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The Snows of Kilimanjaro

A FILM BY ROBERT GUÉDIGUIAN



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INSPIRED FROM THE POEM BY VICTOR HUGO
HOW GOOD ARE THE POOR

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*"Our neighbor died last night; it must have been
When you were gone. She left two little ones,
So small, so frail—William and Madeline;
The one just lisps, the other scarcely runs."
The man looked grave, and in the corner cast
His old fur bonnet, wet with rain and sea,
Muttered awhile, and scratched his head,—at last
"We have five children, this makes seven," said he.
"Already in bad weather we must sleep
Sometimes without our supper. Now! Ah, well—
'Tis not my fault. These accidents are deep;
It was the good God's will. I cannot tell
(...)*

*Go fetch them, wife; they will be frightened sore,
If with the dead alone they waken thus.
That was the mother knocking at our door,
And we must take the children home to us.
"Brother and sister shall they be to ours,
And they will learn to climb my knee at even;
When He shall see these strangers in our bowers,
More fish, more food, will give the God of Heaven.
"I will work harder; I will drink no wine—
Go fetch them. Wherefore dost thou linger, dear?
Not thus were wont to move those feet of thine."
She drew the curtain, saying, "They are here!"*

Victor Hugo *How good are the poor (Les Pauvres Gens)*
(Translation by **H.W. Alexander**)



Synopsis

Despite losing his job, Michel lives happily with Marie-Claire. They have been in love for more than thirty years ... Their children and their grandchildren bring them joy and they are surrounded by their close friends. They are proud of their political struggles and moral values. This happiness will be shattered by two armed and masked men who attacked them violently, tie them up, and snatch the money they had received to go for a trip to Kilimanjaro.

The shock will be even more violent when they discover that this attack was organized by one of Michel's young co-worker, Christophe, laid off along with him.

Michel and Marie-Claire gradually discover that Christophe must also take care of his 2 young brothers as they were abandoned by their parents.

Interview with

Robert Guédiguian



How did you get the idea to use Victor Hugo's poem How good are the Poor, as a starting point for your film?

In 2005, while writing a text calling for people to vote against the European Constitution, I made a reference to the «poor people» in Victor Hugo's poem to depict in a very general way «the new configuration of the working class.» It was for this occasion that I reread the poem. The end of the poem, that is to say when the poor fisherman decides to adopt the dead neighbor's children saying: «we have five children, this makes seven» and then when he finds

out that his wife, having taken the initiative before him, had already brought the children back to their home, is absolutely heartrending. Such goodness, such bigheartedness is exemplary. And more, there is this mutual understanding, this loving gesture between the two characters, the man and the woman, who are equally generous. I immediately thought that this would be a magnificent ending to a film. I just had to find a contemporary path to reach this end.

After a thriller (Lady Jane), and then a historical film (The Army of Crime) you are returning to the type of film you started with.

Obviously it was out of the question to tell a story about a fisherman from Brittany in the 19th century; the idea was to make a film that happens in contemporary times, in Marseille, with Ariane Ascaride, Gérard Meylan and Jean-Pierre Darroussin. And, as in 1980 with Last Summer, or in 1997 with Marius and Jeanette, I wanted to take stock of things: in the neighborhood where I was born, Estaque, and of the «poor people» who live there...I returned to the place where I started to observe the world; to see how it is today, to take away, perhaps, two or three universal truths.

It's a film that once again tests in a very real way the meaning of the word "group."

In my eyes, one of the most serious issues in today's society is there is no longer any class consciousness. In the sense that you can no longer even say «working class;» this is why I speak about «poor people.» Yet, the actual awareness of being «poor people,» doesn't exist. As it is, there are no longer, in France, these huge industrial entities where, in the 70's and 80's still, three thousand workers would come out of a factory. Class awareness in those times was not only possible, it was obvious: it was embodied by these thousands of men in work uniforms, those «blue collar» workers. And, naturally, these people were together, they had common interests, even when they had different identities. There aren't two types of populations, one being a native, employed, unionized home owner...and the other being an unemployed immigrant, delinquent, from inner cities or poor suburbs. Politics and

cinema can work to unmask this intellectual deception – and my mind will never be changed on this question: therein lies the essential.

In form as well, you have returned to a sun-drenched, luminous film, with the sea and cicadas.

