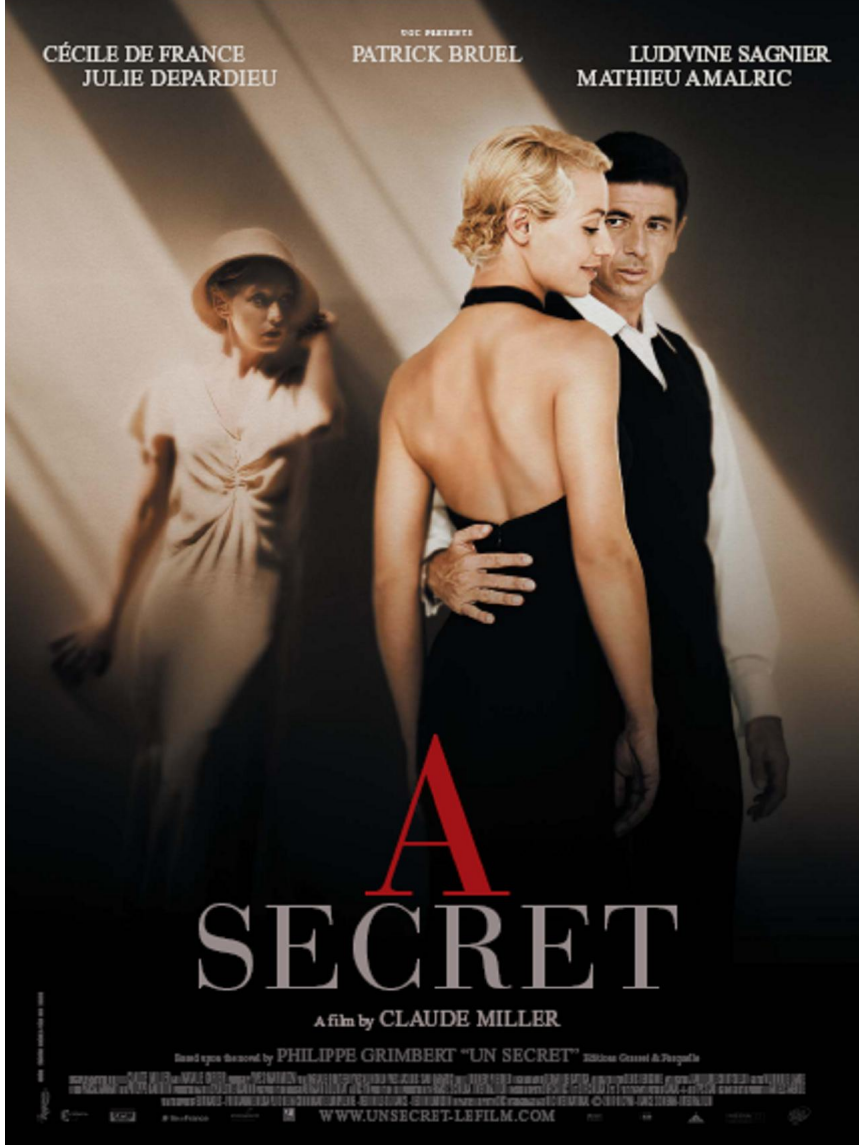


CÉCILE DE FRANCE  
JULIE DEPARDIEU

DOC PRÉSENTS  
PATRICK BRUEL

LUDIVINE SAGNIER  
MATHIEU AMALRIC



# A SECRET

A film by CLAUDE MILLER

Basé sur le scénario de PHILIPPE GRIMBERT "UN SECRET" Editions Grasset & Fasquelle

www.unsecret-lefilm.com

**UGC presents**

**CECILE DE FRANCE - PATRICK BRUEL - LUDIVINE SAGNIER  
JULIE DEPARDIEU - MATHIEU AMALRIC**

# **A SECRET**

**A CLAUDE MILLER FILM**

**Based on the PHILIPPE GRIMBERT's novel "A Secret",  
Editions Grasset & Fasquelle**

**Screenplay, adaptation, dialogues  
by  
CLAUDE MILLER AND NATALIE CARTER**

**A film produced  
by  
YVES MARMION**

**A UGC YM - INTEGRAL FILM Franco-German coproduction  
in coproduction with FRANCE 3 CINEMA**

**Running-time: 110 minutes**

**SYNOPSIS**

The exploration of a dark family secret and the story of a passion, through the inner voyage of François, a solitary child who invents for himself a brother and imagines his parents' past.

On his fifteenth birthday, a friend of the family reveals to young François an overwhelming truth, but one which enables him at last to start building his life.

Claude Miller's film is the adaptation of Philippe Grimbert's novel "A Secret", published by Grasset & Fasquelle, winner of the Secondary School Gongourt Prize and Readers of *Elle* Grand Prix. The novel is also available in the collection Livre de Poche.

## INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE MILLER

*How did you discover Philippe Grimbert's novel, "A Secret", as the basis for the film's adaptation?*

Ever since our first collaboration in 2000 on *BETTY FISHER AND OTHER STORIES* (aka *BETTY*), based on the work by Ruth Rendell, Yves Marmion, the producer, has regularly supplied me with novels he thinks I should read. One of them was by Philippe Grimbert which he warmly recommended to me. As of that moment, he didn't hide from me the fact that UGC might well be interested in the adaptation. I therefore quickly read "A Secret" and the very same evening I phoned Yves and said, yes, I'd love to tell this wonderful story on the big screen!

*What was for you the decisive factor?*

When we speak about victims of Nazism, we often have the impression that they weren't people like everyone else: they hadn't experienced love, romance or passion.

