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A Benoit Jacquot film

Based on the novel by Chantal Thomas (Editions du Seuil / Editions Points)

Farewell My Queen

(Les Adieux à la Reine)

Cast

Léa SEYDOUX

Diane KRUGER

Virginie LEDOYEN

Xavier BEAUVOIS

Noémie LVOVSKY

Michel ROBIN

Julie-Marie PARMENTIER

Lolita CHAMMAH

Marthe CAUFMAN

Vladimir CONSIGNY

Sidonie Laborde

Marie-Antoinette

Gabrielle de Polignac

Louis XVI

Madame Campan

Jacob Nicolas Moreau

Honorine

Louison

Alice

Paolo

Executive Producers

Jean-Pierre GUÉRIN
Kristina LARSEN
Pedro URIOL

Screenplay

Gilles TAURAND and
Benoit JACQUOT

DOP

Romain WINDING
(A.F.C.)

Sound

Brigitte TAILLANDIER

Editor

Luc BARNIER

Music

Bruno COULAIS

Sound editor

Francis WARGNIER

Sound Mixer

Olivier GOINARD

Set Designer

Katia WYSZKOP

Costume design

Christian GASC
Valérie RANCHOUX

1st Assistant Director

Antoine SANTANA

Production Manager

Marie-Jeanne PASCAL

Post-Production

Frédéric J. LOZET

Line Producer

Christophe VALETTE

*A franco-spanish co-
production*

GMT PRODUCTIONS
LES FILMS DU
LENDEMAIN
MORENA FILMS

*In co-production
with*

FRANCE 3 CINEMA
EURO MEDIA France
INVEST IMAGE

*With the participation
of*

CANAL+
CINE+
FRANCE TELEVISIONS

In association with :

LA BANQUE POSTALE -
IMAGE 5
PALATINE ETOILE 9
SOFICINEMA 7

With the support of :

REGION ILE-DE-
FRANCE
PROCIREP / ANGOA

In partnership with :

CNC (France), ICAA
(Spain)

International Sales :

ELLE DRIVER

2011 /// Drama /// 100'

Language

French

Format

35mm & DCP

Sound

Dolby SRD



Photo © Carole Bethuel

Synopsis

1789. On the eve of the French Revolution, those living at the Court of Versailles continue to lead carefree, uninhibited lives, far from the growing unrest in Paris. When news of the assault on the Bastille reaches the court's ears, the nobles flee along with their servants, deserting the palace... But Sidonie Laborde, a young reader of the Court who is devoted to the Queen, refuses to believe the rumours. She is certain that under Marie-Antoinette's protection she will come to no harm. Little does she know that these will be the last three days she will spend at her queen's side.



Photo © Carole Bethuel

Interview with Benoit Jacquot

How and when did you discover this book by Chantal Thomas?

It was back in 2002, during a round-table discussion that we were having for “Adolphe”. At the time, Antoine de Baecque was heading up the culture section at Liberation. He brought Isabelle Adjani, Chantal Thomas and myself together to discuss the problems of literary adaptations. Prior to the meeting, he gave us all a copy of Chantal Thomas’s book “Farewell, My Queen” which had just won the Femina Book Award. As soon as I read it, I knew that I wanted to make it into a film.

Why did you wait so long?

At the time, I realised that it was almost impossible to try and put together a project of this scale. “Farewell My Queen” is a historical drama set at Versailles and therefore very expensive to make. I didn’t know any producers willing to put together the necessary funds for such a project. So, I dismissed it from my mind. Then, when Jean-Pierre Guérin bought the rights, he asked me to do an adaptation. I was still as keen on the project.

Of the twenty films you have made, 10 of them are adaptations.

I am a big reader but I chose to be a filmmaker and not a writer – a conscious decision on my

part. Naturally books will always play an important role in my film projects.

The film tells of the fall of the monarchy, in the period between the 14th July, the day of the storming of the Bastille, and the 16th, when Louis XVI, under public pressure, was forced to sack Breteuil. The entire story is told through the eyes of a young girl, Sidonie Laborde, one of the Queen’s readers at Versailles.

