

Anne-Dominique Toussaint presents

Fabrice Luchini Lambert Wilson

Cycling with Molière

A film by Philippe Le Guay

With Maya Sansa, Camille Japy, Ged Marlon, Stephan Wojtowicz and Josiane Stoléru

Philippe Du Janerand, Annie Mercier, Christine Murillo

Based on an original idea by Fabrice Luchini and Philippe Le Guay

Screenplay, Adaptation and Dialog - Philippe Le Guay

Original Music - Jorge Arriagada

Cinematography - Jean-Claude Larrieu (AFC)

Editor - Monica Coleman

Set Design - Françoise Dupertuis (ADC)

Costumes - Elisabeth Tavernier

Sound - Laurent Poirier (AFSI), Vincent Guillon

Mixing – Emmanuel Croset

Production Manager - Jean-Jacques Albert

First Assistant Director - Hubert Engammare

Coproducer - Romain Le Grand

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In partnership with the CNC

Produced by Anne-Dominique Toussaint

Directed by Philippe Le Guay

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DISTRIBUTION: Pathé Distribution , 2 rue Lamennais - 75008 Paris
Tel: +33 (0)1 71 72 30 00 www.pathefilms.com

PRESS: André-Paul Ricci – Tony Arnoux, 6 place de la Madeleine - 75008 Paris

Tel: +33 (0)1 49 53 04 20 apricci@wanadoo.fr

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SYNOPSIS

At the peak of his acting career, Serge Tanneur turned his back on the world of show business for good. It was all too much grief – he was worn down by a profession in which everyone betrays everyone else. Serge withdrew to live like a hermit in a run-down house on the Île de Ré off France’s Atlantic coast.

Three years later, Gauthier Valence, a well-loved TV actor whose specialty is the big-hearted hero, shows up on the island. He’s come to find Serge to offer him a role in Molière’s classic, “The Misanthrope”. After all, hasn’t Serge become the perfect embodiment of the play’s main character, Alceste?

Serge refuses point blank and swears he’ll never go back on stage. And yet, something inside him wants to be convinced. He suggests to Gauthier that they rehearse the first scene of the play, a dialog between Philinte and Alceste. After five days of rehearsal, he’ll know if he wants to do the play or not.

Rehearsals begin. The two actors size each other up and challenge one another’s approach, torn between the pleasure of acting together and the brutal urge to lay into each other. Gauthier’s good nature is often times pushed to the limit by Serge’s resentment.

All this is played out in the microcosm of the Île de Ré, slumbering in the low season, and alongside the pair’s encounters with a young hotel maid whose ambition is to be a porn actress and an Italian divorcée who’s selling her house.

One might even start to believe that Serge will really tread the boards again...

INTERVIEW WITH FABRICE LUCHINI

What was the genesis of CYCLING WITH MOLIERE?

Two years ago, Philippe Le Guay came to see me on the Île de Ré to offer me the role of Jean-Louis Joubert in *THE WOMEN ON THE 6TH FLOOR*. We went for a long walk through the marshes, and I did what I do nearly every morning; I work on “The Misanthrope”. The enigma and admiration that this text produces in me means it accompanies me everywhere. I’m mesmerized by the intelligence of Philinte, a man of society who has grown beyond his adolescence. Philinte has understood that a profound mind can only move forward if masked. He has a vision of the mask in the Nietzschean sense of the term. In other words, as he says to Alceste: “Poor dunce, do you still think you should tell the truth? The truth is only your hysteria!” I like Alceste’s dumbly sincere manner, his richness. And I like that confrontation, that encounter with the power of the language, and what that makes us examine in today’s speech. So Philippe and I are going for this walk through the countryside on the island, and I start to say the lines to him – I do both characters, since I like one as much as the other. And all of a sudden he says to me: “It would be great to make a film around this.”

What happened then?

We shot *THE WOMEN ON THE 6TH FLOOR* and then, one day, Le Guay showed up with a script he’d written, inspired by my obsession with “The Misanthrope”. He set the story on the Île de Ré and Philippe offered me the role of Serge Tanneur. So the initial idea came partly from me, but the screenplay is totally by him. Instead of just sticking to Molière and a guy who carries out this strange exercise of speaking the text, Le Guay took the plot into the realm of comedy, and the Île de Ré gives it its character. And he called the film *CYCLING WITH MOLIERE*.

The script is somewhat surprising. It starts off with a plumbing problem.

And it gets interesting when Gauthier Valence shows up. Because to perform Molière and to pull off a coup, this really well-known actor is forced to come and find this other actor who has retired to the Île de Ré. The admirable thing is how Molière feeds the film, but as if with contraband – neither in a cultural way, nor up-front or didactic. Le Guay could have made a film about the theater and it would have been dreadfully boring, because theater in film is a drag. But no, he made a comedy. At a stroke, you hear Molière’s text differently. It’s no longer theater, it’s France through its language; that which people speak. And it’s also a reconciliation with the theater.

Yes, one has the feeling that by going about it this way, the film reconstitutes the energy of Molière’s text.

Its energy, exactly! Otherwise the text is dead, the printed page is dead. That’s the whole work of an actor: to bring life to these printed characters.

There are some odd characters in the film: Zoé, part barmaid, part porn actress, whom Serge Tanneur, your character, and Gauthier Valence, played by Lambert Wilson, invite to read a passage by Célimène.

Yes, we really took Molière to some strange lands. That's Le Guay all over, that is.

Your love for great texts and your passion for the Île de Ré are well known, as is your taste for polemic. How far do you resemble Serge Tanneur?