*But weren't there more personal reasons?*

I was born in 1942. There weren't many survivors in my family: most of my uncles, aunts and grandparents didn't come back from the concentration camps. As a boy, then a teenager, I was haunted by this traumatising, stressful story. I began to experience fear and phobias. I was a shy child, but what could have been more natural as my mother had carried me in fear? But, strangely, it was a theme which I hadn't explored in any of my previous films. To such a point that even in *THE ACCOMPANIST*, which takes place during World War II, the subject still wasn't taken up.

*Was it taboo?*

No, but that wasn't my primary concern as a filmmaker. Following the example of my entire family, I was always a laic Jew, and in no way really religious. I sensed that the adaptation of Philippe Grimbert's novel might be the occasion to pay tribute to both my family and their story.

All the more so as we both come from the same social milieu, which was neither bourgeois nor proletarian. Our parents were *petits bourgeois* tradesmen and Ashkenazic Jews.

*Did you want to take a political look at this period as well?*

More sociological than political. In the novel there is a dimension of that order which greatly interested me. Philippe Grimbert clearly shows the emergence in the 30s of a real cult of the body, physical beauty and athletics, even before the usage made of it later by the Pétainism and Nazism. In my laic Jewish milieu, we gladly cultivated this trend: it was a question of fighting against a kind of so-called typically Jewish "dolorism", which I call in the film the spirit of "oi, oi, oi". That is to say an inclination to complain, to give up, not to strengthen oneself in order to be able, if need be, to defend oneself. My father, as the character of Maxime in the film, thus reproached me for my physical laziness, me who, notably, always had my nose plunged in books! He was afraid that I was one of those so-called sheep who'd let himself be led away to the slaughterhouse without resisting. Therefore, it was a subject which greatly

interested me.

*Despite this pronounced taste for the history of your day, you've shot relatively few period films. Why?*

I'm always afraid of the picturesque, in the movies, in general, and in my own films, in particular. I've always been a little frightened of that dusty appearance, a bit like comic opera. I'm afraid of all the make-up, period props and atmospheres.

They must not interfere with emotion and trouble the audience. I therefore don't refuse costume films, as I proved with *THE ACCOMPANIST*, *THE LITTLE THIEF* and now *A SECRET*, but I'm very careful not to let myself be invaded by an anecdotal past which we re-compose.

*To return to the film's preparation, you held a somewhat unorthodox screenwriters casting. Why?*

It's true that it's a relatively uncommon practice. On my past two or three films, I was my own screenwriter. I rather enjoyed the solitude of scriptwriting.

I said to myself that the adapted book was then my working partner. But in the case of *A SECRET*, I wanted to be able to talk things over with a co-screenwriter, because everything was to be done cinematically: the novel presents itself as a story in the first person, without any dialogues, and is designed as "thought in movement", which is the thought of the author himself. In other words, I found myself faced with genuine film adaptation challenges. All the themes taken up pleased me, but I knew that I had to come up with an original cinematic form. I therefore set off in search of a screenwriter and asked five or six of them, including Natalie Carter, to write a full first adaptation.

*Why did you finally select Natalie Carter?*

We had never collaborated before, but I had greatly appreciated the adaptation which she had undertaken of Roman Gary's novel, "Lady L". I immediately sensed in her a great sense of humanity and a deeply emotional empathy for all the characters. The fact that she isn't Jewish, I must admit, seemed to me important for the writing of the screenplay so that we didn't fall into complacency through pity. Finally, in this story, where the women play a key role and even represent the driving force, Natalie brought me an indispensable feminine point of view. We were therefore on the same wavelength and worked together in perfect harmony.

*The scenes of the past in colour, the scenes of the present in black-and-white: why this very particular choice, in opposition to how it's generally done?*

For the films which mix different time periods, as is the case here, there's always the temptation of what I call the "colour coding". We decide beforehand, for example, that all the pre-war scenes are to be in sepia. I knew that we couldn't skirt this stylistic issue on *A SECRET*, but strangely I postponed the moment to actually get around to dealing with it! In that case as well, I likewise had a fear of the picturesque! I therefore shot the film integrally in colour and at the time, the idea of treating the contemporary part in black-and-white hadn't even occurred to me. It was at the very beginning of editing that the idea came to me and I asked for such passages to be in black-and-white. And so, by acting in this manner, I unconsciously rediscovered one of the literary figures of the novel: everything that takes place in the present is written

in the past tense, and all the past action is written in the present! It was, more over, Philippe Grimbert who was the first to point a finger to this parallel in the dialogue between the book and the film.

*The naked bodies of the lovers in the film set in contrast against those emaciated and tortured victims of Nazism shown here in stock footage. Was this meant to be perceived as a deliberate comparison?*

No, not really. It's not a desire to play one against the others, but the fact is indeed there and calls out to us. One of the films about Shoah which most impressed me, was Andrej Munk's *PASSENGER* which takes place in Auschwitz. The themes of the modesty and immodesty of bodies lie precisely at the very centre of this extremely beautiful, powerful film. One scene in my film, which identically takes back up a scene from the novel, shows the bodies of the deportees. For me, it could only be stock footage of that which was projected in post-war secondary schools to show the horrors of Nazism. As for the bodies of the two who passionately make love, they are anything but scandalous if replaced in the chronological context of the related story: the adulterous couple formed by the characters played by Cécile de France and Patrick Bruel knows nothing about the death camps and Shoah. It's our own viewpoint, that of today, which is then in question, and not reality as experienced by the protagonists of day. The shock between different points of view and consciousnesses, between the past and present, seems to me particularly illuminating.

