



HENRY FOOL

USA 1997
137 Min. Farbe OmU

Verleih : polyfilm, Wien

I go where I will and I do what I can. That's why I'm in trouble. An honest man is always in trouble Simon, remember that.

Hal Hartley pur: klug, zynisch, komisch, und eine Spur tragisch. In Henry Fool trifft schräge Tristesse auf gerissene Durchtriebenheit, sind die Menschen weder schwarz noch weiß, sie fluchen, trinken, leben, lieben, atmen, hintergehen einander und versuchen dem täglichen Einerlei etwas Lust abzuringen.

Simon ist einsam, verklemmt, scheu und arbeitet bei der städtischen Müllabfuhr. Die paar Dollar, die er damit verdient, muß er mit seiner manisch depressiven Mutter und der nymphomanischen Schwester teilen. Im Keller haust Henry, Biertrinker, Kettenraucher, Egomane, selbsternannter Literat und Frauenbetörer. Das schlichte Gegenteil von Simon. Henry schreibt - wahrscheinlich seit Jahren - seine Memoiren, ein Gekritzel, das dereinst die Welt erschüttern soll, so epochal, das auch Henry daran zerbrechen wird. Henry hält Simon zum Schreiben an und dieser landet mit der Unverfrorenheit des Anfängers einen Bestseller, der im Internet veröffentlicht wird und ihn über Nacht zum Star macht.

PALME FÜR DAS BESTE DREHBUCH in Cannes 1998

Hal Hartley über Henry Fool:

"Ich wollte eine Geschichte über Ehrgeiz, Talent und Einfluss machen. (...) Mich beschäftigte folgende Frage: Was passiert, wenn dein wichtigster Einfluss jemand ist, für den du dich eigentlich schämst, den als Vorbild anzuerkennen dir peinlich ist. (...) 'Faust' und 'Kaspar Hauser' waren Quellen. Ich habe sie nicht vollständig übernommen, aber bei der Lektüre erschienen sie mir als hilfreiche Startpunkte für meine Charaktere. Ich wollte, dass sie mythische, weit angelegte Charaktere werden, alle Komplexitätsschichten sollten intakt sein. (...) Ich habe mich auch auf das Verhältnis zwischen Joyce und Beckett bezogen - ohne mich wirklich genau an das zu halten, was ich darüber wusste."

It is, in the end, whatever the hell I want it to be. And when I'm through with it, it's gonna blow a hole this wide straight through the world's own idea of itself.

STAB

Produzenten :

Keith Abell

Jerome Brownstein

Thierry Cagianut

Hal Hartley

Larry Meistrich

Daniel J. Victor

Kamera : Michael Spiller

Schnitt : Steve Hamilton

Musik : Hal Hartley

Ton : Daniel McIntosh

Look, in my opinion this is pretty powerful stuff. Though your spelling is neanderthal and your reasoning a little naive, your instincts are profound.

Besetzung:

Thomas Jay Ryan....Henry Fool

James Urbaniak....Simon Grim

Parker Posey....Fay

Maria Porter....Mary

James Saito....Mr. Deng

Kevin Corrigan (I)....Warren

Liam Aiken....Ned

Miho Nikaido....Gnoc Deng

Gene Ruffini....Officer Buñuel

Nicholas Hope (I)....Father Hawkes

Diana Ruppe....Amy

Veanne Cox....Laura

Jan Leslie Harding....Vicky

Chaylee Worrall....Pearl (age 7)

Christy Romano....Pearl (age 14)

*It's a philosophy of poetics. A politics if you will. A literature of protest.
A novel of ideas. A pornographic magazine of truly comicbook proportions.*

Filmografie HAL HARTLEY :

No Such Thing (2001)

Kimono (2000)

New Math(s), The (2000)

Book of Life, The (1998)

Henry Fool (1997) (uncredited)

Flirt (1995/I)

NYC 3/94 (1994)

Opera No. 1 (1994)

Amateur (1994)

Flirt (1993)

Simple Men (1992)

Ambition (1991/II)

Surviving Desire (1991)

Theory of Achievement (1991)

Trust (1990)

Unbelievable Truth, The (1989)

Dogs (1988)

Cartographer's Girlfriend, The (1987)

Kid (1984)

Interview

Sony Pictures Classic: What inspired you to make "Henry Fool?"

Hartley: I wanted to make a story about ambition, talent and influence. Everyone asks me about my influences: Who are my biggest influences? It's a complex question. How are we influenced? What do we take from a teacher and what was there all along that the teacher simply identified? There is a responsibility in having influences, just as there is being an influence.

So I wanted to tell a story about influence, both artistic and personal. I considered this possibility: What happens if your most profound influence is somebody whom you're kind of ashamed of or you'd be embarrassed to admit? Maybe the local pervert did more to shape your personality than anyone else or the criminal, or the ex-con. That struck me as very exciting.

