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PRESENTS
A FOZ PRODUCTION



**BENJAMIN
VOISIN**

**REBECCA
MARDER**

**PIERRE
LOTTIN**

**DENIS
LAVANT**

**SWANN
ARLAUD**

THE STRANGER

A FILM BY
FRANÇOIS OZON

FROM THE NOVEL BY **ALBERT CAMUS**

© EDITIONS GALLIMARD 1942

DURATION: 2 HOURS 2 MINS | FORMAT : 1,66
SOUND : 5.1

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A LEGENDARY NOVEL

Any man who doesn't cry at his mother's funeral is liable to be condemned to death. This is how Albert Camus, the Nobel laureate in Literature, summarised *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*) when asked to write a preface for the American translation of his celebrated novel. Published by Gallimard, it was an immediate success upon its release in June 1942. Upon reading the manuscript, an impressed André Malraux declared, "Mark my words: this will be a major writer". Jean Paulhan, an influential editor, wrote in his reader's report: "This is a first-rate novel". The book has transcended eras and fascinated generations, becoming a legendary story that has been translated into almost every language and countless dialects. To this day, it remains, alongside *The Little Prince*, one of the three most-read French-language novels in the world. In France, the paperback edition alone has sold nearly ten million copies. More than 200 state and private primary and secondary schools are named after Albert Camus. One of the world's greatest novels, it has been the subject of numerous adaptations, including a dance performance. Still, there has been only one successful adaptation for the screen: Luchino Visconti's film, released in October 1967. It was an Italo-French production produced by Dino De Laurentiis, starring Marcello Mastroianni and Anna Karina. During Camus's lifetime, Ingmar Bergman had expressed a desire to adapt *The Stranger*, but the project went no further. Referring to his novel, the author wrote: "I only meant that the hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game. In this respect, he is foreign to the society in which he lives; he wanders, on the fringe, in the suburbs of a private, solitary, sensual life". More than 80 years on, it retains all its mystery.

(Sources: *Brève histoire illustrée de la publication*, Gallimard / *Albert Camus's preface to the American edition*)

*« François Ozon made all the right directorial choices, carried by actors who embody the characters from The Stranger with remarkable finesse.
A magnificent journey through my father's work, rendered with the utmost respect.
Bravo, François, and thank you. »*

Catherine Camus



SYNOPSIS

Algiers, 1938. Meursault, a quiet and unassuming employee in his early thirties, attends his mother's funeral without shedding a tear.

The next day, he begins a casual affair with Marie, a work colleague.

He quickly slips back into his usual routine.

However, his daily life is soon about to be disrupted by his neighbor, Raymond Sintès, who draws Meursault into his shady dealings — until one blisteringly hot day, a tragic event occurs on a beach...



« I WANTED TO UNDERSTAND
THE MYSTERY OF *THE STRANGER* »

INTERVIEW WITH **FRANÇOIS OZON**

**HOW DID THIS PROJECT TO ADAPT ALBERT
CAMUS'S NOVEL COME ABOUT?**

I had written an original screenplay structured as a triptych. In one of the stories, about thirty minutes long, I sketched a portrait of a contemporary young man—disenchanted, cut off from the world—who saw no meaning in his life. Benjamin Voisin was set to play the role. However, the project couldn't be financed, and friends advised me to turn that story into a feature film. To enrich it, I went back to *The Stranger*, which I hadn't touched since my teens. And it was a shock: the novel

had lost none of its power and resonated with things I wanted to explore—only more intelligently and more powerfully! I contacted Éditions Gallimard, assuming the film rights were already taken, but to my great surprise, they were available. I then embarked on the adaptation, confident that Benjamin would be perfect in the role of Meursault.

WHAT IS IT LIKE TACKLING AN ADAPTATION OF *THE STRANGER*?

The idea of adapting one of the most famous novels in world literature fills you with anxiety and doubt! Until now, I had only adapted lesser-known and less acclaimed works. It was a huge challenge to adapt a masterpiece that everyone has read and that every reader has already visualised and staged in their own mind.

However, my fascination with the book was stronger than my apprehension, so I embarked on the project with a certain nonchalance.

Very quickly, I realised that delving into *The Stranger* was a way of reconnecting with a forgotten part of my own personal history. My maternal grandfather had been an examining magistrate in Bône (now Annaba) in Algeria, and he survived an assassination attempt in 1956, which precipitated my family's return to mainland France.