*Why did you grant such an important role to nature in its most luxuriant aspects: woods, undergrowth, running water, etc.?*

Indeed, I'm highly sensitive to nature in stories about love and passion. I like very much the following expression which clearly summarises my approach: *Mother Nature doesn't care!* For me, this nature which doesn't care is in the cinema an incredible vehicle of emotions. Just look at the films by King Vidor either even Terence Malick, such as *THE THIN RED LINE* or *THE NEW WORLD* and you'll find this vision of the importance of nature faced with the human passions we describe. I like the counterpoint between nature as troubled by human beings, and natural splendour which, decidedly doesn't care!

*We note another recurring theme in many of your films, one which plays once again a key role here, and that's the swimming pool! How do you explain its omnipresence?*

It's first of all a key location in the novel, outside my own universe, since Tania (Cécile de France) is a former swimming champion. But, it's true that this place haunts me since it's a part of my bad memories of childhood. My own father, as Maxime in the book and the film, I repeat, wanted me more to be more of an athlete than I really was. As of a very early age, he'd take to the pool to teach me how to swim. Too early, no doubt, because from then on I hated the pool. I had for that place a kind of fascination-aversion for years on end. I next nourished my films with these childhood phobias and made the pool into a frightful, dangerous and hostile place.

*Were you moved during the actual shoot?*

Yes, once. In a scene where the narrator, played by Mathieu Amalric, meets Serge Klarsfeld and makes the connection, definitively and officially, with his family's story.

The only time in my life as a filmmaker when I was moved to such a point by what I had just shot. I was moved in tears a second time in the editing room by the scene where appears for the first time the character of Hannah, played by Ludivine Sagnier.

*Two children play an essential role in the film. How did you discover them?*

The only real difficulty was coming up with two children for one and the same part, that of the future narrator, one 7 years old, and other 14. Now, I was lucky enough to have in the person of Elsa Pharaon a tremendous casting director. She saw over 200 children among whom I auditioned about 20, that is to say a very classic process which enabled us to reach the final casting. The choice of the other child, Simon, who plays in the film the son of Ludivine Sagnier, was far more delicate: he had to be very athletic, and perfectly at ease when performing various physical exercises. We therefore recruited Orlando Nicoletti from a gym club for children where he trains for real competitions. He bore, in addition, a striking resemblance to his on-screen father, Patrick Bruel.

*The latter incarnates on screen the narrator's father. You had never worked with Patrick Bruel before. How did you choose him?*

It's a very singular story! If I held a casting for the screenwriter, Philippe Grimbert had previously done his own casting for the director! As soon as his novel was published, many producers, filmmakers and actors showed a desire to bring it to the screen. As of this moment, Patrick Bruel's name circulated and we had him read the novel. Now, one day, we lunched together and we ended up talking about *A SECRET*! Quickly, even before the adaptation writing, he imposed himself upon me for artistic reasons, obviously, as his acting in Pierre Jolivet's *UNCONTROLLABLE CIRCUMSTANCES* then in Dominique Cabrera's *THE MILK OF HUMAN KINDNESS* had greatly impressed me. But it was also for an important aesthetic reason: his character, Maxime, ages over the course of the story and we gradually see him pass from 35 to 70 years old. And Patrick has the tremendous good fortune to possess a face that seems forever young! He has, as the English say, a real "baby face".

*It was equally a first collaboration with Cécile de France...*

Yes, and I don't regret my choice! In the novel, Tania is described as a magnificent, athletic and immediately attractive woman. As a reader, I had in mind a motion picture reference: Gene Tierney in John M. Stahl's *LEAVE HER TO HEAVEN*. At the time of the casting, before the scriptwriting, someone suggested to me the name of Cécile de France. One single meeting was enough to convince me that she would be a more than perfect Tania. Cécile combined the character's two peculiarities: she's both beautiful and approachable, the perfect "the girl next door", as the Americans say.

*With Ludivine Sagnier, you have a professional relationship which continues to grow...*

Yes, obviously, she was stunning in *LITTLE LILI*. For *A SECRET*, I wanted her to be really naturally gorgeous but in a very different way from the seductiveness as exercised by Cécile de France. In François Truffaut's *THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN* the narrator, alias Charles Denner, claims that in the world there are two types of women, "long stems" and "little apples". That's what I wanted! To present her with Hannah's role, I simply told her: "She's beautiful, just like you, but she makes no particular effort this regard."

*Another regular on your sets is Julie Depardieu...*

I very quickly thought of her for Louise's part. First, because like Patrick, she can go very far in the representation of various ages in life. And then Louise is first and foremost a girl of the people, and, for me, Julie is situated in the continuance of what we used to call in the cinema the "oiseilles" of which Arletty was, the absolute paragon, an incredible mixture of popular wisdom, charm, humour and cheeky humour.

*Let us end with a song, according to the French tradition! The film is carried along by Charles Trenet's song. Why this choice?*

I wanted to impregnate myself with what people used to listen to on the radio during the pre-war years: I listened to many songs of day. But, still out of fear of the picturesque, I didn't want to grant too much importance to this dated background sound. However, I retained in particular the song "All That's For Us" that Trenet wrote and sang under the Occupation. I found it both beautiful and terribly troubling with an apparent lightness which stands in opposition to the hardness of the times. It is symbolic of what the film relates: much joy and much sadness.

## INTERVIEW WITH CECILE DE FRANCE

*How did you discover Philippe Grimbert's novel?*

Thanks to Claude Miller: he was the one who had me read it. I read the novel before discovering the filmscript. I was deeply moved and wept when reading this novel. During the entire shoot, I kept in my heart this first emotion.

*How the meeting with Claude Miller go?*

I knew that he was going to offer me Tania's role. So, I decided to go to the appointment which he had set up for me, in a very sexy sports outfit! That's the image which gives Tania of herself and think that's how Claude Miller chose me! I was immediately the character, at least as far as her physical appearance goes.

