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BAR RAGE

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RED LION & ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP

PRÉSENT

LOLITA CHAMMAH THÉMIS PAUWELS

BARRAGE

A FILM BY
LAURA SCHROEDER

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF
ISABELLE HUPPERT



LUXEMBOURG, BELGIUM, FRANCE / 2017
COLOUR / 110' / 1:33 / 5.1



SYNOPSIS

After ten years abroad, Catherine returns to Luxembourg to catch up with her daughter Alba, who is being brought up by Catherine's mother Elisabeth.

Alba is cold and distant towards this stranger who shows up unexpectedly in her life, and so is Elisabeth, keen to keep her protégée to herself. One day, Catherine cannot take it anymore. She "kidnaps" Alba and takes her on a trip to a lake up north. So begins an unsettling journey into the puzzling and complex world of motherly love...

INTERVIEW WITH LAURA SCHROEDER DIRECTOR

Where did the original idea for *Barrage* come from?

It is a project I have been working on for several years and which went through quite a few changes before it turned into the current film. It started from a rather simple idea: a young woman tries to get closer to her daughter and fails. *Barrage* was supposed to be my first feature film. However, prior to starting work on it, I was given the opportunity to direct a children's movie, *The Treasure Knights - the Secret of Melusina* (2012).

Why did you ask the novelist Marie Nimier to co-write your screenplay?

It all started by coincidence. I was searching for a co-author and mainly meeting with full-time screenwriters, when I heard Marie on the radio one day. The way she spoke about her characters made me want to discover her novels. I read her *Les Inséparables* and immediately fell under the charm of her style. The way she

described her characters, their way of looking at the world and their psychology made me think of my own way of looking at things. As soon as I met her, I felt there was a complicity between both our universes and that a collaboration could work out; she had similar feelings after seeing my short films. I want to point out that Marie had already collaborated on other audiovisual projects, including the adaptation of one of her novels.

Barrage tackles various female subjects which were already present in your short films...

Yes, I realise that there's always a woman in my films who finds herself in a specific situation forcing her to head straight for the wall, even if that attempt is doomed. She must live through an experience to free herself from a burden in order to move forward. This was the case in both my short films, *Double saut* and *Senteurs*, and it pops up again in *Barrage*. The heroes are women who try to free themselves from



something. I'm not the first person to say this, but I still believe that there is a lack of films with strong female main characters. Of course, being a woman myself, it is easier for me to delve into the psychology of a female rather than a male character. Lastly, I wanted to make a film about three generations of different women.

Was your primary intention to make film about motherhood?

The subject of motherhood is indeed very present as there are two mother-daughter relationships in the film, but I'd rather flip the point of view around: for me, *Barrage* is a film about filiation,

about childhood. What does it mean to be someone's child, and what does it imply to have a child of your own? What Catherine went through with her own mother, Elisabeth, must have repercussions on her relationship with her own daughter. She tries to free herself from her mother's domination, while trying not to make the same mistakes with Alba. At the same time, Catherine interferes with Alba's life with a very selfish goal: she knows that she failed in the past and tries to fill a void. It is also a story of disillusion: Catherine attempts to reconstruct herself through someone else but fails to do so. Alba is a kind of tool in this undertaking.



There is a distinct feeling that the characters' psychology in Barrage is very much "constructed". Yet, everyone seems rather taciturn and never comes up with explanations.

This was my intention. I never wanted to make an explanatory film. The challenge was to supply the viewer with just enough information not to lose their interest. I wanted Catherine to be a mysterious character without becoming incoherent. My intention was also, as it has been in my short films, to attempt making a character sympathetic who – at first glance – isn't sympathetic at all. This interests me a lot. As for Alba, she is a young girl with a hard shell. She submits herself to a discipline, which gives her a line of conduct, something she can cling to in the absence of her real mother.

Children are omnipresent

in your films. Why is this?

