

Anatomy of a Fall [15]

2023 France 151 mins

UK released	10 November 2023
Director	Justine Triet
Screenplay	Justine Triet; Arthur Harari
Cinematography	Simon Beaufig
Music	Thibault Deboaisne
Cast	Sandra Hüller (Sandra Voyter); Swann Arlaud (Vincent Renzi); Milo Machado Graner (Daniel Maleski); Antoine Reinartz (the prosecutor); Samuel Theis (Samuel Maleski); Jehny Beth (Marge Berger); Saadia Bentaieb (Nour); Camille Rutherford (Zoé Solidor); Anne Rotger (the President); Sophie Fillières (Monica)

If *Marriage Story* (2019) were a murder trial, it might look a little like *Anatomy of a Fall*, Justine Triet's gripping, sharply intelligent psychological drama, which collects itself in fizzing arcs of strange electricity around a brilliant, edgy but elusive Sandra Hüller. A woman stands accused of killing her husband. Her 11-year-old son, a key witness who was blinded in an accident some years prior, listens in the courtroom. Lawyers rant, theorise and nitpick (after Alice Diop's peerless *Saint Omer* (2022) this is an equivalently forensic depiction of the French legal process). But what is really being dissected is the mystery that is other people's passions. Where does responsibility lie when a marriage sours? Did love fall away, did it jump, or was it pushed?

Sandra (Hüller), a successful novelist, is being interviewed by grad student Zoé (Camille Rutherford) in the partially renovated chalet in the French Alps that Sandra shares with her French husband Samuel (Samuel Theis) and their son Daniel (Milo Machado Graner).

Suddenly, music blares out at ear-splitting volume from upstairs. It is, as a bitter in-joke, a steel-band cover of 50 Cent's misogynist classic P.I.M.P. it forces Sandra to halt the interview. As Zoé leaves, she passes Daniel taking his dog Snoop for a walk in the dazzling snow. When Daniel returns, his father lies dead beneath the attic window where he was working, blood staining the snow.

A year later, Sandra stands in the dock. A native German with fluent French but even better English, she code-switches in fascinating ways: does her reversion to English at key junctures signal better communication of the truth? Or is it the language in which she can more easily lie? As the ruthless prosecution advocate (Antoine Reinartz, a cleverly counterintuitive casting choice) locks horns with Sandra's lawyer and old friend/flame Vincent (an excellent Swann Arlaud), every piece of evidence is opened to opposing, equally plausible interpretations, and the credibility of each witness, especially Sandra, becomes more important than the facts.

It pivots on the hot-blooded drama of violent death, but *Anatomy of a Fall's* searing screenplay – co-written by Triet and her husband Arthur Harari – also takes a scalpel to professional jealousy and writerly ego, and along these deep incisions Sandra and Samuel's marriage splits open, its ugliness spilling out like viscera. Can mutually agreeable fair-use between husband and wife become, in a moment of anger, a "plundering"? Can it ever not?

Daniel, having had the unreliability of his own recollections cruelly demonstrated, must essentially choose between damning his dead father by insisting on his suicide, and condemning his unknowable mother by implying murder. 'Facts don't care about your feelings' has become a catchphrase in our spiteful age, but here, feelings are the only facts that matter.

Between the absolute poles of 'guilty' and 'not guilty' lies a many-shaded spectrum of culpability and complicity. In vivid, clean lines, *Anatomy of a Fall* navigates this moral morass and exposes the absurdity of trying to pluck from it a simplistic, binary verdict. Is Sandra a loving mother, a murderous wife, an egotistical creator, a guilt-ridden destroyer? Tick all that apply.

Jessica Kiang, *Sight and Sound*, 30 May 2023 (abridged)

Coming soon....

Monday 15/1: ***20,000 Species of Bees***

Monday 22/1: ***The Eternal Memory***

[For details and more – visit our website](#)

www.buxtonfilm.org.uk

Buxton Film is a Registered Charity no. 1165040

 admin@buxtonfilm.org.uk  [@buxtonfilm](https://twitter.com/buxtonfilm)