By working with documents, archives, and meeting with historians and witnesses from that period, I realised the extent to which French families all have a connection to Algeria, and that a leaden silence often still hangs over our histories.

WHAT WAS AT STAKE WITH THIS FILM?

Bringing Meursault's story to the screen was a way of trying to understand him, to penetrate his mystery. I discover my films as I shoot them. I never really know what they will look like

in the end. I knew I was profoundly moved by the book, by the absurdity of life that Camus describes without ever yielding to despair. This book—and I hope this film - prompts us to reflect. That's what I expect from cinema.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH AN ADAPTATION AFTER VISCONTI?

The character of Meursault has had a profound influence on contemporary culture. He is a mythical figure. Moreover, he has made his mark on and influenced many filmmakers, who read and took an interest in *The Stranger*. I obviously watched Visconti's 1967 film. In one of his interviews, he confessed that he hadn't been able to make the film he wanted, that he had been frustrated, that he wasn't happy with it, and that his initial choice for Meursault was not Mastroianni, but Delon, which was honestly a much better idea. The perfect incarnation of Meursault in the 1960s was indeed the young Delon, who featured in *Le Samouraï*, or, even better, the Delon from Antonioni's *L'Eclisse*, who, in my opinion, would have been the ideal Italian director to adapt *The Stranger*.

A NOVEL THIS LEGENDARY AND COMPLEX MUST BE DIFFICULT TO GET TO GRIPS WITH. HOW DID YOU PROCEED?

I know that by its very nature, any adaptation involves an element of betrayal that you have to accept. It's the same as translation. The language of literature and the language of cinema are not the same. I followed my instincts, the things that drew me to the novel, and I made Camus's vision my own. I felt that the rendering of the first part of the book (the mother's funeral, daily life, and the murder of the Arab on the beach) had to be sensory, almost silent, physical, with a slow and mournful rhythm. I was told the second part (the trial and prison) would be easier, more "cinematically effective," but it was the one I



feared most. In the book, it is genuinely an interior monologue, a stream of consciousness, whereas the first part is more cinematic with its description of facts and actions.

WHY WAS IT MORE COMPLICATED?

Because, suddenly, through the trial and Meursault's thoughts, we enter the realm of discourse and philosophy, but a film is not a textual analysis. On the contrary, the second part needed to enrich the first, without being instructional and while remaining intensely physical and embodied. Its adaptation presented a real problem for me, whereas the first part is more

or less faithful to the novel, even though I did take certain liberties.

THE FIRST LIBERTY YOU TOOK APPEARS AT THE BEGINNING, WITH THE USE OF ARCHIVAL FOOTAGE FROM THE ERA. WHAT WAS ITS PURPOSE?

It was essential for me to contextualise the story. Albert Camus wrote *The Stranger* in 1939, and the book was published in 1942, during the French colonisation of Algeria. This had to be clear in the film. The idea was to delve into the archives of that

period and to show Algiers as it was in the 1930s - its Casbah, its port, its emblematic places, its beauty, and more.

And since I couldn't shoot in Algiers for obvious political reasons, it was an opportunity to show Algiers, what the city looked like in the 1930s—especially the Casbah, the port, all those emblematic places, its beauty, and more.

WHAT OTHER SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE ADAPTATION DID YOU FOCUS ON?

The two female characters, Marie and Djemila, the Arab's sister, are more present in the film than in the novel. I felt I was pulling on a thread that Camus had woven without developing, and that it was necessary to give it the humanist dimension so dear to the author of *The Plague*. I wanted to know them better and to stage what these women would have done, thought, and said. Marie is not just a simple, smiling typist. She is aware of how dangerous Sintès is; she tries to influence Meursault, and she reproaches him. I didn't want her to be a naive lover. She realises Meursault is a different sort of man, so absent from the world. She is drawn to him, but knows she could just as easily hate him for the same reasons.