She sits at the center of the story. She is the constant presence in the film. I wanted the viewer to feel exactly what she experiences as the events unfold. I also wanted the spectator to be totally immersed in life at Versailles on her level. To have the same doubts and intimacies. Sidonie is so close to events that she is not able to understand everything that is happening around her. By definition, when you are living in the present moment, you do not have a perspective on what you are experiencing. Sharing her understanding of events with the spectator was a way to make the film as vibrant as possible, and avoid the need for any retrospection.

Sidonie, the reader, played by Léa Seydoux, is much younger than the original character in the book.



From the outset, Gilles Taurand and I wanted the reader’s point of view to be one of a very young woman, unlike the book where she is much older. We thought it was interesting as she still has a close link to childhood, and therefore the narrative of the film does not have to use flashbacks, as in the book. Chantal Thomas’s narrative was robust enough for us to be able to make certain changes without altering the tone. From the moment we took that decision, adapting the book became very straightforward: all that was left to do was to leave aside certain scenes, disregard some of the characters and either shorten or condense certain passages to heighten the drama. That really is the key to this kind of project: to put aside aspects of the book in order to discover its essence.

In this film you have respected “unity of time”. The notion of time is something you often like to play around with in your films.

I like the idea of films playing with the notion of time. For example, I find it interesting to compress time and recount a whole lifetime in an hour and a half. Or, work in real time and recount an hour and a half in an hour and a half; this is something I have already experimented with.

In the four-day period that the story covers, we witness the total collapse of the nobility living at Versailles: protocol, conventions, everything collapses and everyone is looking to escape. This story is a bit like the Titanic! Where a ship that is considered the most beautiful construction in the world starts taking on water and then sinking, setting off a huge wave of panic. The si-

tuation obviously creates mixed reactions: people come closer together, relationships form or, the opposite, they fall apart. Over the four days, the main characters are in a continual state of disarray. Over this short period of time, and in the same confined space (we do not leave Versailles until right at the end of the film), the characters experience different states of mind, swinging between one emotion to the next.

They are cut off from the outside world and are therefore unable to get a clear picture of exactly what is going on in Paris.

They live shut away. But in such a vast place that we get the impression that it is a world of its own – like a country, with its own borders. In fact, those who lived at Versailles called it “that country”. They are confined, which is of course ironic. In this closed world, I tried to show how information both succeeded and failed to circulate. And it’s very strange: the information from the outside comes in the form of a rumour, like a foreign body invading. It starts to show in little ways, or is mentioned in passing, in people’s behaviour and thoughts over these four days.

Ironically, when a group of them finally leave Versailles, their world gets even smaller again.

Yes. They escape in a stagecoach that the camera never exits. Once outside the castle gates, it is as if they are confined yet again.

Versailles is shown in a state of real filth.

In his “memoirs”, Saint Simon brilliantly described the stench of the latrines at Versailles. A stench that came from behind the most beautiful wood panelling, gilding and chandeliers in the



world. Something revolting, rotting and putrid. As if the state of the building at Versailles was a metaphor for the collapse of the regime.

Sidonie, the reader, is besotted with Marie-Antoinette, who in turn is infatuated with the Duchess of Polignac. All the events that unfold are set against this troubled relationship...

Sidonie is literally madly in love with the queen! I was really interested in the child-like infatuation she had for Marie-Antoinette, as well as the more “perverse” relationship between the Queen and the Duchess of Polignac. This love triangle electrifies the film.

Sidonie’s love is very discreet.

It is less obviously sexual than the relationship between the Queen and Polignac. Except the Queen herself, maintains a sexual ambiguity with Sidonie. She enthuses over her chubby arms, and rubs her to soothe a mosquito bite. Like a wild creature, Marie-Antoinette loves everything carnal. At the end of the film, when she asks Sidonie to undress so as to take Polignac’s place, it is as if the love triangle is now complete. I felt it was very important, that at a certain point in the film, two of the three women should appear naked, stripped

of the heavily corseted dresses they wore and that played such an important part in their everyday lives. Two out of three, but not the Queen. The Queen never shows herself, she gives the order for one of the others to instead.

