (“I will kill you”) if she reveals the deal she made with him: firewood in exchange for goat’s milk. Although the baby does not speak, her cries, her shouts of joy and her babbling eventually win over the heart of the poor woodcutter.

The animation begins like a fairy tale, “Once upon a time...”, and ends with a message of negation (“none of this ever happened”) to inject doubt, suggesting that fairy tales do not tell the truth. This narrative mode is designed to provoke discussion and debate. However, the message of love is both enigmatic and positive: “The love given to children, to one’s own as well as to those of others, the love that makes life go on in spite of everything that exists and everything that does not exist, the love that makes life continue, the rest is silence.” There are indistinct words in Russian and Yiddish songs in the background.

VIOLENCE

The violence in this war film is not graphic. It is thematic, with scenes that may upset younger viewers.

The baby’s arrival creates a conflict between the poor woodcutters: he does not want the child, so he grabs the baby aggressively and makes sure it stays in the shed. He also abruptly separates the dog from the baby when they are playing, which saddens them both.

The village woodcutters use axes that can become weapons, as in the scene where the poor woodcutter throws his axe into the chest of the villager who demands that he hand over the baby. He kills him. In this same scene, there is a fight in which the poor woodcutter dies.

Besides axes, the woodcutters carry rifles, like “Broken Face,” who usually hunts rabbits but spares them so as not to upset the little girl. He is shot by Russian soldiers and dies, but no blood or obvious wounds are shown, apart from the one wound (dating from the First World War) that gives him his nickname, Broken Face) on his face.

The arrival of the Jews as they are taken off the wagons is brutal, with barking dogs, shoving and the barbaric physical separation of families. The train sequences, where people are crammed together, sad and haggard, need only the rhythm of the wheels on the rails to underline the oppressive uncertainty on their faces.

When some prisoners in striped uniforms have to throw away the skeletal bodies of their companions, and when the survivors, emaciated, lost and vacant, wander outside the camp, the visual impact is shocking. Then a succession of black-and-white images of skeletal faces with black holes for eyes and mouths open in fear and terror appears, in the tradition of Edvard

Munch's painting *The Scream*; **this silent vision of ultimate despair is powerful. These images may disturb children.**

NUDITY

Nothing to report

SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Nothing to report

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT/ MESSAGES

- Risks: anxiety related to the death of loved ones, trains to Auschwitz, the danger to a Jewish baby, the climate of hatred and injustice.
- Disturbing content / heavy themes: deportation, execution, extermination (Holocaust). Emotionally trying film for some young people, to be seen preferably supervised (history lessons, guided discussion).

Film, being a visual experience, can be very powerful, so teachers should be prepared for a variety of responses. Students often react to the Holocaust with sadness, anger, disbelief, or frustration, yet many students do not have a visible emotional response. When using film to teach the Holocaust it is crucial to consider how, as teachers, we might form a thoughtful, respectful and caring classroom community while engaging with this topic.

https://mhm.org.au/app/uploads/2023/09/MHM_FilmGuide-2022.pdf

Messages and values

Positive messages:

- Welcoming of a child threatened by death,
- courage of a father who tries to save his baby,
- evolution of the lumberjack's wife towards empathy despite antisemitic indoctrination
- affirmation of human dignity in the face of dehumanization

Messages for

- compassion
- solidarity
- moral resistance in the face of Nazi barbarism.

The notion of “Righteous Among the nations”: the couple of poor woodcutters would be Righteous

The Righteous Among the Nations are non-Jewish people who, during the Second World War, risked their lives to save Jews from Nazi persecution and the Shoah.

This honorary title is awarded by the Israeli memorial Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

- These individuals provided help in various forms, notably by offering shelter, food, clothing, false identity papers, or by helping people flee to safer areas or neutral countries.
- The essential criterion for receiving this distinction is having acted at the risk of one's own life, freedom, or situation, without accepting financial or any other compensation in return.

Several French films and TV movies deal with the history of the Righteous and the rescue of Jews during the Second World War. Here are some notable examples:

- *Les Enfants des Justes* (TV movie, 2022): Adapted from a novel, this film tells the story of young Jewish children hidden in a French village and of the inhabitants who protect them.
- *Les Enfants de la chance* (film, 2016): The true story of a young Jewish boy saved by the medical staff of a hospital in Limoges, who falsified his identity in order to protect him.
- *La Traversée de Paris* (film, 1956): A classic which, while focusing on the black market, addresses the realities of the Occupation and the risks taken by the French.
- *L'Armée des ombres* (film, 1969): A masterpiece about the French Resistance, illustrating courage and sacrifice, including efforts to save threatened lives.
- *La Rafle* (film, 2010): This film, which retraces the events of the Vélodrome d'Hiver roundup, also highlights the acts of bravery of those who tried to help the victims.

PHOTOS DU FILM



The poor woodcutter's wife hears the cries of the infant she will find in the snow. She takes her home



**The poor woodcutter's wife collects wood with her "baby" to trade it for milk to feed the child.
As she gets the water from the well, she observes her husband warming up to the baby**



The woodcutter does not like the baby. He makes life very difficult for his wife and baby.



The woodcutter starts to like the baby he plays with as he now allows the dog to play with the little girl



The incessant passage of trains resonates every night in the village



La “Gueule cassée” [The Broken face, name given to the soldiers disfigured during the 1914-18 war] looks after the little girl



The woodcutter’s widow leaves the village with her daughter