Djemila, who is nameless in the novel, has a conscience and a voice in the film. She is there to bear witness to the fact that, in this story and at the trial, her brother is never mentioned, even though he is the one who was murdered. It was important, through her character, to stage how the Arab is rendered invisible, to show that two worlds lived side by side without seeing each other. They did not mix on the streets or the beach. And they certainly did not have the same status. Camus was aware of this unease between the two communities. He had written *Misère de la Kabylie* just before. I imagined that, unconsciously, in this novel, he was heralding the beginnings of the Algerian War, even though he always refuted it afterwards.

THE SINGULARITY OF MOST OF THE NOVEL'S CHARACTERS IS THAT WE KNOW ALMOST NOTHING ABOUT THEM. HOW DO YOU GIVE THEM FORM IN A FILM?

Yes, they are archetypes about whom we know very little - Meursault is an office worker, and we don't really know his age. The key was to avoid projecting Camus onto the character of Meursault.

So we had to flesh them out with words, silences, thoughts.

Between Raymond Sintès, who beats his mistress, Salamano, who hits his dog, and the indifferent Meursault, it's a rather toxic vision of men. That's why it was essential to develop the female characters as a counterpoint to the male characters.

When you make films, you also need to be able to identify with the characters. My direction had to convey a form of fascination for the character of Meursault, who is opaque, indifferent, and without a moral conscience, yet carries within him, besides his mystery, a beauty and sensuality.

DOES MEURSAULT OCCUPY A SPECIAL PLACE IN YOUR DIRECTION?

I identified with him completely! To me, he's a filmmaker! He looks around him; he sees characters, actors. The others are acting their lives. But not him, he refuses to play along. He never lies. Life is a stage play from which he is absent. However, he sees the beauty of the world, and its violence too. And when he observes this violence, he doesn't intervene. He remains a spectator. Until the very end, when he finally rebels and becomes the actor of his own life!

THE FILM FEATURES AN IMPRESSIVE CAST.

I was reunited with actors I had already worked with, including Pierre Lottin (*By the Grace of God, Quand vient l'automne*),



Swann Arlaud (*By the Grace of God*), and Rebecca Marder (*The Crime is Mine*). They all placed their trust in me and embraced the challenges of the film's modest budget.

With Rebecca, I knew her *joie de vivre*, her beauty, her intelligence, but I felt her sensuality hadn't yet been shown on screen, and she'd never had the chance to play that sort of part. In my direction, I told her I wanted the audience to fall in love with her, unlike Meursault, who remains emotionally indifferent.

Denis Lavant was the obvious choice for Salamano, the old man whose face and scabs tell his story, and who resembles his dog. He reminded me of an aged, damaged Charlie Chaplin who can be both frightening and deeply moving.

Pierre Lottin also stands out as Raymond Sintès, with his swagger and cunning. Before we started, he asked me, "How do you want me to play your Sintès?" I replied: "For me, he's

Gabin as we knew him in the 1930s". Ultimately, he's more like a Robert Le Vigan figure, both charming and frightening.

As for Benjamin, it was a joy to work with him again, six years after *Summer of '85*. He has matured and is much more disciplined! The role of Meursault is a genuine character part, a performance that runs counter to his own nature, since, in real life, he is an extrovert, and I would often ask him to be silent, to observe, and to be withdrawn.

WHY DID YOU FILM IN BLACK AND WHITE?

For both economic and aesthetic reasons.

Economic, because we didn't have the budget for sets and costumes to produce a realistic reconstruction of Algiers. It's a choice I had already made for *Frantz*, which was set in 1919.

Aesthetic, because black and white bring a form of purity, beauty, and abstraction. Today, images are often aggressive,

saturated with colour. I wanted us to be in a state of sensation and observation, a form of simplicity. Black and white allowed me to do that: to focus on bodies, gestures, silences. There are very few camera movements, and the film consists mainly of static shots. A pared-back direction, with black and white that provides an evocation of Algeria as a kind of lost paradise. Finally, *The Stranger* is a philosophical novel that illustrates Camus's vision of the absurd. Black and white gives the story an almost metaphysical dimension. I feel this choice fits the story, that it also creates a form of distance from reality, from Meursault's gaze on what is happening around him.

AND THE VOICE-OVER, TWICE?

I only use it twice, at the end of the first part and the end of the film. These are the two moments in the novel that move me the most. We have an insight into Meursault's inner world through Camus's poetic language. It seemed to me that these two passages enabled the power of literature to be combined with that of cinema.

