

CURIOSA FILMS PRESENTS



CATHERINE
DENEUVE

KACEY
MOTTET KLEIN

OULAYA
AMAMRA

FAREWELL TO THE NIGHT

(L'adieu à la Nuit)

A FILM BY
ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ

WITH
STÉPHANE
BAK

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SYNOPSIS

Muriel is overjoyed. Her grandson, Alex, will be staying at her place for a few days before moving to Canada. Intrigued by his curious behavior, she soon discovers he's been lying. Alex is preparing a different life. Distraught, Muriel must act – and there is no time to lose.



INTERVIEW

ANDRÉ TÉCHINÉ

Serge Kagansky: How did the project *Farewell to the Night* get started?

André Téchiné: It was a combination of several things. First there was the David Thomson book [Les Français jihadistes (French Jihadists), published by Les Arènes], a collection of very tough, very raw interviews of young French people who left for Syria to join the jihad. Their words reminded me of when Jacques Nolot showed me the lines for *La Matrioulette*. I was interested in whether we could bring those words to life through actors in a scene, if that journalistic material could be made into cinematic material. There was also the issue of the point of view of someone of my generation, which is how the role of Catherine [Deneuve] comes into it, bringing with her the closeness and desire for renewal that she and I have shared for quite a while. I wanted to set up a reverse angle between Catherine and the raw dialogue of those young jihadis, taken directly from reality. And finally, there was also the theme of transition out of childhood, adolescence, and this grandmother who discovers a part of post-adolescence which has taken on a terrifying aspect. What would we do in her shoes, in that situation?

S.G: *Farewell to the Night* seems to bring a very hot news topic into the world of your films, with its themes of youth, family, the landscapes of the southwest, the seasons... Were you aware of how the subject of “young people attracted to jihad” converge with your perennial preoccupations?

A.T: I was not aware of it. I co-wrote this with Léa Mysius (director of *Ava*) and she wrote the first draft. Then I went over the whole thing and worked a lot in the field, especially around the jihadist milieu which I had no experience with or knowledge about.

S.G: Did it scare you at all to tackle this explosive, difficult-to-handle issue of religious radicalization, which has been debated so widely in the media?

A.T: For teens attracted to jihad, there is a “furious desire for sacrifice”. Sure, it’s controversial, but I also thought I might not be the only one interested – everyone might be interested. It’s at once a divisive and open issue. And the film is only my point of view about it, it’s a fictional contribution. When these adolescents don this “monstrous” mask, attempting to put down new roots, it’s like a conversion to evil, in unknown territory. From a cinematic point of view, that brought me to a dimension of inward fantasy.

S.G: The film is Renoirian, insofar as you don’t judge your characters and you observe them all with equal attention. The two young people, played by Mottet Klein and Oulaya Amamra make disastrous, reprehensible choices, but you also show how they are imbued with this romantic ideal that makes them murky, more exciting and ambiguous, as likeable as they are detestable. And conversely, the grandmother is a well-meaning character who also has some darker areas.

A.T: It’s obviously easier to identify with Muriel, the grandmother played by Catherine. When she calls the police, she is ratting them out, but also trying to save them, to protect them. I didn’t want to make her a caricature – I went looking for the moral complexity of this action. As for Alex (Kacey Mottet Klein) and Lila (Oulaya Amamra), they have begun a terrifying process of dehumanization, but they do still remain human. At the end, the audience is free to be sad or relieved by the collapse of the young characters’ toxic dream, when they’re arrested.



S.G: The film builds tension, energy, suspense – almost like a thriller.

A.T: I wanted to show these kids concretely preparing their future trip. How they get the money together, pool their energies, at the same time hiding what they're doing from friends and family, staying underground. There were some crime story elements, like a hold-up movie. But there was no need to push the genre side, I just followed their trajectory, their actions.

S.G: You've spoken of fantasy and crime movies. You could also see Farewell to the Night as set against the backdrop of a western. Why did you choose a riding club as the setting?

A.T: I wanted to avoid sociology, or sociological filmmaking. I was looking for a mythological setting. I was going for a connection to the wider world, the realm of animals, with horses and boars, the realm of flora where flowers yield fruit, and then the cosmos, the eclipse... I also liked the idea of politics being absorbed by religion, where current events are transformed, becoming a cinematic and fictional sphere.

S.G: Beyond its physical beauty, does the eclipse at the start of the film also serve as metaphor?