Léa Seydoux is exceptional in this part. She is both very physical and very modern.

Lea lives in jeans. I wanted her to wear the dresses of the period that were very complex to put on, in the same casual way she would wear a pair of jeans. Yet I did want her to be aware of the constraints of these dresses. I wanted her to understand XVIII Century costumery, and to live with it. Yes, she is amazing.

Diane Kruger is also very remarkable as Marie-Antoinette

She has the same background as Marie-Antoinette and is exactly the right age for the part. The role of Marie-Antoinette was made for her, she was the obvious choice. As an actress, she is the complete opposite of Léa. Diane is meticulous, focused, deep down she is very Anglo-Saxon, whereas Léa is more animal-like, instinctive, blowing



hot and cold. Bringing the two of them together was very exciting.

In the film, like in the book, we discover the lesser-known sides of Marie-Antoinette's personality

It is as if, in the center of the picture, the queen bee starts, for whatever reason, to upset the equilibrium and her agitation spreads throughout the hive. The accelerated events over these four days show all the different phases Marie-Antoinette went through in her life – the period of innocence, then of frivolity, then near debauchery ending with a period of great decorum. They are all mixed together. Without warning, she moves from extreme frivolity to a state of incredible lucidity, to great despondency. Like the weather. I love that. On set, when I'm giving instructions to the actors almost all my references are weather-related “Like the sun breaking through the clouds, the sun goes in, day, night.” Different weather for different moods....

You film scenes relatively quickly and you have a habit of giving actors a free rein.

The fact that I film quickly means that I have to leave them free. The limitations of speed are such that there is only time to frame the shot, enabling us to achieve certain realism. I don't really believe in rehearsals. For “Farewell My Queen” we just booked a few days with Lea, Diane and Noemie Lvovsky who plays Madame Campan, to read the script and basically agree on what they could and could not say. This was particularly important for Diane as French is not her first language so we wanted

to be sure about certain pronunciation and emphasis. I did not have to say anything to Virginie Ledoyen, I know her so well, there was no point.

There are always a lot of women in your films, and a lot of very young women.

I'd say it was about fifty-fifty. I have done five films with Isabelle Huppert. She was 25 when I first met her and we have worked together ever since. I love women when they just start becoming women, when they have just past the stage of being young girls. I believe this moment is special and important.

Xavier Beauvois, Jacques Nolot, Marie-Julie Parmentier... also figure in the credits

A film's cast is essential. I do agree that, in this case, the cast is particularly distinguished. But it was vital that Léa, who is in the film right from the very first scene through to the last, be well supported. She needed to be surrounded by actors and actresses whom she admired and also who would set high standards.

The lighting in “Farewell My Queen” is stunning.

I wanted the lighting to be both very sophisticated and very dramatic. I had already worked on another idea similar to this with Romain Winding.

And the set design is incredibly sensual.

Each set was conceived by considering one piece of furniture at a time, after meticulous planning and plenty of discussion. Previously, on other period dramas, I arrived on location

and barely changed a thing. But for this film, everything was worked out beforehand. Take the golden cabinet, for example. It is night. A fire is lit and Marie-Antoinette is burning some letters. The fire lights up everything. What could we use so that the light from the fire would contribute a nocturnal ambiance to the scene? Since this place was called the golden cabinet, Katia Wyszkop came up with the idea of making large gold screens. They add a warm, golden glow but they also add a disturbing decadence too.

You did a lot of the filming at Versailles. Very few productions have ever done this.

We filmed there as much as we could i.e. every Monday and every night. The people running Versailles were very welcoming and made things as simple as they possibly could for us. Few films are made at Versailles because filming there costs a great deal, which puts a lot of people off. You have to be sure, which is the case in this film, that Versailles really is one of the main characters. Saying this, we did also film in other chateaux. It's actually quite funny trying to work out where each scene was shot, whether it was at the real Versailles or at one of the pretend Versailles.

How many other chateaux?

