

KINO LORBER

presents

A FAITHFUL MAN

A film by Louis Garrel

with

Lily Rose Depp, Laetitia Casta, Joseph Engel, Louis Garrel

Screenplay: Jean-Claude Carrière & Louis Garrel, in collaboration with
Florence Seyvos

Official Selection | New York Film Festival

Official Selection | San Sebastian Film Festival

Official Selection | Toronto Film Festival

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Director's Statement:

The screenwriter Jean-Claude Carrière and I began from a simple concept: the fact that we very often doubt our feelings. And this doubt is expressed by voice-overs. I chose voice-over because it's a device unique to cinema, as well as one I simply have a great affection for, almost in the way one loves a particular type of music.

The subject is quite straightforward; the dramatic interest hinges on the fact that the audience, with no access to the characters' feelings, can project whatever it wants onto them. I imagined the lead character as an innocent, someone who is constantly being reborn. He is amazed by everything, in the style of the great heroes of the silent era, like Buster Keaton, who doesn't try to find out what happened when a flowerpot falls on his head, but rather wonders if he is bleeding. If in literature you have the short story and the novel, I would like to build this film like a short story: a short film, offbeat, surprising and fresh, the antithesis of a heavy psychological drama. In essence, it is a contemporary comedy of manners.

Synopsis:

A Faithful Man is directed by award-winning actor Louis Garrel in a light-hearted feminist rom-com that re-imagines the tropes of the French New Wave. The women in his life come to dominate the unanticipated joys and heartbreaks one man experiences over a long time period. Garrel himself plays the central character, Abel, a Parisian whose girlfriend, Marianne (Laetitia Casta), leaves him while pregnant with his best friend's child, beginning a journey that stretches a decade, filled with twists and turns, and happy and unhappy surprises. Marianne will pop back into his life again along with her son, as will Eva (Lily-Rose Depp), the younger sister of the man he was abandoned for, and who has secretly loved him since childhood.



Director's Biography:

Louis Garrel has enjoyed an acclaimed career as an actor in outstanding titles including *The Dreamers* (2003), by Bernardo Bertolucci, *Les amants réguliers* (2005), directed by his father, Philippe Garrel, *La belle personne* (*The Beautiful Person*, 2008), by Christophe Honoré, which competed in San Sebastian, and *Le redoutable* (*Redoubtable*, 2017), in which he played the part of Jean-Luc Godard. As a director his credits include the short films *Mes copains* (2008), *Little Tailor* (2010) and *La règle de trois* (2011). His first feature, *Les deux amis* (*Two Friends*, 2015), was presented at the Cannes Festival's Semaine de la Critique.

Screenwriter's Biography:

Jean-Claude Carrière is a French novelist, screenwriter, actor, and [Academy Award](#) honoree. He was born in 1931, in a small village in the south, and received a scholarship and trained as a historian. In 1957, he published his first novel, *Lizard*, and when he met Jacques Tati and Pierre Etaix, he collaborated with them on three short films and four feature films including *The Sighing* and *Yoyo*. In 1963, he met Luis Buñuel, with whom he worked for almost 20 years (*Diary of a Chambermaid*, *Belle de Jour*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*). He also worked as a screenwriter with Daniel Vigne (*The Return of Martin Guerre*), Volker Schlöndorff (*The Tin Drum*, *The Forger*), Andrej Wajda (*Danton*), Jacques Deray (*The Swimming Pool*, *Borsalino & Co.*), Jean-Luc Godard (*Sauve Qui Peut* (*La Vie*)), Louis Malle (*Viva Maria*, *May Fools*), Jonathan Glazer (*Birth*), Miloš Forman (*Taking Off*, *Valmont*), Jean-Paul Rappeneau (*Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Horseman on the Roof*), Mikael Hanneke (*The White Ribbon*) and Atiq Rahimi (*Synghé Sabour*, *Pierre de patience*). He wrote his first play, *The Notes*, in 1968, directed by André Barsacq. Thereafter, he never stopped writing for theater (*La Terrasse*, *Audition*). He was also a playwright and adapter, including working with Jean-Louis Barrault and with Peter Brook (*The Conference of the Birds*, *The Mahabharata*) for 34 years.