*Tania is a swimming champion. Did you work on this specific aspect of the character?*

I sure had to! Claude Miller got me documents of the day, photos notably in relationship with the world of sports and swimming. With the help of a coach who really helped me, I modelled my body so that resembled sportswomen of that time which have nothing to do with women today. I worked on this aspect of my character for three months and, me - who has no particular taste for swimming - I became a "sidestroke" specialist, which was highly fashionable during the period. But don't forget, Tania is a sportswoman who remains very elegant, very feminine, and very graceful. She's both a sportswoman and a model. She mixes sports and fashion.

*Was it important for you to master as far as possible Tania's physical appearance?*

It was even essential. I work a role physically first of all. I conceive it through her hair, dresses, gait and her way of speaking and walking. It's my way of next reaching the psychology of the character. It's first necessary for me to get to know her silhouette, her appearance.

*But over and beyond this appearance, just how would you define Tania?*

She's a character for the very least complex. Each can judge the evolution of her behaviour all along the tragic story which the film relates. She's a terribly human character who gradually transforms. At first, she doesn't want to fall in love with Maxime, she struggles with all her might against the idea of becoming attracted to this man. Succumbing is totally out of the question. It's a moral point of view. And then, she will end up by breaking out this armour and cracking. But nothing is done simply. We see her as torn, filled with guilt and terribly sad.

*Isn't she also a mother?*

And a remarkable mother indeed on whom her son can depend. She's the narrator's mother, he who will one day become the author of the adapted novel... She's the protective mother, the mother to whom one turns when faced with a father who eternally dissatisfied by his son.

*Did you feel close to Tania?*

Not especially. At the time of the shoot, I wasn't yet a mother, but more broadly speaking, I don't need to sense such close ties with my character. It's a genuine composition which I develop over the course of days, polishing up such and such a detail, such and such an attitude. At the same time, I've always tried to defend this character. I wanted audiences not to judge her as light, and for her to remain likeable for them.

*How did you experience the ageing of the character?*

It was very amusing. And it strengthened precisely this aspect of composition. At certain moments in the film, my character could have been my own mother in reality: the age difference is about the same! For me, it's a joy to be get made up like that and artificially age. It's a brilliant experience! And then it was equally necessary to adapt oneself as well to the fashions of each period. Obviously, people didn't dress in the same way in the 30s or 50s. I took all this as a game which was both very serious and very enjoyable to do.

*It was the first time you've shot under Claude Miller. What memory do you retain from the experience?*

He's a filmmaker who deeply loves his actors and profession. I know that he's been preparing the shoot for a long time and it's highly reassuring. On the set, he regularly consults a little book filled with notes and indications. You feel you're in good hands because he constantly gives off the impression he knows exactly where he's heading and where he wants us to go.

*What was your relationship with the other leading actors?*

What the film has to relate is often difficult and filled with pain, so we had to work off the excess in tension and emotion through laughter and fun. And then we were really welded together. I share a deep complicity notably with Ludivine Sagnier. It was indispensable.

*Did you discuss your character with Philippe Grimbert?*

I did so repeatedly and each and every time it was all the more enriching. Still, it's rather troubling to play in the movies the mother of someone who really exists and whom you can actually meet on the film set. He was just as moved as me moreover. There was no taboo subject between us: I was able to ask him all the questions I was asking myself about his mother. But Philippe Grimbert, from the very outset, kept this distance. He never behaved like a director. He gave his opinion, answered questions and reacted to interrogations, while at the same time preserving his role of observer and witness of a film which was being made before his very eyes.

*With hindsight, what image do you keep of the film?*

If I chose to make this film and play Tania, it was first of all out of a sense of duty to the memory of the Jewish people and their history over the last century. This tragedy lives on in me and I wanted to express it through a role. Tania gave me this occasion. Moreover, the film tells stories of love and passion. I was greatly sensitive to this blend of history with "personal histories", personal stories. It's especially this double dimension which I retain.

## INTERVIEW WITH PATRICK BRUEL

*How for you did the casting of A SECRET take place?*

In a rather unusual way, because I was lucky enough to read very early on Philippe Grimbert's novel and was so overwhelmed that I dreamed above all of playing the character of Maxime even before knowing that Claude Miller would be doing both the adaptation and film.

*How would you define Maxime?*

He's a complex character, who is first of all fighting against himself in his desire to integrate and his denial of fatality. He ferociously denies his origins at the risk of being taken for an anti-Semite. He's a laic Jew who refuses to submit in pre-war France or during the Occupation. He's also a father who is extremely demanding when it comes to his son. But first and foremost, he's a man snatched up by destiny and a victim of feelings stronger than himself... I didn't, moreover, try to attenuate his weaknesses or make him immediately likeable. I was anxious to respect his faults, whether visible or intimate.

*In what does this role differ from those you've played in the past?*

It's the very first time I play a character who is neither good nor bad. He feels a deep, complex humanity that combines joy and misfortune.

*How did you work with Claude Miller?*

In the most total harmony; we agreed perfectly on the character. When at the end of a scene, I told him, "A strange guy all the same!", he invariably answered, "The male soul is a battlefield!"... Which made me laugh every time and we were real buddies on the set.

*You met Philippe Grimbert several times on the shoot. Wasn't playing one's own father wasn't troubling?*

Sure, of course, but it was necessary to remain in the world of fiction: I didn't try to stress the identification because I didn't want to fall into the imitation or mimicry, which would have considerably weakened the film's message... it's not a documentary about the history of a family.

*For the first time, you had for female co-partners Cécile de France, Ludivine Sagnier and Julie Depardieu. How do you see them?*

You must agree that I had a lot of luck: they're all three great, talented actresses with whom it's particularly enjoyable to work. I appreciated Cécile's mystery as much as the sunny side one finds in both Ludivine and Julie. And I'm not forgetting the children in the film who obviously awoke in us intense and troubling, personal feelings.