And we haven't had to mix sound with cicadas since Marie-Jo and her two lovers. In my last five films I greatly explored styles I was less familiar with. Now I'm back home! At the suggestion of Pierre Milon, my cinematographer, we even returned to using super 16, instead of digital, which was used for my last two films. And we were very happy to do so: it gave a certain warmth to the image, a grain, something that was more alive...I returned to what I call my «fundamentals,» in style as well as in content. The difference is that in Last summer, the characters were 25 years old, because they were my age, and in Marius and Jeannette they were a little over 40, and now they are in their 50's, because I am now in my 50's.

Marie-Claire and Michel, the characters played by Ariane Ascaride and Jean-Pierre Darroussin, are parents, and even grandparents?

Working on two generations instead of only one was bound to happen. At the writing stage with Jean-Louis Milesi, we decide that the two central couples, who were of a certain age, would be surrounded by very young characters. I wanted to make sure that the assailant was not the only person from the younger generation to be in opposition to Marie-Claire and Michel; this opposition between generations also occurs with their own children, who don't understand the choices made by their parents. Florence and Gilles have withdrawn into the circle

of their family and friends which, for me, equals a certain regression. They don't want to put their little comforts in danger. I'm not pointing fingers, they also have their own share of troubles. Gilles lost his job at the shipyard, even if he has since found other work, and Florence's husband has to work in Bordeaux. He's always traveling for work, which makes their daily life complicated. Let's just say that they have lost the ability to feel indignant. I understand that people are afraid to take risks...because no one wants to lose what they already have, it's legitimate. But in the story we are telling, this inability to react is very serious, and it is their parents who give them a lesson about courage in the end.

The assailant, although from the same generation as Florence and Gilles, is battling with another reality.

For the younger generations, concerning the "new poor people," we wanted to speak about those who, fully struck by poverty, are more revolted than our main characters who have found a fragile balance, only because circumstances allowed them to, withdrawing into an internal solidarity within the smallest group that exists, that is to say the family. Christopher, for his part, crosses the line because he has no choice, for we discover that he paid the rent with what he stole, and that his actual family is the two brothers he's raising alone.

The aggression on Marie-Claire and Michel is like an electric shock for them.

They are beaten, in the most literal sense of the term, but they also take a moral beating. This happens to them at a moment when it seems absolutely unthinkable that something like this could happen. They are attacked by one of their own, and that destroys them

intellectually, in reference to what they have always fought for. It's unbearable for them. Although they only have a few material things, they have, at the end of a lifetime of labor, finally been able to feel like they "made it." All the political and union experts have noticed this fact: we are undergoing a downgrade in social status. It's the first time, historically, that we are faced with a generation who will not live as well as their parents.

Marie-Claire and Michel realize that there are some who are even poorer than they are. And that we are always rich in comparison with somebody else. Is this what makes them reexamine the notion of "courage" as defined in one of Jaurès' speeches that is cited by Michel?

The film is a crossing of Victor Hugo with Jaurès. I believe the first serious book I read as a child was Les Misérables, I went directly from The Famous Five to Victor Hugo. And, as soon as I became an activist, Jaurès instantly became important to me through this text, which is an extract from his speech to the youth in Albi, beautifully written and remarkable from every point of view. In this speech, Jaurès defines courage in several different ways, with a rhetorical style that consists of repeating at the beginning of each phrase: "courage is..." And he emphasizes the fact that courage means taking responsibility on an individual level as well, insisting on the link between an individual's life and the group, the individual and society. Courage doesn't only exist within the context of the group; there is courage in everyone's daily life, in the way they function, their habits, and morals. Marie-Claire and Michel tell themselves they have to do something. They've spent their lives fighting collectively, but they realize it is no longer enough.

When Christophe points out how unjust the blind draw is, Michel, the old union man is terribly shaken up.

He's more than shaken up: Michel thinks he "isn't wrong," therefore he's right. And that upsets his strategy in this combat, and the choices made by the union members. What Christophe proposes, examining each person's individual situation, is more fair. This young man is a libertarian, without appearing to be; he's applying communism without realizing it.

Concerning vengeance, the need to punish the bad guy, Raoul's reaction is extremely violent, yet awfully common, isn't it?

And people who react that way aren't necessarily politically on the far right. It's visceral, and independent of one's political position. And for me, regrettable; moreover, that's what Michel thinks. If we want to change the world, it has to be

changed on every level: nuclear power, women's condition, sexuality, punishment in society...In short, all the themes that don't seem to be a part of social, economic, or political concerns, but in fact very much are.