Three mainly. The Queen's bedroom in The Petit Trianon was recreated in Maison Lafitte. It would have been impossible to film in the original room, which was too small to fit a camera. So we had to rethink it. However, the hallway and the staircase leading to her room as well as the entrance to The Petit Trianon and



its immediate surroundings were all filmed at The Petit Trianon. We also filmed at the Chateau de Chantilly. This is where we shot the long galleries that the nobles can be seen walking through once they leave their own grotty apartments.

“Farewell My Queen” is a big budget film, yet it feels incredibly light and modern. We have already mentioned the way Sidonie / Lea's learnt to move in

her costume. But, there is also the way in which you film skin texture...

That's something very important for me. When I make a period drama, I always try very hard not to make it look false, like an exhibition of beautiful antiques. Of course, that staged approach can be very beautiful, there are some wonderful films – take Visconti's films for example or Kubrick's “Barry Lindon” – these are fabulous “antiques”! But that's

not my thing. I want people to think this is it, this is how it is, and that's all there is to it.



Interview with Chantal Thomas

How did you react when you first saw Benoit Jacquot's film?

I could no longer remember my book. I watched it as if it were being told to me. The story unfolded in a new and very different style but of course it had an extraordinarily familiar feeling to it. It was both: my book and his film.

Did you know his films?

Benoit and I occupy a similar intellectual universe. When I saw "Deep In The Woods" for example, I immediately thought, and I was right, that he must be an avid reader of Bataille. I also enjoyed how we met in 2002: during a debate about literary adaptations. He had just read my book. It's quite a surprising sequence of events, isn't it?

You have written several books about Sade (1) and Benoit Jacquot made a film about him. There are quite a few connections between you two.

I don't think that this is a coincidence. Very few people, whether in France or elsewhere, have made a film about Sade. Benoit is inspired by the beauty of the French language and by the art of cruelty when enacted with certain elegance. This is exactly what I love about Sade.

Did you follow the different stages of the adaptation?

I was not in any way involved in the adaptation process but Gilles Taurand and Benoit did send me the different versions of the screenplay.

Several comical characters from the book have been sacrificed notably Captain de Laroche, who is in charge of the menagerie. The animals in his care are all sick. He himself stinks. Laroche is really a premonition of what is going to happen?

I was so happy when I came across this character as I was searching through the archives. Louis XVI was very fond of Captain de Laroche and I felt that he said a lot about that period – not only about the smells at the court, but also about the king's personality, who appeared to enjoy his company. Yet, when I saw the film, I did not get the impression that Laroche was somehow missing. Whatever Benoit took out of the book, appears differently elsewhere. He has moved things about. Take, for example, the wonderful walk that Léa / Sidonie takes along the Grand Canal. When I wrote that scene, Sidonie, my reader, was simply lonely. They was no sign of the decline to follow. Benoit made this scene incredibly strong: the moment she puts her hand in the water and the rat appears, it is a premonition of the "shipwreck" to come. From the book to the film, the symbolism has changed.

Tell us more about Petite Venise (Little Venice) the place where this scene takes place.

It was an area that Louis XIV created and was

looked after by a group of Italian families. The big canal was full of boats – gondolas – it's hard to imagine, isn't it? People would go there in the evening to ride on the boats. At the time, Versailles was a very lively place to be. There were Guinguettes (open-air taverns) all the way along the railings – that was something I loved seeing in the film – and lots of traders. Everywhere in Versailles, in the entrance, in the corridors, people were selling things. Did you know that you could hire a jacket at the entrance to the Chateau so that you could participate in the King's lunch? Isn't that wonderful? We no longer have access to seats of power like that anymore.

Another passage that was left out is the incredible choreography that took place between those leaving and those arriving on the night of the 16th July. There were some fabulous scenes.

The story of the revolution always talks about Paris but never Versailles. But Versailles was the starting point for my book. I love the idea that the conviction of certain royalists was such that it seemed natural for them to take refuge at Versailles whilst others fled. It's a two-way movement which is very theatrical. Benoit Jacquot's angle was to never abandon the character of the reader. She plays the role of guide, everything is seen with her in mind. It was impossible for him to keep these comings and goings because Sidonie did not take part in any of that.