*What is the scene of the film which most touched you?*

Without revealing anything about the story and its secrets, it's the scene where I return home having gone for umpteenth time to the Hôtel Lutétia where were assembled the rare deportees surviving after the Liberation.

*Inversely, do you have any bad memories?*

Difficult moments, perhaps: my character is seen at several ages in his life and to age me, it took many long hours of make-up. The first time, I found the exercise amusing, but in the long run, I had had more than enough and really looked forward to getting over that part of the film!

*Is it true that you wanted at a certain moment for the entire film to be shot in black-and-white?*

Let's say that I discovered during the course of shooting, in this particular case the scene of my marriage with Hannah (Ludivine Sagnier), that they were in black-and-white. So I said to Claude: "It's great, it looks like a Capra movie, you absolutely have to keep this tone!" It was just a spontaneous, enthusiastic reaction in front of images which seemed to me incredibly beautiful. But the screening of the black-and-white retained by Claude, was even more stunning and unexpected...

## INTERVIEW WITH LUDIVINE SAGNIER

Isn't *A SECRET* first of all for you the continuation of your collaboration with Claude Miller after *LITTLE LILLY*?

I can't speak about this new film without effectively speaking about *LITTLE LILLY*. Claude Miller, whom I greatly admire, wove between us a relationship of confidence and friendship. When he offered me this new part, once again co -starring with Julie Depardieu, I felt great pride because I didn't think I'd experience, professionally speaking, a new form of complicity comparable, for example, to the one I already shared with François Ozon. I didn't think that one could have several different close friendships of this kind at one and the same time. *A SECRET* marks for me renewed confidence in Claude and a new phase in our work in common.

*At what moment did you read Philippe Grimbert's novel?*

I first read the script and it was only then that I discovered the book. I was totally carried away by the screenplay and read the novel the very same day. From then on, I was totally swept away by the story. During the long months which preceded the actual shoot, I lived with my character constantly in mind and loved this film well before it was even shot!

*Did you therefore immediately know that you would play Hannah?*

Yes, Claude had told me even before having me read the screenplay. But I didn't think that he'd give me a role of such tragic dimension, me who, at the Conservatory, dreamed only of playing Iphigénie and Bérénice! Up until then, directors had thought of me for less dramatic roles, without being necessarily light for all that. Claude enabled me to make my dream come true.

Furthermore, he gave me the possibility of teaming up for the third time with Julie Depardieu and I equally like the idea of creating close bonds with other actors by sharing films.

*On the other hand, you had never shot before with Cécile de France or Patrick Bruel...*

That's true. But henceforth I know that with Cécile, in particular, we are part of the same network, the same family. Our paths are going to again meet on film sets and we are going to build paths in common, which is something I especially appreciate. This enables you to fight against the feeling that the end of a shoot marks the end of your relationship with the other actors.

The meeting with Patrick Bruel intrigued me a lot, notably because we are not of the same generation and come from different horizons. But I discovered a deeply moving actor. He didn't hesitate a single second to throw himself body and soul into the character of Maxime, which is a difficult, ambiguous role, far from Patrick's normal image as a popular singer.

He takes the risk of not always being likeable in the eyes of the audience and it's brilliant.

*You're very familiar with Claude Miller's world. What are, according to you, the bridges between this world and that of Philippe Grimbert's novel?*

In my opinion, the correspondences are numerous and fertile. The theme of childhood and family, in particular, are present in both. They even have places in common: I'm thinking of the role which the swimming pool plays, both as regards its place in the novel and the film. What's more, obviously, Jewishness which Claude hadn't yet dealt with head on in his previous films. And I find it utterly admirable the way he came to grips with this theme.

*How would you define your character?*

For me, she's a little like little Lili: she's a seagull that takes off and loses its wings. She passes from one extreme to next. She's both terribly happy and terribly sad. She passes from candour to lost innocence. She's one of those people who can't imagine that tragedy can one day befall them. When she finds herself starved of affection, her whole being collapses and topples into disbelief. She then loses all her benchmarks.

*Did you attempt to humanise this character?*

It's my habit to take my characters literally and consequently I don't try to introspect them during the shoot! I espouse their convictions and start off with the principle that they are right. Furthermore, this role took on a particularly personal dimension: it's the very first time I've played the role of a mother while being a mother myself. The intensely close relationship which Hannah has with her son therefore greatly resonated in my head all along the film. She's a character heavy to bear and I had to delve into my heart to call upon buried emotions which I hadn't necessarily expressed thus far on screen.

*Would you have wanted to play the two other female characters in the film: Tania or Louise?*

The desire, yes. The regret, no. If Claude Miller had asked me, I would have agreed to play either one. But the role of Hannah fell just at the right moment. In short, Tania is what I was, Hannah is what I am and Louise what I shall be!

*When did you meet Philippe Grimbert?*

Even before the shoot during a dressing session. I literally collapsed into his arms, so submerged was I by emotion! What is fascinating in Philippe is the inner force which he radiates. Moreover, he chose as his profession taking care of other people's children and their secrets, so as not to remain locked in his own. He is of extreme kindness and gentleness, in total contrast with what he had experienced and related in his novel.

*How do you see the historic period in which the film unfurls?*

I know, for example, that my grandmother, without actually having been part of the Resistance, sheltered Jews during the war. This film gave me the opportunity to take part in the necessary duty of memory. We are here first and foremost to tell a story, but in this particular case it isn't just any story or any historical context.

*Do you keep in memory one particular scene?*

More than any one scene, I retain those with the children in a general way. And notably the scene when the children discover through a montage of stock footage all the horrors of the concentration camps and Final Solution.