In this film, as often in your films, in addition to the serious subjects we have been evoking, there are little things: teaching children to eat sardines, boycotting a butcher who acts badly, speaking to an old, isolated woman in the middle of the night...

In life, I love infinitely banal things that happen every day: coffee, errands, discussions...In film, it is the small everyday details put into the narrative that give it layers and depth. I have always written daily scenes, I never grow tired of them. And I film, cut and edit them very simply, to tell neither more nor less than what they are, without any particular sophisti-



cation: life itself! Which doesn't stop me from making fun of myself from time to time, and to find that I can overdo it a bit. Here, there are a lot of ribs, sardines, and sausages...The Snows of Kilimanjaro is certainly the film with the most barbecues in the history of cinema.

In the film, the only thing that is unanimously shared is the sea that can be seen from the windows of every home.

Yes. But it's also their view of the working world. And work, some have it and others don't! Each window is crossed by the enormous cranes in the Marseille harbor. When we were scouting for locations, we concentrated our choice of apartments in relation to the cranes: symbolically it is from there that the narrative begins, with the first scene of a dismissal, on the docks. From Michel and Marie-Claire's place, from their children's, from Raoul and Denise's, from Christophe Brunet's and even from Mrs. Iselim's house (the old woman for whom Marie-Claire does house cleaning) the cranes, sea, and boats can be seen. All of these worlds are different; there is the workers' place, the gated housing developments for the nouveaux riches, and the decrepit lower income housing towers...But the view is the same for all of them.

The shots are more lavish than before, for example, what fills the frame, the scenery, the way in which you have the actors enter a scene.

It's because I'm older! It's not as bare. I let things happen, breathe. I let the shots live...perhaps I used to force them, hinder them a bit more. I've always said that I direct actors in the highway driving sense of the term: go in that direction. But today, I believe I give them more freedom, to shift from one lane to the other, as they feel it; I accompany them,

I dance with them...This said, I take control back in the editing process, with my editor, Bernard Sasia; I almost never shoot long takes; I cut a great deal, allowing myself numerous choices that have to be made at the time of editing.

During the shoot, the film was called How good are the poor; in the end you chose the title The Snows of Kilimanjaro...

"How good are the poor" and the reference to Hugo comes in at the end, on a title card that precedes the end credits, which makes more sense and has greater strength than putting it at the beginning. The Snows of Kilimanjaro evoke this vast world, although we are in Estaque. And it is the song that Marie-Claire and Michel's grandchildren sing at their wedding anniversary. The idea of the group gift for a trip to Tanzania is represented by this song. I always liked popular music, it puts a date on things, big and small, much better than carbon 14! And I'd like to mention that I saw Pascal Danel sing this song live on stage at the Marseille Gymnase in the 60's, as the opening act for Salvatore Adamo! Marie-Claire and Michel are from Pascal Danel's generation...and also the generation of Joe Cocker, whose interpretation of Many Rivers to Cross is heard in the film.

The film takes into account the transformations and evolutions of the world, as well as yours, which is why Michel asks the question: what would the people we were at twenty think of who we've become today?

It's a question that Ariane, myself, as well as a few others from our group have always asked ourselves...I've always moved forward in asking myself what would the person I was at 20 think of the person I've become. And at 20 I was, as



you might guess, excessive, revolted. I would even say, I forced myself to act in such a way that the young man I was would always think well of what I was becoming: as if the person I was at 20 was my Jiminy Cricket, my conscience...

Borrowing a little from Malraux, you declared one day that an "Everyman's film is a film that reveals to people the greatness they have within them."

And I think that more than ever. In my mind, hope is in these people. Call them "Saints" or "The Just," in any case, there are people like that, they exist. Hope is in the reconciliation of all the poor people. And I imagine, evidently, as an epilogue to the film, that when he gets out of prison, Christophe will join Michel, Marie-Claire, Raoul, and Denise, and they will take up the battle again. Together.

Robert Guédiguian

was born in Marseille in December 1953.