As a novelist (*Simon Magus* and *The Controversy of Valladolid*) he wrote the book *The Force of Buddhism* with the Dalai Lama in 1994, *Conversations on the Invisible* (1988) with astrophysicists Jean Audouze and Michel Cassé, *Interviews on the End of Time* (1998) and *Do Not Expect to Get Rid of Books* with Umberto Eco. After recounting his childhood in the Languedoc, Jean-Claude Carrière wrote *The Wine Gruff* (2000) published by Robert Laffont, the *Dictionary of Stupidity* with Guy Bechtel, followed by *The Odd Book*, which experienced several editions (the last in 2014). He also composed the *Love Encyclopedia of India* with Chez Plon (2001), wrote *Goya's Ghosts* with Miloš Forman (2007), *Circle of Liars* (2008), *Words and Things*, and the encore, *Love Encyclopedia of Mexico* (2009). He wrote *Interviews on the Multitude of the World* published by Odile Jacob. With Thibault Damour, *The Rise of Buñuel* (2011) and an essay, *Fragility*. Chez Plon again with *Spanish Memory*, 2012. His latest book, *Money, his life, his death*, was published by Odile Jacob in 2014. His last theatrical experience was a show written with Isabella Rossellini, *Bestiary of Love*, which she interprets herself. In 1986, he founded FEMIS with Jack Gajos, the National School of Film and Television, where he remained president until 1996. For the past 25 years, he has been the co-chair of the theater festival in Montpellier Spring Comedians. He was on the board of directors for SACD (theater department), the Cinematheque, the ENS and the Guimet Museum. He is an

Officer of the Legion of Honor and the National Order of Merit. In 2014, he received an Honorary Oscar for his body of work as a screenwriter.

Actors' Biographies:

Laetitia Casta was born in Pont-Audemer, Normandy, France and spent her childhood in Corsica and Normandy. She was scouted at 15 and began a global career in modelling. She has appeared on over 100 magazine covers including Vogue, Elle, Cosmopolitan, Glamour, and Harper's Bazaar. She has been featured in campaigns for brands including Miu Miu, Guess?, Victoria's Secret, Alberta Ferretti, and L'Oreal. In 1999, she began her acting career, debuting in *Asterix and Obelix vs. Caesar*. She also starred in *The Blue Bicycle* (2000) and *Savage Souls* (2001), which further propelled her acting career. She was nominated for a César Award for her portrayal of Brigitte Bardot in *Gainsbourg: A Heroic Life* (2010).

Lily-Rose Depp was born in Paris, France. She is the daughter of actor Johnny Depp and French singer, actress, and model Vanessa Paradis. She began her acting career with *Tusk* in 2014, and since 2015, she has also been a brand ambassador for Chanel. She continued her acting career with *Yoga Hosers* (2016), Stéphanie Di Giusto's debut film, *The Dancer* (2016), and Rebecca Zlotowski's *Planetarium* (2016).

FILM COMMENT

NYFF Interview: Louis Garrel

By [Yonca Talu](#) on October 12, 2018



“We live in a story, our own, as well as in the stories of a few people close to us. And we also live in other stories, which we share with our neighbors, with our people, sometimes with the entire world.”

—Jean-Claude Carrière, *Raconter une histoire. Quelques indications*

Louis Garrel's directorial debut, *Two Friends* (2015), starred Vincent Macaigne and Garrel as a modern slapstick duo drifting through Paris in search of romantic fulfillment. A product of the 35-year-old actor's maturation, his sophomore feature, *A Faithful Man*, relinquishes youthful fervor to navigate the bewildering territory of parenthood through the story of Abel (Garrel) and Marianne (Laetitia Casta), a Parisian couple that separates in the film's opening and subsequently reconciles. Prompting their reconciliation is the sudden death of their offscreen best friend, Paul, a decade after impregnating Marianne with a son. Paul's ingénue sister, Eve (Lily-Rose Depp), complicates the equation by confessing her love to Abel and luring her rival into a Marivaudian seduction conquest. But Garrel and co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière shift our attention onto the boy, Joseph (Joseph Engel), as he conspires to generate the turmoil and simultaneously alleviate it.

Punctuated by the adult protagonists' introspective voiceovers, *A Faithful Man* draws vitality from the primal pleasures of storytelling. Under Carrière's influence, a recognizable tale of romantic duplicity acquires peculiar implications, while remaining indebted to an intimate tradition of French cinema that champions the representation of feelings. A year after interviewing his father, Philippe, in Paris, I spoke with Louis Garrel on the phone from the French capital in the wake of *A Faithful Man*'s U.S. premiere at the New York Film Festival last Sunday.