## INTERVIEW WITH JULIE DEPARDIEU

*Had you read Philippe Grimbert's novel before being contacted by Claude Miller?*

No, but I read it before the screenplay, on Claude's recommendation. But at the time, I didn't know what character I'd play in the film. That, I only found out later, when Claude had me read the script, explicitly telling me that he was thinking of me for the part of Louise.

*When reading the novel, did you imagine yourself in the skin of Hannah or Tania?*

No, I read the novel without thinking of the coming film. I read it in one go. It's a strong work which one reads for itself without analysing the characters. The idea of the role came later when I read the script. At that time, I began to represent to myself both Louise and the other characters. But it's the book in its entirety that I loved first of all. But quite frankly, if Claude had suggested to me playing the part of a table or chair, I would have accepted without the least hesitation!

*You play the only really invented character in this story which is otherwise inspired by very real facts. How did you experience this singularity?*

The most troubling is that I only received this information very late on, once the shoot had in short begun, from the mouth of Philippe Grimbert. But it didn't really bother me. I always have an instinctive vision of my characters. I don't search for information on them which isn't included in the scenario.

*Have you moreover the feeling that Louise could be the other narrator of the film, the other "off-stage voice"?*

It's true that Louise is there from the very beginning to the very end. She experiences everything. She knows everything. She spans the entire story as a benevolent witness who refuses to judge or condemn others. From this point of view, she's admirable. I know that in life, I don't have the strength of character to refuse to constantly spy on others or stigmatise their faults or their failings. Louise, on the other hand, is blessed with this great capacity. I believe that she's the person each of us would like one day to become. Louise is the personification of wisdom and understanding.

*It was your first shoot with Patrick Bruel. What memory will you keep of it?*

I'm one of those people for whom singers are more important than... actors! In the 90s, I was a painter trainee on the shoot of Claude Berri's *GERMINAL* in which Renaud starred: every time I'd meet him, I was literally petrified. To meet Patrick Bruel in the flesh had the exact same effect on me.

He impresses me even more than Robert de Niro, for example. I speak from experience as I've already met de Niro and instantly turned into a pillar of salt! But a singer-star is something else altogether. All the more so as Patrick possesses incredible and irresistible charm: he's somebody who could even seduce an empty chair! And on the set he's a very pleasant, very kind partner who respects one and all.

*What about Ludivine Sagnier and Cécile de France?*

Ludivine is a friend. We've known each other for a long time, well before even the shoot of *LITTLE LILLY*. We even could have met on the set of Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *CYRANO* where she played the novice actress and me, the novice make-up artist. But we were too young then. Cécile, on the other hand, I hardly knew before *A SECRET*. More precisely, I knew her and appreciated her great talent through her films. I equally know that we went through a few auditions together for the same part, but I won't mention any names because obviously she walked off with them all!

*What scene in the film most marked you?*

It's difficult to choose. But I remember having wept during the marriage scene between the characters played by Ludivine Sagnier and Patrick Bruel. It's a breathtaking ceremony full of particularly moving songs and dances.

## **INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPE GRIMBERT (author of the novel "A Secret")**

*You chose the filmmaker who would adapt your book. How did this somewhat usual casting take place?*

My position is singular. My professional life keeps me at a safe distance from the worlds of publishing and motion pictures as I'm a clinician for autistic and psychotic children. But I'm equally a real film buff. I learnt, once "A Secret" was published, that a certain number of filmmakers were interested in its eventual screen adaptation. Marie-Hélène d'Ovidio, who's head of audiovisual rights for my publisher Grasset, then suggested to me that I might become involved in a process of consultation which would enable me to meet six or seven of these directors and thus appreciate their respective projects. I obviously found the idea intriguing. It turned out that it was with Claude Miller that I had the most immediate and closest bond. Everything therefore began very quickly after that first decisive meeting.

*How do you explain this immediate empathy with Claude Miller?*

At first, it was for me all the more astonishing as I considered adapting my book virtually impossible! But the meeting with Claude was grounded in a community of personal stories. Even if his career is different from mine, Claude had something to express that brought us together. We share a common questioning of identity and origins. I therefore gradually came to understand why the chemistry worked so well between us. We're both sons of men who had chosen to blend and remain silent as to their origins. That was the first point in common which bound us so strongly and quickly. From then on, we mutually trusted each other for the adaptation and that's why we talked everything over, throughout all the scriptwriting - in which I didn't directly take part - as well as all along the actual shoot of the film. When I'd make remarks, Claude always and enthusiastically took them into account.

*Why didn't you directly participate in the screenwriting?*

I believe that the book must, at some point, escape its author. It's a new work, a film in this particular case, which is being constructed and must find its own path, its own identity. I'm not a professional screenwriter and I therefore totally relied on Natalie Carter and Claude Miller to carry out this adaptation. I told them at the time: "Take my book and do whatever it inspires you to."

*Were you surprised when you first read the screenplay?*

The screenplay taught me many things about my book. However surprising it might appear, I literally discovered on this occasion that my book didn't contain any dialogues! The two screenwriters had to invent all of them.

I thus discovered for the very first what my characters actually say, and it was a troubling discovery for me as an author. They acquired an existence and consistency that ultimately I hadn't given them in the book. They emerged from the book and began to speak, even about very everyday, mundane things.

*What was your reaction on discovering the actors whom Claude Miller had chosen to play your characters who were almost all members of your family?*

I always insist on the fact that my book is first and foremost a novel, even if it is based on real facts and very real characters. I built a romantic story out of mere fragments. Be that as it may, the revelation of the casting came for me a real shock. I

had to admit that people whom I had really known would be portrayed on screen by... stars! I was therefore somewhat disturbed by the absence of physical resemblance with the members of my family whom these actors were supposed to play. So I had to accept the idea of having as my screen parents Cécile de France and Patrick Bruel! But very quickly, all this hesitation faded before the sheer talent of each of these great actors.