He is one of the founding producers of AGAT FILMS&CIE - EX NIHILO, companies that have produced for, among others:

Laurent Achard, José Alcalá, René Allio, Solveig Anspach, Jean-Christophe Averty, Dominique Bagouet, Lucas Belvaux, Patrick Mario Bernard and Pierre Trividic, Didier Bezace, Luc Bondy, Peter Brook, Dominique Cabrera, Carolyn Carlson, Christine Carrière, Isabelle Czajka, Marina de Van, Natalie Dessay, Claire Devers, Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, Eléonore Faucher, Pascale Ferran, Piotr Fomenko, Alain Françon, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Patricio Guzmán, Lucile Hadzihalilovic, Cédric Kahn, Lech Kowalski, Diego Lerman, Susanne Linke, Haroun Mahamat-Saleh, Tonie Marshall, Ariane Mnouchkine, Gérard Mordillat, Agnès Obadia, Christophe Otzenberger, Nicolas Philibert, Jean-Henri Roger, Hineer Salem, Ghassan Salhab, Pierre Salvadori, Peter Sellars, Claire Simon, Michel Spinosa, Jean-Pierre Thorn, Paul Vecchiali, Anne Villacèque, Bob Wilson, Jean-Jacques Zilbermann...

He is the author, director and producer for:

- 1981 **LAST SUMMER**
- 1984 **ROUGE MIDI**
- 1985 **KI LO SA ?**
- 1990 **DIEU VOMIT LES TIEDES**
- 1993 **L'ARGENT FAIT LE BONHEUR**
- 1995 **TIL DEATH DO US PART!**
- 1997 **MARIUS AND JEANNETTE**
- 1998 **WHERE THE HEART IS**
- 2000 **CHARGE**
- 2001 **THE TOWN IS QUIET**
- 2002 **MARIE-JO AND HER TWO LOVES**
- 2004 **MY FATHER IS AN ENGINEER**
- 2005 **THE LAST MITTERAND**
- 2006 **ARMENIA**
- 2008 **LADY JANE**
- 2009 **THE ARMY OF CRIME**
- 2011 **THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO**

In 2000, he directed Ariane Ascaride on stage in a play by Evelyne Pieiller: « Le grand Théâtre » at the Chaillot national theater.

In 2010, he directed a series of excerpts from "Auschwitz and afterwards" by Charlotte Delba, with Ariane Ascaride at the Rond-Point theater.





(...) "Courage is being all together, whatever one's work, a practitioner or a philosopher. Courage is understanding one's own life, making it precise, improving it, giving it depth, establishing it, and yet coordinating it with life in general. Courage is watching that spinning or weaving machine so that no thread breaks, and yet preparing a social order that is broader and more brotherly, where the machine will be the common servant of all liberated workers. (...)"

Courage, is overcoming one's own flaws, suffering from them but not being overburdened by them, and following one's path. Courage is loving life, looking at death with tranquility; it is reaching for an ideal and understanding what is real; it is acting, and giving oneself to great causes without knowing what reward this profound universe will reserve for our efforts, not even if any reward will be given.

Courage is searching for truth and speaking it; it is not submitting to the law of passing lies and not allowing our souls, our mouths, or are hands to echo the idiotic applause and fanatical boing"

Jean Jaurès - *Speech to the youth, Albi, 1903.*

Cast

ARIANE ASCARIDE	Marie-Claire
JEAN-PIERRE DARROUSSIN	Michel
GÉRARD MEYLAN	Raoul
MARYLINE CANTO	Denise
GRÉGOIRE LEPRINCE-RINGUET	Christophe
ANAÏS DEMOUSTIER	Flo
ADRIEN JOLIVET	Gilles
ROBINSON STEVENIN	The Police Chief
KAROLE ROCHER	Christophe's Mother
JULIE-MARIE PARMENTIER	Agnès
PIERRE NINEY	The Waiter
YANN LOUBATIERE	Jules
JEAN-BAPTISTE FONCK	Martin
EMILIE PIPONNIER	Maryse
RAPHAËL HIDROT	Jeannot
ANTHONY DECADI	Gabriel
FRÉDÉRIQUE BONNAL	Martine

Credits

A Film by
Screenplay

Cinematographer
Sound
Art Director & Production Designer
Editor
Assistant Editor & Dialogue Editor
Production Manager
Assistant Director
Production Manager
Assistant Production Manager
Costume Designer
Costume Department
Make Up
Sound Mixer
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FERDINAND VERHAEGHE
BRUNO GHARIANI
MADJID HAMZAOU
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