They are not really children anymore, they are on the edge between childhood and adolescence (*Double saut, Barrage*). This is an age when their body is still asexual, but their mind is developing and taking the lead. What I find interesting in characters like Alba in *Barrage*, is that they have attained a certain maturity which their face does not yet reveal. I like to play with that false innocence, make them perform unexpected actions which contradict the impression they give at first glance.

Why did you choose a real mother-daughter duo to play Catherine and Elisabeth, meaning Lolita Chammah and Isabelle Huppert?

I initially chose Lolita after seeing her on stage in Paris in *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*. She was playing the mute handmaiden.

I adored her in that part and imagined her straight away as Catherine. There is something about Lolita which is serious and childish at the same time, exactly what I needed for the character of Catherine. Only then did I think of Isabelle and that the real-life mother-daughter duo would considerably enrich the film. I was lucky to meet them both – together – before the beginning of the shoot. I felt there was something between them which goes beyond a mother-daughter relationship, or maybe even reverses it. After both officially joined the project, we consequently modified some of the dialogue with Marie Nimier.

How did you discover Thémis Pauwels who plays Alba?

We organised major castings, first in Luxembourg, then in Belgium. Michael Bier asked me to meet with Thémis. As soon as we met, I understood straight away that she would be perfect for the part of Alba. She's a very professional young actress, very mature and very gifted.

Why did you choose to shoot in the square 1:33 academy format?

I wanted an image allowing the viewer to concentrate on the bodies, the characters. We shot tests with the director of photography, Hélène Louvart, alternating between the 1:85 and the 1:33 ratios. The way the

character appeared in the frame changed exponentially, with 1:33 putting the character much more into evidence within the scenery. I did not want the sets to crush the situations. For me, a "postcard effect" for the film was unthinkable. The square framing also allowed me to strengthen the intimacy between characters. The image is very important to me. I always try to make the narration intelligible without the need for dialogue. The image must speak for itself.

Barrage is a Luxembourgish film. The country's film production is little known across its borders. Can you give us your impressions?

It is difficult to judge how much you are influenced by a country, or just being bound to that country. I grew up in Luxembourg, but I also spent a lot of time abroad: in France, in England, in Germany... My film references come from all over the place.

I cannot really say whether the film is representative of what is currently being made in Luxembourg, but I won't say the contrary, either. I was given the opportunity of making a film with people from all over Europe, people I had complete confidence in, talented people whose work I value, without ever wondering about their nationalities. ■



LAURA SCHROEDER

DIRECTOR, SCREENWRITER

Born in Luxembourg, Laura graduated with a Masters in Film Studies at the University of Paris 1 – Sorbonne and a Postgraduate Diploma in Directing at the National Film and Television School, London. After several self-produced films, she wrote and directed the short films *Senteurs* (2008) and *Double Saut* (2011), both produced by Red Lion (LU) and screened in many festivals worldwide. In 2009, she wrote and directed the transdisciplinary theatre play *Luxtime – Luxtime – Jacques Tati revisited* which, after its premiere at Théâtre National du Luxembourg, was also shown at the Avignon Theatre Festival in 2010. After her first feature, *The Treasure Knights - The Secret of Melusina*, was successfully released in 2012 in Luxembourg and Germany, Laura directed two episodes of the Luxembourgish sitcom *Comeback*. In 2014, Laura joined Kollektiv13 and directed the documentary *Blurred Borders*, as part of the series *routwaïssgro* broadcasted on RTL.

In January 2016, Laura directed the contemporary German play *Das Ding aus dem Meer* at Théâtre des Capucins in Luxembourg.

Laura's new feature *Barrage*, co-written with French novelist Marie Nimier and developed at TorinoFilmLab and Atelier Grand Nord was produced by Red Lion and will make its World Premiere at the Forum of the Berlinale 2017.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2008 *Senteurs* | Short Film
- 2011 *Double Saut* | Short Film
- 2012 *The Treasure Knights - the Secret of Melusina* | Feature Film
- 2017 *Barrage* | Feature Film





INTERVIEW WITH LOLITA CHAMMAH ACTRESS

How did you meet Laura Schroeder?