***Two Friends* was concerned with friendship, whereas *A Faithful Man* pushes friendship off screen in favor of exploring a couple's dynamics. It's a leap from collective to personal identity and from youth to adulthood. What was the impetus behind this shift in focus?**

In *Two Friends*, the characters were overgrown adolescents, and in *A Faithful Man*, we might say that they are premature adults. Adulthood means responsibility, and for me, this immediately has to do with one's relationship with their children. In order to have a relationship with your children, you somehow always have to pretend to be an adult. It begins as an imitation of something you've seen and slowly turns into an instinct of responsibility. As far as this film is concerned, I don't exactly know how I thought it out, because one doesn't always analyze their own creative process. We wrote the script with Jean-Claude Carrière without a producer attached to it, a bit in the manner of the surrealist Exquisite Corpse game that you play when you're a kid: one of us would write a scene and then the other one would write another scene based on that.

So the story emerged that way?

Well, I gave Jean-Claude the premise, the story of a widow and a man who has been dumped, which comes from a classic play by Marivaux, *La Seconde Surprise de l'amour* [*The Second Surprise of Love*].

Deep down, *A Faithful Man* could have been called *The Game of Love and Chance* [the title of another Marivaux play]...

Yes, you could absolutely say that. But then I got scared, because I thought that a widow and a man who has been dumped sounds like the setup of David O. Russell's *Silver Linings Playbook*. At the same time, it was crazy that Marivaux had already thought up this story 400 years ago. My first film was very sentimental, in the sense that the characters spent their entire time making love declarations to each other in a passionate way, and I was thinking a lot of Patrice Chéreau when I made it. Something that's always fascinated me about Chéreau is that his characters are very feverish and always tell each other their feelings with a lot of passion, so I made *Two Friends* in that spirit and had my characters say what they thought all the time.

With *A Faithful Man*, on the other hand, I had a different point of view: what the characters think in this film is never what they actually say. And this is very connected to something real, because in general, people tend to think that what you express is always the product of a preconceived thought. But sometimes, it's through expressing something that we think, so the thought and its wording are simultaneous. We are not prepared for each and every situation in life and sometimes we may surprise ourselves by acting in a way that we hadn't premeditated at all, and this film is about that. It's about the impulse of the moment and how feelings are constructed in the immediacy of the moment. And this is a lesson that I learnt from Marivaux, whom you know because you live in France, but I believe Americans don't really know him. Marivaux worked a lot on the fact that the more you hide a feeling, the more it becomes visible, and on the other hand, if you want to show a feeling, the person in front of you cannot necessarily read it. We always prefer reading something that wants to be hidden because curiosity is pleasurable. Afterward, there was also a constant battle between Jean-Claude Carrière and myself regarding psychology. I'm quite sentimental so I'm very attached to psychological logic, whereas Jean-Claude, who has more experience than me, does not have that fondness for psychology at all. So sometimes he would propose scenes and I would say: "But isn't that a bit surprising? Are you sure people will accept that from the characters?"



There was indeed one moment that struck me particularly. It's when you pair a shot of Abel watching a split-screen news broadcast of war atrocities with the voiceover line: "Imagining Marianne as a poisoner unsettled me, but excited me a little too." It's quite outrageous to juxtapose an erotically twisted thought with the traumatic sight of our crumbling world.

People have much more surprising and outrageous thoughts than they let appear. Most of the time, we are filled with aggressive and morbid impulses, but we domesticate ourselves in order to come across as acceptable. That's why we had fun writing three voiceovers with Jean-Claude, because we could play with this discrepancy between the characters' thoughts and what we see of them. I really liked doing this within a story that could externally be seen as a kind of déjà vu in cinema, that of a man torn between two women. And within this rather classic argument, I liked having strange digressions from time to time, something bizarre inside an intrinsically familiar circle.

There's a palpable Desplechinian influence in your attempt to revisit a typical setup of French cinema from a genre perspective. Did you have Desplechin's universe in mind while writing?