*Isn't it troubling to see the representation of one's own parents on big screen, especially in their greatest intimacy?*

I'm a psychoanalyst and I think that my training helped me to effectively see on the big screen what, in our jargon, we call the "primitive scene", that is to say the vision of one's own parents making love. I've done enough work on myself to be able to watch this scene with detachment, while *a priori* it's *par excellence* the scene that a child and even an adult would have the hardest time representing to himself.

*The character of Louise, played by Julie Depardieu, is the only one you actually invented. What was your reaction at the time of casting?*

Julie Depardieu doesn't physically resemble the character I invented, but she nears as closely as possible the deep truth of the character and obviously that's what counts the most.

*What were your relations with all these actors so close to you in a way?*

The very first time I came onto the film set was for the scene of Maxime's wedding night with Hannah. And I felt before this sea of period costumes an incredible impression of being the "ghost" of this story and making a journey in time. I was in a place where I beheld, so to speak, my father wedding his first wife at a time, consequently, when I hadn't yet been born! But I took away from this moment only pure intellectual pleasure and felt in no way troubled.

*Wasn't it a bit disturbing for you to encounter your film double in the person of Mathieu Amalric?*

I was delighted to be played by this fantastic actor. I enjoy a total distance with regard to my own incarnation which doesn't disturb me at all, contrary, for example, to that of my parents. I just said no to naming the character "Philippe" like me. It seemed to me too immodest. François is a lot better!

*What memory do you keep of the role which Claude Miller confided you in the film?*

He's the one who insisted in fact on me playing a minor character, that of a clandestine smuggler which, let it be said in passing, is, for a psychoanalyst quite a feat! It was symbolically for me deeply moving to thus appear in the film.

## **INTERVIEW WITH NATALIE CARTER (co-screenwriter)**

*What was the genesis of your collaboration with Claude Miller?*

We had our first professional contact for a television project, the adaptation of Roman Gary's "Lady L", which didn't come off in the end. Then, after having just read in one go and with much emotion "A Secret", I learnt that Claude was organising a kind of casting for the film adaptation of the book. I therefore wanted to be among the dozen screenwriters whom Claude asked to do a sketch for the script's construction and adaptation in just a few pages. I found the exercise particularly stimulating and exciting. Firstly, because the book had particularly touched me. And secondly, because I just love Claude Miller's films. And, as he happened to like what I wrote, it marked the beginning of our great adventure together!

*Was "A Secret " an easy book to adapt?*

It contains some wonderful artistic challenges to a screenwriter! The novel journeys between the past and present, from one time to another. The characters age and the periods change. It's a novel without any dialogue. Furthermore, the story is in the first person, therefore with the point of view of the narrator, in this particular case, but this raised in turn problems of cinematic transposition. In the end, at certain moments, one might say that the story is one of a dreamed life and not a real life.

*At what moment did the choice of the off-stage voice come about?*

From the beginning of our screen adaptation work, we knew that with Claude we were going the right way. He was the only one capable, for example, of getting across moments of dreamed life where the narrator gives free rein to his imagination. The story which the film relates is that of a gaining of awareness which the off-stage voice carries in the literal sense of the term.

*Concretely, how you did work with Claude Miller?*

Like him, I adore writing. We therefore supervised in tandem the balance of things in the scripting. I know that Claude doesn't like beginning to write, for example, so I started off first, but after we really wrote with four hands. We had to invent and write all the film's dialogues as the book didn't contain any. We went literally to the heart of the characters, and had to totally understand them to be able to have them speak.

*You knew the casting before starting to write the script. Was that a handicap or an advantage for you?*

A real stroke of luck! To be able to put Patrick Bruel's face on a character as complex as that of Maxime, Ludivine Sagnier, or the troubling Hannah saves you time and gains assurance as regards the definition of the characters. To write for somebody isn't necessarily easier but it's certainly far more fertile. We can base ourselves on existing personalities and physical appearances as well as voices, intonations, attitudes... It was equally necessary to write children's characters, an exercise I truly enjoyed! It's a real pleasure for me to invent or adapt personalities for young children or teens.

*What was your relationship with Philippe Grimbert?*

He was discreetly and effectively present during each every stage of the film. As soon as the first treatment was completed, Claude and I felt the need to have him

read it. We weren't worried but very eager to have his opinion of our work. Fortunately, he loved it! Over the course of the various versions, as during the shoot, then in the editing room, Philippe's remarks and suggestions were always beneficial and even more, judicious.

### CAST

Tania	Cécile DE FRANCE
Maxime	Patrick BRUEL
Hannah	Ludivine SAGNIER
Louise	Julie DEPARDIEU
37-year-old François	Mathieu AMALRIC
Esther	Nathalie BOUTEFEU
Georges	Yves VERHOVEN
Commander Beraud	Yves JACQUES
Joseph	Sam GARBARSKI
7-year-old Simon	Orlando NICOLETTI
7-year-old François	Valentin VIGOURT
14-year-old François	Quentin DUBUIS
Robert	Robert PLAGNOL
Hannah's mother	Myriam FUKS
Hannah's father	Michel ISRAEL
Rebecca	Justine JOUXTEL
Paul	Timothee LAISSARD
Mathilde	Annie SAVARIN
Sly pupil	Arthur MAZET
Serge Klarsfeld	Eric GODON
Smuggler	Philippe GRIMBERT