The religious dimension is also rarely addressed in the film. Yet religion is one of the main reasons that explains why Louis XVI could not understand the revolution: he was haunted by the

idea of blood shed and wanted to avoid a civil war at all costs. And his court is in mourning. The court as portrayed in the film is younger, and more uncertain of its wishes. That is what makes the film so vibrant.

Like the book, the film recounts the unbelievable living conditions of the nobles of the court who were all piled into grotty little apartments that opened out onto dingy corridors.

And it really was like that. We always hear about Versailles and its grand apartments but we forget that they were essentially the apartments of the king and queen. Where did the others live – around three thousand people, the equivalent to a small village? The answer is they were piled up under the eaves, in cramped living quarters that were anything but comfortable. Their only consolations were the rituals of the court. During those few days in July, when they saw their world crumbling around them, their anguish was all the more as there were no ceremonies to cling on to. All they had left were the rat holes they lived in. Plus, the army of servants who worked at Versailles knew exactly what was going on in Paris. This only added to the nobles’ angst....it really was a whole way of being that fell apart.

In spite of the very strict hierarchy in place at the Court, we get the feeling that there was plenty of social interactions between the masters and their servants. Exactly like in Latin America today. And

we see the same thing in Chekhov’s plays. It was the bourgeois society that broke up these links. That is what is so fascinating about historical novels (and films), that they can bring huge unknown areas of social history to light that profoundly go against the ideas of our present day.

Ironically, “Farewell My Queen” has plenty of links to the present...

I wrote this novel during and after September 11th which is very significant in that even in this day and age when there is so much information available, in some ways nothing has changed. When a terrible event happens, like the World Trade Centre, we are all thrown into a state of shock. We are no more prepared than people were in 1789. When I saw Benoit Jacquot’s film, I was amazed by how Sidonie / Léa Seydoux, evokes the theme of innocence lost. Sidonie sees the world from below, far below. She is a person who looks up to others, whether by admiration or desire. We are just like her, we are not in control of anything. To help emphasise this comparison with the present, I never use XVIII Century language in my novels. I also want to keep the narrative as real as possible to avoid trapping the reader inside a waxwork museum. The film did an amazing job at this. The characters, sets, dialogue are all very fluid.

And very sensual.

Yes, sensuality runs through the film. I am a huge fan of the scene that takes place in the golden cabinet. When I saw

it, it looked exactly how I had imagined, that scene has incredible grace. The gold is there. Marie-Antoinette appears to be set in gold. She is in the centre, covered in jewels, she sparkles. The way in which Benoit Jacquot portrays her beauty is in some ways archaic. She is a figure that shines; we do not ask ourselves the question who she really is inside.

Both the book and the film portray her as a character full of contrast.

Benoit Jacquot has managed to convey the tension in her frivolous nature – an almost nervous tension, whilst everything collapses around her. He also shows her mature side. Marie-Antoinette is very aware of events. She is a childlike woman, not at all prepared for politics, her mother did everything in her power for her to know nothing about it – but faced with adversity, she does not waiver and remains resolute. I find the women of her period and in the XIX Century very moving; due to their intelligence and their ability to decipher the real world that went unnoticed.

Her love for the Duchess of Polignac makes her character even more engaging.

Marie-Antoinette has a heightened sensuality and a surprising aesthetic sense. She was passionate about clothes, something that Benoit Jacquot’s film puts across very well. Caresses pass from one woman to another – not only from skin to skin – but also in the tactile nature of fabrics, the shine in their hair, certain gestures. Take for example the scene when



her hairdresser takes off Marie-Antoinette’s wig just as she has learned that Polignac is about to leave: in one shot, he summarises a whole chapter of my book and beautifully conveys the distress that she feels at that moment.

In your writing, you insist on the fact that Marie-Antoinette’s lavish expenditure was nothing in comparison to the sums spent during the War of Independence. In other words, the country’s debt was not due to her.