"That's when everything began to reel. The sea carried up a thick, fiery breath. It seemed to me as if the sky split open from one end to the other to rain down fire. My whole being tensed and I squeezed my hand around the revolver. The trigger gave; I felt the smooth underside of the butt; and there, in that noise, sharp and deafening at the same time, is where it all started. I shook off the sweat and sun. I knew that I had shattered the harmony of the day, the exceptional silence of a beach where I'd been happy. Then I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace. And it was like knocking four quick times on the door of unhappiness."

"For the first time in a long time I thought about Maman. I felt as if I understood why at the end of her life she had taken

a "fiancé", why she had played at beginning again. Even there, in that home where lives were fading out, evening was a kind of wistful respite. So close to death, Maman must have felt free then and ready to live it all again. Nobody, nobody had the right to cry over her. And I felt ready to live it all again too. As if that blind rage had washed me clean, rid me of hope; for the first time, in that night alive with signs and stars, I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself - so like a brother, really! I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate." (Excerpts from *The Stranger*)

A WORD ON THE MUSIC, WHICH PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE?

I contacted a Kuwaiti musician, Fatima Al Qadiri, whose score for Mati Diop's film *Atlantics* I had loved, and whose work I discovered afterwards.

We had numerous discussions before we began working together. She needed to understand my intentions, my point of view on this story, and my vision of the Arab world, as well as how I would handle rendering the Arab character invisible. Once reassured, she committed passionately to the work and brought her Eastern sensitivity, creating a bewitching, haunting score that combines electronic and classical instruments.

For the closing credits, it was essential for me to feature The Cure with their legendary track, "*Killing an Arab*". So I wrote to Robert Smith, who had already granted me the right to use *In Between Days* in *Summer of '85*. As it happens, he had just watched Visconti's film again and agreed immediately, pleased that the track, misunderstood and misinterpreted by some at the time, would be placed back in the context of Camus's book.



YOU MET CATHERINE CAMUS, ALBERT CAMUS'S DAUGHTER. WHAT ROLE DID SHE PLAY IN THIS ADAPTATION?

It was important for me to meet Catherine Camus, who supervises her father's work with benevolence and firmness. It was very moving to go to Lourmarin, to see Camus's room, his desk, the view from the terrace where he wrote, and to feel the warmth of the south that reminded him so much of Algeria.

She read the screenplay and shared important insights about the circumstances of the book's writing, specific inspirations, and biographical details, which helped me finalise my script. She understood my need and concern to contextualise the film, so that it would be accessible to a modern audience and not perceived as disconnected from the complex reality we know today. It wasn't about making a literal adaptation, but about bringing a contemporary perspective to this major work of the 20th century, to our colonial past, and to the pain that remains raw between France and Algeria.





INTERVIEW WITH **BENJAMIN VOISIN**

HOW DO YOU APPROACH A LEGENDARY CHARACTER LIKE MEURSAULT?

I started with reading and research. I went back to “*The Stranger*” at least four times, as well as essays by Camus, Nietzsche, and Paul Valéry. I wanted to feed my mind before working on my body. Then, I had to find an inner stillness. I worked on meditation, silence, and withdrawal to embrace my own existential anxieties. Paradoxically, this role was incredibly physically demanding. Playing absence is extremely draining; it took more out of me than a role where I had to jump, fight, or

« MEURSAULT IS MY MOST PHYSICAL ROLE! »

run. Doing almost nothing, saying almost nothing, is intensely physical! At the end of each day of shooting, I was utterly exhausted! Meursault is my most physical role!

The role required very few transformations. It was mainly about posture and restraint. I wanted to embody a silent, tense. I also studied mannerisms of the time, old photographs, and the clothes they wore. The most complex part of the physical transformation was the posture; I had to hold myself stiffly. But the essence was elsewhere: to be almost a bystander in my own role, even a spectator. I tried to play Meursault as someone peripheral, someone absent from the setting, from the people, as if François Ozon was always filming someone else. In fact, in every scene, I felt like I was waiting.

To help me, François gave me Robert Bresson's book, *Notes on the Cinematograph*, explaining that an actor should be a model, not a performer. He was looking for the truth of a filmed being, not a performance. We talked a lot - in the evening, on set, all

the time. It was a process of stripping things away; it was a role far removed from myself. If I have to lie to please someone, I'll lie. Meursault doesn't, especially when Marie asks if he loves her. Whenever it started to feel 'acted,' we had to return to the essential.