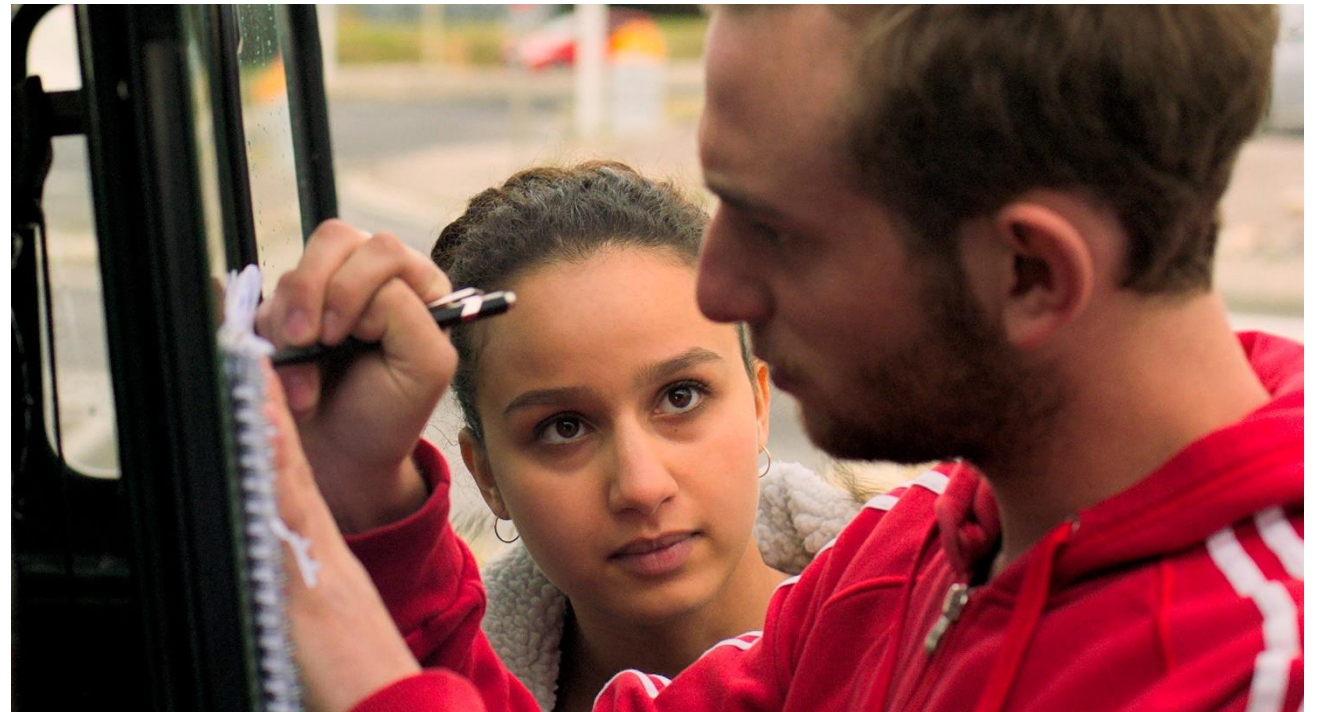
A.T: And a historical touchstone as well. The film is set in 2015, and there was indeed an eclipse that spring. You can imagine anything you want with that eclipse – the choices made by the young people, the state of things between Alex and Muriel, the passage of day into night. What the young heroes experience is very violent. The psychologist Fethi Benslama sees it as a sort of incest between God and a person, a fusion and confusion, where the devout takes on a limitless and absolutely terrifying power over life and death. Notions of civilization and nationhood are very distant. The eclipse is also stands for that – an extinction of the values of the Enlightenment.

S.G: Through the character of Alex, but also Muriel's North African partner, Youssef, and through Fouad, a repentant ex-jihadi, were you trying to show that the tendency toward – or rejection of – Islamist radicalism is not merely a matter of ethnic and social background?

A.T: Fouad is perhaps the embodiment of a future that Muriel dreams of for Alex. From the research materials I saw, 60% of French jihadists are recruited from the middle classes, 30% from the working class and 10% from among the wealthy. So there is no typical profile. In addition I absolutely wanted to avoid making my characters into sociological poster children. I wanted to keep to the subjective and singular. Benslama, whom I just quoted, speaks of "ensavaged individuals". That phenomenon has accelerated and sharpened since 2005, through the internet.

S.G: In the end, your film points more to a generational split than an ethnic or social one, which is reminiscent of *Wild Reeds* (*Roseaux sauvages*).

A.T: *Reeds* was all about the intrusion of the Algerian war in the heart of France. *Farewell to the Night* is the intrusion of radical Islam in a new France. The harm caused by French colonialism (the Algerian war being one example) can be found here, brandished like a banner of identity and vengeance. Whereas Youssef, Muriel's partner, is an example of assimilation.