## CREW

Directed by	Claude MILLER
Screenplay, adaptation, dialogues by	Claude MILLER and Natalie CARTER
Based on the Philippe GRIMBERT's novel "A Secret", Editions Grasset & Fasquelle	
Produced by	Yves MARMION
Music by	Zbigniew PREISNER
Cinematographer	Gérard de BATTISTA - AFC
First assistant director	Denis BERGONHE
Production designer	Jean-Pierre KOHUT-SVELKO
Film editor	Veronica LANGE
Sound engineers	Pascal ARMANT and Frédéric DEMOLDER
Sound mixer	Philippe BAUHOVIN
Camera operator	Nathan MILLER
Production manager	Sylvestre GUARINO
Musical production	Valérie LINDON
Co-producer	Alfred HURMER
Postproduction manager	Abraham GOLDBLAT
Costume creator	Jacqueline BOUCHARD
Scriptgirl	Sylvie KOEHLIN
Children's casting and coach	Elsa PHARAON
Make-up artist	Lucia BRETONES MENDEZ
SFX make-up artist	Benoît LESTANG
Hair stylist	Paul de FISSER
Stills photographer	Thierry VALLETOUX
Theatrical distribution France	UGC Distribution
International sales	International UGC
Video publications	Video UGC
Trailer	SoniaToutCourt
Artwork	Rageman

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 In coproduction with FRANCE 3 CINEMA  
 In association with the SOFICAS SOFICINEMA 2 and 3 and SOFICA UGC 1  
 With the support of  
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 the EU SUPPORT PROGRAMME MEDIA PLU S,  
 the ILE-DE-FRANCE REGION  
 and the LIMOUSIN REGION  
 In partnership with the CNC  
 With the cooperation of CANAL + and TPS STAR

## PRESS ARTICLES

## VARIETY

"Un Secret"  
(France)

By DENNIS HARVEYA UGC release of a UGC YM, Integral Film production, in association with France 3 Cinema. Produced by Yves Marmion. Co-producer, Alfred Hurmer. Directed by Claude Miller. Screenplay, Miller, Natalie Carter, based on the novel by Philippe Grimbert.

Tania - Cecile de France  
Maxime - Patrick Bruel  
Hannah - Ludivine Sagnier  
Louise - Julie Depardieu  
Francois - Mathieu Amalric  
Esther - Nathalie Boutefeu  
George - Yves Jacques  
Commander Beraud - Yves Verhoeven  
Joseph - Sam Garbarski  
Simon - Orlando Nicoletti  
Francois (age 7) - Valentin Vigourt  
Francois (age 14) - Quentin Dubuis

Based on Philippe Grimbert's fact-inspired novel, "Un secret" is a fine drama that stands as Gallic vet Claude Miller's best in at least a decade. Oft-traveled narrative terrain of a Jewish family torn asunder during France's WWII occupation is rendered fresh by a complex flashback structure that spans half a century and maintains suspense over key developments until the final reels. Impressive cast should help lend prestige item legs when it's released in October later this fall; offshore sales prospects look bright.

In a black-and-white 1985, Francois (Mathieu Amalric) is an anxious-looking Parisian who's informed his elderly father has gone missing. This triggers flashbacks to 1955, when he was a shy, sickly kid (Valentin Vigourt), intimidated by two conspicuously robust parents: erstwhile champion swimmer Tania (Cecile de France) and gymnastically inclined Maxime (Patrick Bruel). While both strain to exert patient understanding, it's clear enough to Francois that he is a disappointment, especially to dad.

The boy's best friend is Louise (Julie Depardieu), who runs her massage business across the lane from the family's clothing shop. Francois also has an imaginary brother who's everything he's not -- fearless and athletic. Discovering a toy in the attic that mysteriously upsets his parents, Francois pulls the long-hidden truth out of Louise: He once had a half-brother, and his parents didn't come together under the idyllic circumstances he's fancied, but rather amid terrible tragedy and guilt.

Prewar scenes find Maxime engaged to another: fetching Hannah (Ludivine Sagnier), whose parents view Hitler's rising power with great foreboding. The groom, however, considers himself French above all, barely acknowledging his Jewish heritage and expecting society to follow suit. At his own wedding, Maxime can't help but ogle blonde beauty Tania, who's just as physically vigorous as himself -- and, to Tania's considerable embarrassment, the attraction is mutual.

Nonetheless, life goes on more or less as planned -- soon including Maxime and Hannah's child Simon (Orlando Nicoletti) -- until the Nazis invade.

Telescoping the considerable spiral of events in Grimbert's prize-winning tome (set to be published Stateside early next year) into a sleek, cogent mosaic of brief scenes, Miller is in top form. Direction and screenplay let the multitiered narrative's emotions emerge without need for melodramatic flourishes. Particularly vivid is the adulterous erotic charge between the leads, though it's seldom more than a matter of fleeting glances.

Thesps are first-rate, including several Miller regulars. Handsome production package emphasizes the good life of prewar and several-years-postwar Paris (as well as the beauty of the countryside during farm sequences), with special mention due Jacqueline Bouchard's stylish period costumes and Gerard de Battista's attractive, occasionally lyrical lensing. Editor Veronique Lange's work is a model of delicacy and concision.

Pic shared the Grand Prix of the Americas prize at the Montreal Fest with Belgian debut feature "Ben X."

Camera (color/B&W), Gerard de Battista; editor, Veronique Lange; music, Zbigniew Preisner; production designer, Jean - Pierre Kohut-Svelko, costume designer, Jacqueline Bouchard; sound (DTS/Dolby Digital), Pascal Armant, Fred Demolder; assistant director, Denis Bergonhe; casting, Elsa Pharaon. Reviewed at Montreal World Film Festival (competing), Sept. 3, 2007. Running time: 105 MIN.