I was appearing on stage, in Paris, in a play by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *The Bitter Tears of Petra von Kant*, directed by Thierry de Peretti, which Laura saw on the suggestion of Martine de Clermont-Tonnerre, the French

co-producer of the film. We met in a café the day after and that's how it all started. At once there was a mutual understanding between Laura and myself. I was waiting for a part with Catherine's seriousness. Shortly after, we did a reading of the screenplay and then, things happened very fast...

Tell us about the character you play. Who is Catherine?

It is a strong, rich and intense part. The kind of character you are waiting for as an actor. Catherine is about 30 years old, she's a fragile young woman who returns to her birth-town and meets up with her daughter, Alba, who is 12. We come to understand that they haven't seen much of each other over a very long period of time, while Alba was being raised by Catherine's mother, Elisabeth. The film starts as Catherine decides to patch things up with her daughter.

It's a story of taming, of a frustrated and complex motherhood. Catherine is a somewhat subversive character, that's what I liked about her right from the start. She's a woman who completely gave up on her role as a mother, out of weakness. She is somewhat marginal, never capable of adapting to reality. On one side, she has something of a child in her but at the same time, she gives the impression of having lived several lives. She is confronted by Alba. We understand that she had her daughter too early in her life and that she was unable to assume her role. Alba is the reflection of her own guilt. Communication between the two is far from easy, it's almost combat-like for Catherine who constantly sways between gentleness and toughness.

How did you comprehend the character? What was your preparation work with Laura Schroeder?

I am not an actress who consciously builds her characters, that is not the way I work. With me, parts tend appear in a rather mysterious and unconscious way. When I meet a director with as intimate a project as *Barrage*, my role consists in dissolving myself in her universe, to totally put myself at her service. Laura gave me very few indications about the character's past, and the film is scattered with secrets and unsaid things. Catherine is a character who slowly but surely rises from the ashes, who steps from darkness into the light. Laura showed me photos, she made me listen to music, which put me into a rather particular mood. That's how Catherine was born.

There is a kind of truthfulness about *Barrage* when it comes to human interaction. A kind of emotion which – sometimes – appears to go beyond fiction. We go through quite a few different emotions as we watch you acting opposite young Thémis Pauwels who plays your daughter (Alba).

Acting opposite a child the likes of Thémis is an extraordinary experience. Being a mother myself, I can see firsthand that children

are constantly searching for the truth, they tend to bring you back to what is essential. An actor is a complex being with a very strong self-consciousness. A child is beyond all that, that's why Thémis worked like a mirror for me. I believe that's where this feeling of reality came from, the emotional range you mentioned. Children are indeed the best partners in the world.

Lest we forget, your own mother, Isabelle Huppert, also plays your mother in the film. This is where reality goes way beyond fiction.

On this particular point, I feel deep down that this does not concern me. I acted with my mother before. The filial link is a fact. Cinema, and the fact of acting opposite each other, obviously reveals things which elude us, which is good.

More generally, what are your memories of shooting *Barrage*?

I never felt such a density before. The character just wouldn't leave me. She was constantly present; every breath I took was linked to Catherine.

The setting had an enormous impact on the shoot's atmosphere. The natural surroundings gave off a real force. The water, the green colours, the trees, the chalet. It was, on one hand, a wide open space, yet it was, at the same time, what the French call

a "huis-clos", where things happen behind "closed doors".

Laura Schroeder is a Luxembourgish director. She comes from a country whose cinema production is not well known yet. How was your relationship on the set?