SPC: "Henry Fool" seems more ambitious than your previous films. You've even described it as an "epic."

Hartley: I've always thought about big stories. And I wanted to do something like a biography of a great, infamous person. I wanted it to reach over a long period of time and tell a story about the culture we live in. But I needed a person to serve as a catalyst.

"Epic" for me means a long story that treats a variety of themes by following the adventures of a particular person or group. The means at my disposal were not the high seas, the desert, or outer space, but a typical, loud, ugly American urban sprawl which seemed like the proper scope for my inclinations. I wanted a new modern myth -- something broad, but penetrating, that sketched in who we might be here and now. Henry himself is the personification of the inconvenient push and pull of events that cause us to become a community rather than a mob, whether we like it or not.

SPC: Did you have in mind any literary models for "Henry Fool?"

Hartley: I actually drew from "Faust" and "Kasper Hauser." I didn't incorporate them entirely, but while reading those works they struck me as helpful starting points for shaping my characters. Because I wanted them to be mythic, broadly sketched characters, with all the layers of complexity intact.

I love that in "Faust," at a certain moment, Faust conjures Mephistopheles. And I think of Henry, in essence, as Mephistopheles. At the most desperate moment in Simon's day, he needs a friend really badly. And that happens, Henry materializes. It's as if Simon calls Henry into existence.

Simon fits into the Kasper Hauser archetype. Henry teaches him to speak, teaches him how to express himself. He teaches him how to yearn, how to want, how to desire, how to have ugly, messy needs. And then it goes haywire.

I also drew on the relationship between Joyce and Beckett. I didn't stay faithful to what I know about it. The fact that the younger was really enamored of the old man, and that the old man wasn't particularly honest with him all the time and, maybe even, used him in ways he didn't understand. But the younger one was happy to be used, too. What was most important for me as a storyteller was that we constantly suspect Henry's integrity, that he might just be full of hot air. But, nevertheless, even if he is full of hot air, he is having an effect. Henry is egotistical and admittedly perverted, but he never lies. And that's why I play with how much we can trust him.

SPC: On one hand, "Henry Fool" deals with spiritual, philosophical issues like art and its importance to society. On the other hand, the film plunges deep into the muck, with numerous references to bodily fluids. Why did you decide to go so deep into the scatological with your storytelling?

Hartley: It's just a desire. Maybe in my process of growing up and making films, I had never done that, so I decided to just roll up my shirt sleeves and try something completely different. I really wanted a loud, ugly beauty of a thing.

I wanted to be knee-deep in creatureal reality -- the blood, guts, urine, sperm, and spite of the common muck. And I wanted to amp it up to a comic book clarity. And this was a challenge for me because I usually shy away from the time consuming technical labor of stunts and effects (the puking was a lot of work). Sex -- the filming of sexual encounters -- is stunt work.

I wanted Henry to wallow in depravity. I needed him to be consistently and increasingly outrageous, because I had every intention of also showing him as possessing the highest human qualities. But I wanted these admirable aspects to be hard to see.

SPC: Normally you tend to hold back more with your storytelling.

Hartley: Yes, I think it's important to hold back on emotion. I don't really have a grand theory about it. If you show too much emotion, then it just gets watered down and there's no build. You have to keep the individual shots and the individual scenes carefully unemotional for the real emotion to be rendered.

SPC: People have characterized your work as controlled. You control the dialogue, the camera, the actors, the music. Did you feel in this film you opened up a little bit?

Hartley: Film is, for me, an art of composition. It's composed. Just as if I wrote a piece of music, I would compose the singing to correspond with the other instruments, and that's how I make films. It's never occurred to me that films could be anything else.

"Henry Fool" is just as carefully composed as any of my other films. But it's more obviously emotional, and that was a decision to make, to be more openly and clearly emotional. The story is kind of a response to the world around me. It was humming in a particular way and I said I've got to address this, now. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to sleep at night.

SPC: In this film, Simon is the character who is most composed. Everyone else is acting out wildly.

Hartley: Yes, he displays some control. People are expressing themselves and doing things, but they're expressing, as in Warren's case, contempt, or in Fay's case, extreme desperation and low self-worth. And her mom is expressing very complicated emotions, too.

Simon's reticence is double-edged. I think he does want to participate in the world a little bit. But there's another side of that, too. His strength is an admirable thing. He has time to think about the actions he's going to make and the compassion he is willing to express.

I think for Simon the world is a really fascinating place. Whatever he has written, which we're really not privy to, is probably not an expression of desperation and loneliness. It's probably just a very clear-eyed look at the world, conveyed in a mode that's not easily recognizable. Maybe it's not clearly or easily sentimental or cynically intellectual. It scares some people, but some people love it.