Any war costs far more than any amount of clothes or gardens. There is something quite ridiculous about the accusations made against her. In the biographies written about Louis XIV, nobody makes a fuss about his having left his country in such a terrible financial state. Let alone all the endless wars that he fought. Yet Louis XIV was the one who started the extravagant building of the Petit Trianon all in mosaic – in ceramic tiles. But in the end he didn’t like it so he had it taken down and entirely rebuilt. The debt that ruined his country came into being at the end of his reign. Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette were really just scapegoats. But their guilt still persists in our collective imagination.

Let us return to the modernity of “Farewell My Queen”

I love the curiosity that defined the XVIII Century. People wanted to try everything new; they travelled, constantly discovering new horizons. At the same time the idea of a new world was born. We are driven by these same ideas today. Consider the scene when the nobles are preparing to leave Versailles: they hurriedly load their belongings into a stagecoach, trying to take as many objects as possible with them. Like the members of any overthrown

government, they run away.

Let’s talk about Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, Versailles’s official historian during this period.

Faced with the gravity of events, the king asked him to write an epistle threatening the insurgents with divine punishment that was to be read out in all churches. But the writing of the epistle progressed very slowly because of his own doubts. He was someone very critical of the nobility. Jacob-Nicolas Moreau thought that the privileges that the nobility were entitled to should also be accompanied by responsibilities. He had his own theory of the revolution and considered that it was the price the nobility had to pay for being cold-hearted. Michel Robin is wonderful in this role.

Jacob-Nicolas Moreau works, reads, eats and sleep in revolting lodgings. That’s a strange place to work.

That is what I like so much about the film, and in the book too: everyone lives slightly “below deck”. Meanwhile, “above deck”, everything is crumbling and is on the brink of collapse.

Where does your fascination for the XVIII Century come from?

It was whilst writing a thesis on Sade that I began reading a lot about this period in history. Later, when I was at the CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research), I worked on historical documents. I loved reading the newspapers from that period. I realised that people were driven by the same irrational concerns that we have now about our future. When I wrote “Farewell, My Queen”, I wanted to raise awareness about this period of particular uncertainty.

(1) “Sade, l’oeil de la lettre” (1978), “Sade” (1994).

Filmography of Benoit Jacquot



SCREENWRITER

2010 JE SERAI LÀ
2007 FAREWELL MY QUEEN
2006 AU FOND DES BOIS
2006 VILLA AMALIA

TV SCREENWRITER

2007 LES FAUX MONNAYEURS Directed by : Benoît JACQUOT
2004 GASPARD LE BANDIT Directed by : Benoît JACQUOT

STAGE DIRECTOR

2004 WERTHER

FILM DIRECTOR

2011 FAREWELL MY QUEEN
2009 AU FOND DES BOIS
2008 VILLA AMALIA
2005 L'INTOUCHABLE
2002 A TOUT DE SUITE
ADOLPHE
2001 TOSCA
2000 SADE
1999 LA FAUSSE SUIVANTE
PAS DE SCANDALE
1998 L'ÉCOLE DE LA CHAIR
PAR COEUR
1997 LE SEPTIÈME CIEL

1994 MARIANNE Based on the novel written by Marivaux
1990 LA DÉSANCHANTÉE
1987 LES MENDIANTS
1985 CORPS ET BIENS
1981 LES AILES DE LA COLOMBE
1977 LES ENFANTS DU PLACARD
1975 L'ASSASSIN MUSICIEN

SHORT TV FILM DIRECTOR

2009 LE SÉCATEUR

TV DOCUMENTARY

2004 LA MAISON DE TANGER

TELEVISION FILMS

2007 LES FAUX MONNAYEURS
2004 GASPARD LE BANDIT
2003 PRINCESSE MARIE
2 parts Sopadin 2003 Award for Best Television Screenplay
1996 LA VIE DE MARIANNE Based on the novel written by Marivaux
1992 EMMA ZUNZ Based on Borgès
1982 UNE VILLA AUX ENVIRONS DE NEW YORK Based on Kafka

COMPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Director of several documentaries about Jacques Lacan, Alfred Deller, Merce Cunningham, Louis-René des Forêts, Robert Motherwell, Marguerite Duras....