Arnaud Desplechin's cinema is beyond important to me and one with which I share an enormous intimacy. But what I especially love about the latest part of his oeuvre is how he is constantly quoting other genres like the detective film or the thriller to play with the audience in the process of recounting his own sentimental or existential novel. So he has understood something crucial about cinema: the fact that it can be treated as a popular art form to entertain viewers while subterraneously transmitting existential

ideas to them. And this is something that we really loved doing with Jean-Claude as well, to have the film switch between different genres, from the spy movie and the Hitchcockian thriller, with a very opaque female character, to the romantic comedy and the comedy of remarriage, through the story of someone who is reunited with a person he had separated from in the past, to gag comedy, because there are also gags in the film. So I liked having this sort of *marivaudage* of genres.

You know, Claude Chabrol said something that interested me a lot in a book he wrote: the fact that there are two categories of filmmakers, the poets and the storytellers, those who say, "Once upon a time." You might say, "Once upon a time" to a child with the hope of getting him to sleep, and in our film, we try to say, "Once upon a time" to the audience to keep them awake. Jean-Claude Carrière is a screenwriter who constantly plays with the intelligence and thwarts the expectations of the spectator, so he taught me a few rules. And what was extremely amusing to do in this film was to create a fiction with a well-known subject matter while continually bending the expectations of the audience and taking them to places they never expected to go. In the opening scene, for example, the credits are over the Paris skyline and the Eiffel Tower, so you expect a very Parisian and cosy sort of film. But what follows is so dry that I find it a bit destabilizing.

It's also destabilizing because of Abel's way of resigning himself to his fate. The narrative has a fable-like quality and seems to be designed to propel Abel from a state of submissiveness to one of agency in which he is able to take on the role of father, as in that scene of father-son recognition toward the end of the film when Abel and Joseph exchange a long glance outside the school. I imagine you and Carrière had discussions about Abel's trajectory.

Jean-Claude Carrière has worked with Pierre Étaix, who was a clown before becoming a filmmaker, and I also worked with clowns when I was at school. So there was this idea of the clown, in the sense of having a character who is slightly different and somewhat out of sync with the world. The mechanism of the character of Abel was that he would get several bangs on the head for the cruel pleasure of the spectator, but would never complain. If you take a great clown like Buster Keaton, he is always punched in the face by the brutality of the world, and yet he never complains. On the other hand, that's one of Buster Keaton's biggest strengths, because his passivity, which is a comedic one, also reveals itself to be a mark of endurance.

It's a survival strategy.

Yes, a way of sailing through and coming back to life over and over again. That is to say that Abel, who has spent the whole film being tossed around like a toy, is the one standing at the end. Deep down, the film is the metaphor of a world in which the adults twist and turn, while the child waits for the world to be

stabilized. That's why there is a cooling down in the finale after a game around everyone's desires. To go back to the opening, some people might be shocked by it upon reading the script, thinking, "How can that character barely react?" In a conventional domestic quarrel scene, Abel would rebel against Marianne by saying something like, "How could you do such a thing?" But the truth is, if you want to be a little idiosyncratic, you have to handle that break-up scene differently, and I find that by being idiosyncratic, you somehow get closer to the truth. In fact, I was listening to people's reactions in the theater and felt like they were laughing at that scene, and if they laugh, it means there is something truthful about it, because laughter unlocks a person's truth.



Why did you make Abel a journalist?

I don't really know why, but I have journalist friends, and I think it's because a journalist is someone who is confronted with the worst things all day and starts to become emotionally impermeable after a while. So it felt like the right profession for Abel.

But you don't really involve the audience in Abel's professional life.

It's true that it's not developed. But to be perfectly honest, I had the desire to film a newspaper office because I love films about investigative journalists, like *All the President's Men* or *Network*. I was lucky to be able to shoot those scenes in a real editorial office, and since we were a small team, we were allowed to capture journalists in their authentic environment.

The state of the world that Abel is confronted with as a journalist finds an echo in Joseph's obsession with murder. To me, he's really a kid whose unconscious is shaped by television imagery, so he's internalized the threat of the adult world and that's why he has a slightly cruel edge to him and somewhat of an Oedipus complex. But that's actually just a shield for his vulnerability. How did you present the character to the actor, Joseph Engel?