Simon is, in fact, probably clear-sighted and strong. Impossibly strong. Frighteningly straight forward. Yes, I always imagine that whatever he has written is a frightfully accurate, clear-eyed view of his parents, his friends and the world as he sees it. He sees clearly, and that is why he is tongue tied. He has been struck dumb by the insight he possesses. Henry does not give Simon insight -- he gives him eloquence.

SPC: Why didn't you show Simon's work?

Hartley: Because films about artists always get it wrong when they show the art. And they let the audience participate in the judgment of the art, whether the art is good or bad.

I wanted to focus attention on how reaction creates value or non-value. This is not a story about what art is. It may be a story about what art seems like when it enters the world. But, for the most part, the artistic worth of Simon's poem is not the issue. The issue is the manner in which Simon's life changes as a result of knowing Henry and how that change begins to threaten Henry.

SPC: What about some of these characters along the sidelines of the story? You have Kevin Corrigan's character...

Hartley: Warren. My aspiration -- wrong-headed or not, was to create a broad but meaningful sketch of our culture and some of its current preoccupations, to leave a fossil of a particular time and place in America. I wanted to make a few little brush strokes, shading in, giving some definition to the country we're living in now, including its intolerance, desperation and fast pace. I found Warren's misguided foray into politics admirable. He wants to do something, be involved in something, but he blindly chose the wrong thing. Maybe he actually loves that guy that he's campaigning for. But he's too immature to understand what politics are. And when the guy loses, he becomes cynical and bitter.

SPC: But even so, you don't hate him.

Hartley: No, you don't. You've got to be careful with your characters. You have to love your villains when you're writing them.

SPC: You also show the world around, the business of art, the publishing world through this editor who basically rejects Simon's work without a thought, then suddenly has a change of opinion when he sees that it can work in the marketplace.

Hartley: Yes, and I think that's legitimate. I like that character. I mean, he doesn't compromise his integrity. He says exactly why he's there. He says, "Well, it's growing on me. I'm spending more time with the poem," whatever. But it was clear, he says, in so many words, "I'm not an idiot. This can make a lot of money."

SPC: Many of your films deal with men's yearning for women and their corresponding inability to form lasting commitments.

Hartley: If I may say so, I think most of my films deal with men who want a lasting relationship with a woman so badly that they invariably make it an impossibility. I have always been amused and enlightened by men who shoot themselves in the foot.

If the earlier films often included a tacit approval of loneliness as integrity, "Henry Fool" is flooded with the knowledge of our mutual neediness. We have to put up with each other somehow and invent new strengths from old weaknesses. But still, loneliness is not a sin for me. It is a quality of character I admire if it's not allied to narcissism and/or self-pity.

"Henry Fool" is about the accidents of commitment. Henry's commitment as a friend and teacher to Simon is simply the result of his need to pontificate wildly -- he needs an audience. And, of course, Henry never really commits to Fay. They are a train wreck of a couple. But I think they do love each other and their son. And that's why I love them both -- they are conspirators perpetrating an irreconcilable difference. And who said people who love each other should be able to get along?

SPC: How do you hope people will respond to this movie?

Hartley: I hope that they're alert. That they're moved and they're kind of more awake to each other and to the world. That's why I wanted Henry to be legitimately disgusting. I didn't want it to be too easy to like him. I mean, he's so bombastic, so funny and disgusting -- it's easy just to fall in love with this man. So he really had to have been in prison for something inexcusable. And not only that -- but he doesn't even apologize. And you can say, "Oh, he's just not really dealing with this." Or something like that. But whatever it is - it's ugly.

When we first showed it, a distinct nervous silence came over the audience when Henry tells Simon that he "was caught in flagranti delicto screwing a 13-year-old girl named Susan." It was a tense moment, and I would not have been surprised if someone had stood up and shouted, "Fuck you, Hal Hartley!"

Somehow, it would have been appropriate. I was spending all this energy making us like this disgusting guy and perhaps, now I had crossed the line; attempted a joke at the expense of innocence.

I was willing to risk that this would seem callous and cheaply sensational, perhaps even a pathetic and ill-advised attempt at titillation. The reason for it is Pearl towards the end of the film. I, myself, am repulsed by Henry in that moment with Simon, not because of what he has done, but because of what he is doing; making excuses, glorifying (by almost any standard) his basically sordid past

SPC: In anticipating that response from the audience, were you afraid that they were going to think that you were saying: "Accept what this guy has done!"

Hartley: We have no choice but to accept what he has done. The hard part is about how we judge him. We can only take him at his word. He claims this 13-year-old girl, named Susan, knew how to play upon his weaknesses which, he admits, are "deep and many."

This scene plays in direct relation to the scene with Pearl near the end of the film where this other 13 year-old girl attempts -- for very different reasons -- to play upon what she has heard are Henry's weaknesses.

I hope there is some fear in the audience that Henry is capable -- in that moment-- of making a horrible mistake.