S.G: This is your sixth consecutive film with director of photography Julien Hirsch. What makes you two inseparable?

A.T: For a long time, I worked with two cameras. Then at a certain point I got tired of it, it was becoming too systematic. Anyway, we had to tighten our belts. That's why I stopped working in long continuous takes and two cameras, when Julien and I started working together on Changing Times (Les Temps qui changent). But in order to avoid the mechanical monotony of multiple takes ("Ok, let's do another one!"), we decided to change the frame width and camera movements with each successive take. We never reproduce the same shot. We're not looking for mastery or perfection, we're looking for the happy accident, a stroke of luck, a quiver.

S.G: That feverish undercurrent we feel when watching your films is probably a result of that method, but also of how you direct your actors. Can you talk about how you worked with your actors, beginning with Catherine Deneuve, with whom you've now shot eight films?

A.T: This might be the film where I left her the least amount of freedom – I hope it wasn't too painful for her. I wanted to avoid reproducing the same thing, I was wary of the routine of our shared know-how. Muriel is on solid ground in her profession but very vulnerable in her relationship with her grandson. I wanted to stay very close to those feelings, I didn't want any high-mindedness. Muriel had to be completely disarmed, thrown, baffled. She finally sort of loses her mind. She locks Alex away, she is at her wit's end. She keeps on fighting and struggling. So we absolutely could not simply rely on what we already achieved in our common experience.



S.G: Why a grandmother rather than a mother?

A.T: She could have played Alex' mother, but I wanted him to feel a lack regarding his parents. The mother is dead, the father has moved to Guadeloupe to start over. That parental breakdown is part of the character's subjective equation. His desire to set down new roots, elsewhere, might be partly due to this.

S.G: You're working once again with Kacey Mottet Klein. Is this the prolongation of his character in Being 17 (Quand on a 17 ans)?

A.T: He's changed a lot in two or three years. Alex is every bit as willful as the character in Being 17, every bit as determined to become somebody else. But in the previous film he didn't know who to become, whereas here he knows all too well. He rigorously accomplishes every gesture and ritual associated with the new identity he is trying to construct. I feel like Kacey found the rigid side of Alex, even as he communicates a torment all his own.

S.G: And at the same time, there's still a childlike quality?

A.T: When he writes a letter of farewell to his grandmother, he's declaring his love and that allows him to open up emotionally and be a child again. Bilal, the recruiter played by Stéphane Bak, also has some human moments. He is cold and determined, but sometimes he sneaks a smoke, like he has trouble observing the strict rules that he preaches. Like Alex, he remains human despite himself. The ideals of these youths are scary, but they're not completely robots. They still tremble inside.

S.G: Let's turn to Oulaya Amamra. You direct her in a register very different from that of Divines, much calmer, and she is every bit as convincing.

A.T: Lila (the character played by Oulaya) is happy, likes to laugh, which is a sharp contrast to the more brooding Alex. She is caring and warm with the residents of the retirement home where she works. There's a mixture of humility, joy and bullheadedness in her performance. Lila is head over heels in love with Alex, but in a warrior-like context. She would be proud and happy if Alex died in battle. For her, death is not sorrowful. There is no grieving in her future. Death is seen as a life in heaven, a life more perfect and desirable than the one on earth.

S.G: The film's ending is very open-ended.

A.T: The film ends with the character of Fouad as the focus. Fouad returns to France and to society because he has experienced the reality of ISIL in Syria. That ordeal of the real has made him more lucid and objective than Alex, who has never left. Alex' future is still up for grabs, but Fouad has reclaimed his freedom.





CAST

Muriel Catherine Deneuve
Alex Kacey Mottet Klein
Lila Oulaya Amamra
Bilal Stéphane Bak
Fouad Kamel Labroudi
Youssef Mohamed Djouhri
Preacher Amer Alwan

CREW

Director André Téchiné
Scenario and Dialogue André Téchiné & Léa Mysius
Based on an original idea by André Téchiné & Amer Alwan
Photography Julien Hirsch - AFC
Editor Albertine Lastera
Original Score Alexis Rault
Sound Vincent Goujon
Loïc Prian
Cyril Holtz

Set Director Carlos Conti
Costume Designer Jürgen Doering
1st Assistant Director and Casting Michel Nasri
Script Supervisor Claudine Taulère
Production Manager Bruno Bernard
Post-Production Manager Susana Antunes
Executive Producer Christine de Jekel
Associate Producer Emilien Bignon
Produced by Olivier Delbosc
Coproductio Curiosa Films
Bellini Films
Arte France Cinéma
ZDF/Arte
Legato Films
Films Boutique
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