When we meet 9-year-olds, we forget how much they have already understood the world. Of course, children cannot be independent, but they completely grasp human relations and even the mechanics of sexuality in ways that we are not aware of. So with Joseph, I made him read the script and then I presented him the two actresses, asking, "Which one do you prefer?" [*Laughter*] Since we both come from families with separated parents, we spoke at length about a child's relationship with his stepfather. When you're a kid and you have a stepfather, the feelings you develop for him are very deep, in the sense that there's a violent perversity involved in your interactions, and asking him for affection might be your way of better cornering him. So we worked a lot on this idea that Joseph would turn out to be much more cunning than the other characters in maneuvering situations. At the beginning, I thought this wasn't the kind of script he would grasp from the get-go, that I would need to explain him certain things, but he understood it perfectly. Once again, we tend to forget how accurate an understanding children actually have of sexuality. And since Joseph has a genuine acting gift, he understood right away that it would be rewarding for him to play a manipulative kind of character and that the audience would love seeing a kid who is not represented from the perspective of an adult, but in a way that we don't often get to see kids on screen. In that regard, maybe we had an unconscious memory of Jonathan Glazer's *Birth*, which is a film that I adore and was also co-written by Jean-Claude.

To pick up on that idea, I was wondering whether you and Carrière ever alluded to your father's films that he co-wrote as you were developing the script, especially the latest one, *Lover for a Day* [2017], which deals with the Electra complex.

Not really. We had a different way of working, because me being an actor and Jean-Claude being a screenwriter, I could perform scenes to him while we were writing. To return to what I said earlier, Philippe [Garrel], as a director, is more of a poet, whereas I wanted to make a kind of humorous fable that contains profound truths, but whose form is closer to a... How to call it? Maybe an existential comedy or a comedy of manners. So Jean-Claude would often tell me about Pierre Étaix, and I felt that his biggest pleasure as a screenwriter was to make people laugh. I think that what he is looking for now after having written so many screenplays is to surprise people. For instance, he would call me at midnight to say, "Oh, I have an idea," and suggested things that would never cross anybody's mind.

He is really a genius of planting elements and then paying them off, like the subplot with doctor Pivoine [i.e., Peony] and the way his name is revealed to Abel as he walks by the flower shop.

What's great about Abel and Joseph's first scene is that their dialogue felt a bit schematic on the page, but then it took on a perfect rhythm on screen. At the beginning, I wasn't sure whether their exchange, "How is the doctor called? He has a flower name," would work, but when I see it on screen, I just find the enumeration of flowers so pleasurable. One thing that's terrific about Jean-Claude is that he is never afraid of mixing triviality, even vulgarity, with a high degree of sophistication. So he can be very popular and extremely sophisticated at the same time.



Since we need to wrap up, I'd like to ask about something specific that's caught my attention. Your directing credit on both of your features is "Mise en scène by Louis Garrel." Although Truffaut famously used that credit, most filmmakers today opt for the more conventional "Directed by" or "A film by." Is using the word "mise en scène" a way of inserting yourself into a cinematic tradition?

No, it's because I have a theater background, and "mise en scène" is a very noble word that comes from theater. You would never say, "a play directed by," but rather, "a play *mise en scène* by," because in theater, there are the actors and there is the *mise en scène*.

What do you get from directing that you can't get from acting?

When you write a script, you tell yourself that you want to surprise the audience by finding things they didn't expect. And what I really love about working with actors is that they bring their own interpretation of the script and find things in it I didn't expect, but sometimes I also love giving them suggestions they hadn't thought of. For instance, there is a scene I'm very happy with, because I love the way Laetitia and Lily performed it: it's when Eve declares war to Marianne. I love it, because they declare war to each other with a crazy elegance, a gentle and noble kind of aggressiveness. When Laetitia and Lily heard this, they took an immense pleasure in performing the scene, and I can have that relationship with the actors since it's my film. But when you're an actor, you can't really allow yourself those kinds of interventions.

Translated by Yonca Talu.

[Yonca Talu](#) is a filmmaker living in Paris. She grew up in Istanbul and graduated from NYU Tisch.

Cast

Laetitia Casta as Marianne

Louis Garrel as Abel

Lily-Rose Depp as Eve

Joseph Engel as Joseph

Director

Louis Garrel

Screenplay

Jean-Claude Carrière & Louis Garrel

in collaboration with

Florence Seyvos

Production Company

Why Not Productions

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Cine +

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The Region Île-de-France

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Executive Producers

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