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Barrage

Laura Schroeder

Producer Pol Cruchten, Jeanne Geiben, Sebastian Schelenz, Sébastien Delloye, Martine de Clermont-Tonnerre. **Production companies** Red Lion (Roeser, Luxembourg), Entre chien et loup (Brüssel, Belgium), Mact Productions (Paris, France). **Director** Laura Schroeder. **Screenplay** Marie Nimier, Laura Schroeder. **Director of photography** Hélène Louvart. **Editor** Damien Keyeux. **Music** Petra Jean Phillipson. **Sound design** Marc Bastien. **Sound** Pascal Jasmès. **Production design** Christina Schaffer.

With Lolita Chammah (Catherine), Thémis Pauwels (Alba), Isabelle Huppert (Elisabeth), Charles Müller (Robert), Elsa Houben (Agathe), Marja-Leena Juncker (Babette), Luc Schiltz (Pol).

Colour. 112 min. French.

Premiere February 10, 2017, Berlinale Forum

World sales Luxbox

Catherine returns to Luxembourg from Switzerland following a period of ten years during which her daughter Alba was raised by her own mother Elisabeth. From the side of the tennis court, she watches Elisabeth coach Alba, her face clearly showing how well she remembers this mixture of stimulus and humiliation from her own childhood. The roles in this female family trio have been assigned. Does Catherine stand any sort of chance of being a mother to her daughter after so much time has passed? On a spontaneous trip to the family's summer house, Alba and Catherine's wounds and longings come out into the open. Sometimes they seem more like two very different sisters, who dance together in the garden and wear the same childish sweatshirts. When they bury Catherine's dog Charbon in the forest, they resemble two children performing a ceremony for a pet. Catherine named the dog after a song, „Black Like Coal“ – the same dark colour as the depressive moods she takes tablets to ward off. The gentleness of Laura Schroeder's storytelling is shot through with serious undertones, supported by a carefully chosen soundtrack and most of all her superb actors.

Anna Hoffmann

Dammed-up yearnings and desires

Barrage revolves around a young mother, Catherine, and her daughter, Alba. It is an uncertain coming together of two individuals who have always lived apart, in two different worlds. Their reunion is an impossible love story. Getting closer, mother and daughter discover that they might actually not be made one for another.

It is Catherine's journey that I've wanted to tell, how this woman struggles and fights – against her own mother, Elisabeth, and against herself, to win her daughter back and to prevent Alba's having to live what she herself had to live. To break the circle. But Catherine is also trying to fill the void in herself so she doesn't go under again.

The main part of the film is set around the Haute-Sûre lake in Luxembourg, a wild and spectacular environment, in which Alba and Catherine evolve as though freed from the constraints of our civilised world. Yet this space is also a huis-clos, cut off from the world. Time has no meaning anymore. The only thing that matters is what takes place between the characters. The surroundings are a space open to all possibilities and at the same time one where Alba and Catherine are at the mercy of the complexities of their relationship, left to resolve, all by themselves, the mistakes of the present and the past.

With *Barrage*, I decided to make a film that is neither psychological nor explanatory but one based on sensations and impressions, with the images creating meaning rather than the dialogues. Atmosphere is what matters in *Barrage*, and meaning comes from what the bodies, the looks, the gestures and the unsaid things express.

That is also why I choose to shoot the film in the 1:1.33 ratio. It is a concentrated image that draws the attention to the characters, relegating everything else to the second plane.

The title of the film ['barrage' is the French word for 'dam', -Ed.] is not only an allusion to the dam in the film; it also describes the mental state of the characters themselves: underneath a seemingly calm and smooth surface, their desires and yearnings have been dammed-up and have accumulated, up to the moment where, suffering from that excess, they cannot take it anymore. The potential of all that withdrawn energy unleashes and explodes. What was hidden is released.

In *Barrage* there are no winners and no losers. The three main characters are looking for lifebelts so they don't sink in the maelstrom of life.

Laura Schroeder

"I like to play with that false innocence"

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

Laura Schroeder: 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. Yet, prior to that, I was given the opportunity to direct a commissioned children's movie, *Schatzritter/The Treasure Knights and 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. I had mainly met 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 commonality between both our universes and that a collaboration could work out. And she had similar feelings after seeing my short films. I want to point out that Marie had already collaborated on other audio-visual projects. She specifically collaborated on the adaptation of one of her novels.

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

Yes, I do 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 of 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. Also, and I'm not the first person to say this, 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. 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 for her relationship with her own daughter. She tries to free herself from her mother's domination, all while trying to avoid making 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 some kind of tool in this undertaking.

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 bodies are still asexual, but their minds are developing and taking the lead. What I find interesting in characters like Alba in *Barrage* is that they have attained a certain maturity that their faces do not yet reveal. I like to play with that false innocence, make them perform unexpected actions that contradict the impression they give at first glance.

Why did you choose a real-life 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 in the role of Catherine's. There is something

about Lolita that is serious and childish at the same time, exactly what I needed for the character of Catherine. Only then did I think of Isabelle. 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 that goes beyond a mother-daughter relationship, or maybe even reverses it. After both officially joined the project, we consequently modified some of the dialogue, together with Marie Nimier.

Interview: Red Lion, Luxembourg



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Laura Schroeder was born in Luxembourg in 1980. From 1999 until 2003, she studied Film Studies at the University of Paris 1 – Sorbonne, and in 2006 she earned a Postgraduate Diploma in Directing at the National Film and Television School, London. She worked as an assistant director for Peter Greenaway, Geneviève Mersch, and Jean-Claude Schlim, among others. In 2008,

she directed her first short film, *Senteurs*. The following year, she wrote the play *Luxtime – Jacques Tati Revisited*, which she also directed at the Théâtre National du Luxembourg. Since then, she has worked as film and theatre director. Laura Schroeder took part in the 2009 Berlinale Talent Campus. *Barrage* is her second full-length film.

Films

2008: *Senteurs* (15 min.). 2010: *Double Saut* (15 min.). 2012: *Die Schatzritter und das Geheimnis der Melusine* (93 min.). 2017: *Barrage*.