Meursault has a kind of childlike innocence. The absurd had to be portrayed through the eyes of a young man, not one who is jaded. Meursault's innocence isn't naivety, but raw truth. He refuses to play along. He eats, he walks, he answers when spoken to. He doesn't over-interpret anything. On set, I was constantly searching for that simplicity. It wasn't easy. The slightest anticipation betrayed the moment. You really had to be in the character's time, in the waiting, in the listening, without ever seeking an effect.



INTERVIEW WITH **REBECCA MARDER**

When I mentioned the role of Marie Cardona before shooting, people would often show surprise: “There’s a female character in *The Stranger*?!”

Listening to François talk about the character was thrilling for me, because I knew he wanted to give her a special place. François is a master in the art of combining the woman, the actress, and the character.

I love the relationship Marie has with Meursault. I love that she loves him, despite everything, even when he seems distant, indifferent, and cut off from all emotion. Marie says a great deal

« I LOVE MARIE, BECAUSE SHE EMBODIES THE GOOD FORTUNE OF BEING IN LOVE »

about love, but she also illustrates the status of women in that era. I loved her as she appeared in Camus's novel - perhaps a personification of one-sided love - but through François's gaze and direction, she takes on another dimension. As an actress, it was my duty to bring her the depth she deserves. In fact, I think she already had it, even if I'm still sometimes trying to figure out who she is without Meursault, or if she becomes a bit like Meursault herself from being around him... birds of a feather flock together, as they say.

In the films I've made up until now, I've often played characters with a strong inner life—crusaders, intellectuals. With Marie Cardona, François offered me the role of a woman in love, a sensual woman.

In the novel, when Meursault is in prison, he remembers Marie: “*a sun-gold face, lit up with desire*”. She is the incarnation of the sun, of desire, of love, of sensuality... of hope. She embodies the sheer joy of living despite the absurdity of existence. I recall a specialist saying, “Marie is Camus!”

I also love this character because she embodies the good fortune of being in love. There is a quote from Camus that explains it well: “For there is merely bad luck in not being loved; there is misfortune in not loving”. That's precisely what I think.

Marie Cardona is a courageous woman, and above all, very free for her time, free in mind and body—she agrees to go to Meursault's home, while he's wearing a black armband, on the very first evening. She embodies a relish for life.

When she speaks with Djemila at the trial, François is keen to show that she is one of the characters capable of empathy, and the only one with an awareness of what colonisation is.

In addition to listening to François and his intentions for the role, I reread *The Stranger* three times. During the shoot, I also brought *The First Man* and two collections of short stories: *Nuptials* and *Summer*, which revolve around the same themes.

I also latched onto the flowers mentioned in the novel, white asphodels, which Marie scatters on the path to the beach before the murder. I saw that these flowers symbolise peace, tranquillity, and purity.

I also thought about a quiet rage, about rootlessness, about the feeling of being a stranger—to oneself, to others. I thought about waiting: for change, both personal and political, waiting for Meursault's love, for a reaction, for a marriage, for a glance in the courtroom during the trial. In the book, when he catches sight of Marie's gaze in the audience, Meursault says he “had even forgotten to look for her”

CHARACTER LIST

Meursault	Benjamin Voisin
Marie Cardona	Rebecca Marder
Raymond Sintès	Pierre Lottin
Salamano	Denis Lavant
The Chaplain	Swann Arlaud
Judge	Christophe Malavoy
Prosecutor	Nicolas Vaude
Examining Magistrate	Jean-Charles Clichet
Meursault's Mother	Mireille Perrier
Djemila	Hajar Bouzaouit
Moussa	Abderrahmane Dehkani
Céleste	Jérôme Pouly
Caretaker of Old Person's Home	Jean-Claude Bolle-Reddat
Masson	Christophe Vandevelde
Director of Old Person's Home	Jean-Benoît Ugeux

TECHNICAL LIST

Direction & Screenplay

Screenplay collaboration

Image

Design

Costumes

Music

Sound

Sound editing

Mixing

Editing

Casting

Director's Assistants

Hair

Make-up

Executive Producer

Production

Coproduction with

With the essential support of

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