Laura is very demanding and well organised - she knows exactly where she's going. Our collaboration was awesome, despite her rigor - she gave me great freedom when it came to acting and experimenting. We gave each other the necessary space to work and search in. In the end, it's a film with very little dialogue and a rather special relationship with music and atmosphere. *Barrage* has a real identity, whose influences probably stem from Northern Europe. It also relates to this country. Luxembourg might be at a mere two-hour train-ride from Paris, but its culture is entirely different. The film's colours are green and blue... I am glad cinema knows no boundaries! For me being French, it was extremely gratifying to make *Barrage* with all these talented people from all over Europe. Cinema is a formidable tool for this, this kind of experience allows for an exchange of cultures, of atmospheres, influences and spaces. This is why I became an actress, to venture into the infinite, into the unknown, into the expanse of the world. ■

LOLITA CHAMMAH

ACTRESS

FILMOGRAPHY (PARTIAL)

1988	<i>Story of Women</i> dir. Claude Chabrol	2011	<i>Demain ?</i> dir. Christine Laurent
1991	<i>Malina</i> dir. Werner Schroeter	2012	<i>Ma première fois</i> dir. Marie-Castille Mention-Schaar
2000	<i>La Vie moderne</i> dir. Laurence Ferreira Barbosa	2012	<i>Farewell my Queen</i> dir. Benoît Jacquot
2003	<i>18 ans après</i> dir. Coline Serreau	2012	<i>Les Coquillettes</i> dir. Sophie Letourneur
2004	<i>Process</i> dir. C.S. Leigh	2013	<i>Passer l'hiver</i> dir. Aurélia Barbet
2004	<i>The Intruder</i> dir. Claire Denis	2013	<i>Cherry Pie</i> dir. Lorenz Merz
2007	<i>La Vie d'artiste</i> dir. Marc Fitoussi	2014	<i>Les Gazelles</i> dir. Mona Achache
2008	<i>Les Bureaux de Dieu</i> dir. Claire Simon	2014	<i>Gaby Baby Doll</i> dir. Sophie Letourneur
2009	<i>Montparnasse</i> dir. Mikhaël Hers	2015	<i>Anton Tchékhov 1890</i> dir. René Féret
2009	<i>La Femme invisible,</i> <i>d'après une histoire vraie</i> dir. Agathe Teyssier	2015	<i>The Art Dealer</i> dir. François Margolin
2010	<i>Copacabana</i> dir. Marc Fitoussi	2016	<i>L'Indomptée</i> dir. Caroline Deruas-Garrel
2010	<i>Memory Lane</i> dir. Mikhaël Hers	2016	<i>For This Is My Body</i> dir. Paule Muret
2010	<i>Mirror of Happiness</i> dir. Sam Samore	2017	<i>Strange Birds</i> dir. Élise Girard
		2017	<i>Barrage</i> dir. Laura Schroeder

RED LION & ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP
PRESENT

BARRAGE

A FILM BY
LAURA SCHROEDER

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY MARIE NIMIER,
LAURA SCHROEDER

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK PETRA JEAN PHILLIPSON

PRODUCTION RED LION, LUXEMBOURG
POL CRUCHTEN,
JEANNE GEIBEN

ENTRE CHIEN ET LOUP, BELGIUM
SÉBASTIEN DELLOYE,
SEBASTIAN SCHELENZ

MACT PRODUCTIONS, FRANCE
MARTINE
DE CLERMONT-TONNERRE

PROXIMUS, BELGIUM
TANGUY DEKEYSER

BNP PARIBAS FORTIS FILM FINANCE, BELGIUM
DAVID CLAIKENS,
ALEX VERBAERE

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY HÉLÈNE LOUVART, AFC

PRODUCTION DESIGN CHRISTINA SCHAFFER

SOUND PASCAL JASMES
MARC BASTIEN
LOÏC COLLIGNON

EDITING DAMIEN KEYEUX

COSTUME DESIGN ULI SIMON

MAKE UP KATJA REINERT

CAST

CATHERINE LOLITA CHAMMAH
ALBA THÉMIS PAUWELS
ELISABETH ISABELLE HUPPERT
ROBERT CHARLES MÜLLER
AGATHE ELSA HOUBEN
BABETTE MARJA-LEENA JUNCKER
POL LUC SCHILTZ
FILLE KERMESSE JULIETTE MORO

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