



OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

ARCHIPEL 35 AND LES FILMS DU FLEUVE PRESENT

OLIVIER GOURMET

MICHEL BLANC

ZABOU BREITMAN

THE MINISTER

L'EXERCICE DE L'ÉTAT

A FILM BY PIERRE SCHÖELLER

ALL THE MINISTER'S MEN

I've been working on this project for 7 years. Originally, I wanted to address the invisible nature of power and show the people behind the scenes of government because these are people who are pulling the strings and yet we never see them. It was very important for me to show that political decisions are thought up by a whole group of people, although one person alone approves the decision in the end. So the original idea for the film lies in the relationship between the principal private secretary and the minister. The PPS epitomizes the man who never gets any media attention but who gets his hands dirty. So it's a film not so much about "the president's men" as about "the minister's men".

THE WORKINGS OF POWER

I wasn't so interested in the quest for power, in the accession to power or in the life of a political party - as in the workings of the government and of ministerial functions. That's why I wasn't keen on focusing on a real-life politician as I would have felt that this stood in the way of my creative expression. Instead I wanted to focus on the hard facts of everyday political wheeling and dealing. I also wanted to show that politicians these days are caught up in a kind of frenzied whirlpool because today's society has become so complex. Each and every one of us is saturated in a technological and media-obsessed society and I think politicians are just the same.

THE DREAM SEQUENCE

The dream sequence allowed me to show what kind of man Saint-Jean is. This is a man who is literally haunted by his job, and who gets up in the middle of the night to visit the scene of a car crash where children have been killed. Because this is the kind of thing that is expected of a politician who is in the public eye. So the dream sequence helps the viewer understand better how emotionally challenging a minister's job can be: I really wanted the viewer to empathize with this man's anguish and loneliness.

RESEARCH & SCREENWRITING

I did a lot of research into the material. I read a great many books and I combed a lot of newspaper articles. I also collected some 300 pictures of politicians to help me portray the minister. As far as the writing of the script is concerned, I worked with three people who'd worked in ministers' offices: they didn't actually write the script with me but they gave me feedback on the writing and brought their know-how into the process. For instance, the scene with PPS Woessner was directly inspired by the experience of one of these men who had joined the private sector after working as a government official.

MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONSHIPS

In the film, dominance and submission are the prevailing motifs: each character dominates someone and is dominated by someone else, up until the final sequence where they all end up in the President's office. Humiliation pervades the film but no one is cynical enough to enjoy venting their anger or losing their

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE SCHOELLER



temper. Being temperamental is part of politics, just as political insider's advice and colleagues' words of support are always unreliable. For that matter, 'think positive' seems to be the motto in ministers' offices – advisors have to keep providing the minister with positive thoughts and reassuring words.

MINISTER SAINT-JEAN

I had two options: I could either make Saint-Jean a righteous man - like Séguin, Mendès-France or Rocard - or I could make him a cynic who's been around for too long. I chose to make him a man who is in the process of learning his trade. He starts out serving the common good, rather than his own - in other words, serving the cause of his party and of the current government. Later on, he gains independence and some freedom.

Saint-Jean's accident changes him - when you come this close to death, you're bound to change. He suddenly realizes that his driver is a human being, although he wasn't in the least interested in this man who'd been driving him around for a few weeks. Saint-Jean is by his side while this "invisible" man is dying: an almost spiritual exchange takes place between them both. Saint-Jean remains marked by this experience forever.

THE BURDEN OF DUTY

I was really taken up with the idea of the privatization of railway stations, although I couldn't possibly get into too many technicalities. But I came up with an interesting perspective to depict the reform and the timing of the reform: I realized that any major reform involves the appointment of a new political figure that helps implement the reform in question. It's a strategy of power. Besides, it was interesting to confront a man - Saint-Jean namely - with his own beliefs. Because while he does not adhere to the project, his duty is to defend it no matter what.

ABOUT THE CAST

Olivier Gourmet was extremely dedicated to the film. He brought so much energy into portraying anger and comradeship and his performance always rings true. His way of moving and of conveying emotions with his face and his body language is really intense. I need those qualities in an actor. When he did the first reading of the script, I immediately felt that he was an obvious choice for the part. Olivier Gourmet played the role organically and the audience will hopefully empathize with him, as much as I do.

Things happened somewhat differently with Michel Blanc. The thing is, he'd been wanting to play a political advisor for quite some time. And all of a sudden, he had the opportunity to play this role. What was amazing was that his take on the character was pretty close to mine. He then fleshed out Gilles from the inside. It's been great meeting him.

For Martin Kuypers, the unemployed fellow who's hired as the minister's personal driver, I wanted to cast a non professional actor who'd never been in a film to keep that gritty quality I was looking for. It's been a long process and it took several months before I found Sylvain Deblé. There was something naive about him that I valued and all the while, he remained himself. I also cast non professionals for the bodyguards.

THE MINISTER

L'EXERCICE DE L'ÉTAT

A FILM BY PIERRE SCHOELLER

FRANCE / 112' / 35 MM & JPEG 2000 / DOLBY SRD / 2.35 / FRENCH / FEATURE FILM / 2011

The Minister for Transport, Bertrand Saint-Jean, is woken in the middle of the night by his personal private secretary. A bus has crashed into a ravine. He goes there, he has no choice. Thus begins the odyssey of a State official through an increasingly complex and hostile world. Speed, power struggles, chaos, economic crisis... In the frantic chain of events, one emergency replaces another. What sacrifices are men ready to accept? How long will they last in a State that devours those who serve it?

SCREENPLAY **PIERRE SCHOELLER**

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COSTUMES **PASCALINE CHAVANNE**

EDITING **LAURENCE BRIAUD**

ORIGINAL SCORE **PHILIPPE SCHOELLER**

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PRODUCERS **DENIS FREYD - JEAN-PIERRE & LUC DARDENNE**

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FILMOGRAPHY OF PIERRE SCHOELLER

2011 **THE MINISTER**

2008 **VERSAILLES** with Guillaume Depardieu, Judith Chemla, Max Baissette de Malglaive
Festival de Cannes - Official Selection - Un Certain Regard

2002 **ZÉRO DÉFAUT** (tv feature) with Eric Elmosnino, Nade Dieu, Abdallah Moundy

1996 **DEUX AMIS** (short film) with Michael Lonsdale, Jean Mercure



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BERTRAND SAINT-JEAN OLIVIER GOURMET
GILLES MICHEL BLANC
PAULINE ZABOU BREITMAN
YAN LAURENT STOCKER
MARTIN KUYPERS SYLVAIN DEBLÉ



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