It would be a lie to say we don't have anything in common. That said, he's quite a long way from what I'm like. I'd love to withdraw onto an island, but I don't do it – it's a fantasy. I almost slip into depression if I'm on the Île de Ré for long! I'm not Bernarhdian, the way my character is. Neither Bernarhdian, nor Célinian. I'm more about exchange, and curiosity about the psychology of others. I have to say I'm a very curious person, very mischievous. My real job is more as a manservant of comedy. What's more, Philippe Le Guay was very attached to the idea of basing the story in fiction. There would have been a danger of coming up with something too biographical. I'm tempted to cite the phrase by Deleuze: "Great literature, the truly great, exists when it's no longer in the domain of the private." No one gives a hoot about Céline's life. "Journey to the End of the Night" is an immense work because it's not *his* misery, it's misery in general. Proust is great because "Remembrance of Things Past" is not *his* childhood, it's all childhood. So with a due sense of proportion, Le Guay's job was to move away from simple reportage, even if the role of Serge Tanneur is perhaps the closest to myself that I've ever played. Personally, I see him as closer to a Jean-Louis Trintignant, a Trintignant who's read a lot of Céline and Thomas Bernarhd.

This permanent irritation that Tanneur shows towards his acting partner, such as when his cellphone rings mid rehearsal – that's a bit like you, all the same...

That's pure Le Guay! But it's true I have a problem with modernity. It's no accident that I read Muray in the theater. I like the idea of being an anti-modern.

Where did all the barbed remarks skewering the theater and cinema world come from?

It's Le Guay transposing Alceste into today's world. He reappropriates his truth, his power, his breadth, his eloquence. It's stimulating and a little cruel – in a good way. There's a mischievousness in there.

What about the relationship you build with Maya Sansa's character, who leads you and Gauthier Valence into a sort of love triangle in the style of JULES AND JIM?

Or Marivaux – the relationship between the two guys and that Italian woman is straight out of Marivaux. That's Le Guay, once again. Philippe likes working with people's emotional shortcomings, and it was very pleasing for me to act that. CYCLING WITH MOLIERE is Le Guay and me, it's the end result of many long conversations and tireless jousts between us. It's the fruit of our collaboration and our differences.

Your differences?

In the 17 years we've known each other, Philippe has adopted a position which I find deeply annoying: he challenges the long tradition of the great French moralists who, long before Freud, established suspicions about human nature. What do Chamfort, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère tell us? That there is no such thing as an heroic act; that in each act, there's an organization of the me. Everything that we deal with has no other economy than our own economy. I totally believe that. It's not a sinister idea. I'm convinced that we're condemned to having an ego. That ego may take any possible form, but we'll never be free of it. That's intolerable for Philippe, who has a Dostoyevskian vision of mankind. He thinks that grace can transform him, and can transform me. "I, Fabrice, I'm not as black as I say," he says over and over to me. So *CYCLING WITH MOLIERE* is the prolongation of this difference between Philippe and I; him very courteous, me totally skeptical. It's a clash of my pessimism and his naivety. It's Don Quixote taking on the evil geniuses of French thought that I convey on a low level. And it's a love story. There's no film without a love affair with the director.

Is he Philinte?

Yes. Absolutely.

Let's come back to the tussle between Tanneur and Valence. We sense that the former is very happy with the rehearsal process that he has set up, while the latter is only thinking about getting back to Paris once he's convinced Tanneur to do the play.

"You've come to offer me Alceste, and you want to leave right away?" Tanneur says to him. Tanneur has that sort of philosophy: he's not a businessman like Valence, who wants the role for the kudos it brings. Tanneur almost doesn't just want to play Alceste: he wishes with all his soul that this eternal material, this sublime material, isn't vulgarized – destroyed by just "doing" it. He's a man who has no half-measures. He's a Glenn Gould. He'd rather rehearse for himself. At one point in his life, Gould no longer wanted to perform in concert. He only worked on fabricated music. On a very small level, my character is a sort of Glenn Gould.

There's a lovely scene in which we see Lambert Wilson and you in the garden working on the text of "The Misanthrope", whilst hopping on and off a low wall. It's a very nice homage to the actor's craft.

Those improvisations were wonderful, great fun and very poetic. You are witnessing "how one rehearses" live. How the note comes forth. It's something you can't put your finger on; it's in the realm of human energy, of which Molière is the photographer. Philippe was smart enough to leave me a free hand. I had to be as I am when I work.

What kind of actor are you on set, and in particular for this film, which came from your idea?

You try to embody the comedy, and add a little science. I didn't chose this profession just to have narcissistic, psychological or financial rewards. It would never have got under my skin like that. I chose it as a vocation, thanks to reading Jouvet. I am not grappling with cinematic issues here, that doesn't interest me. I do this profession to work on my movement, my movement of diction, my movement of breathing; the passage from Feydeau to Labiche, from Labiche to Molière, Molière to La Fontaine. For 30 years, I've had this obsession about hitting the right note in terms of what's on the page, this obsession of reconstituting life from a page which is dead. CYCLING WITH MOLIERE is the end of this trajectory. Since Le Guay's film, I've had the feeling that my obsession as an actor working on Molière every morning like Sacha Guitry used to, and his father before him, has subsided somewhat.

Would Jouvet have liked the idea of rehearsing Molière on a bicycle?

He would have loved it. Because it comes back to finding the physical impulse of the texts. Jouvet used to say that actors are emotional athletes.

INTERVIEW WITH LAMBERT WILSON

This is the first time you have worked with Philippe Le Guay.

Philippe Le Guay and I had already met several times at festivals. He always seemed extremely open and charming towards me, unlike a lot of directors who can be indifferent or even slightly hostile towards actors. Over time, we developed a friendly relationship based, I think, on mutual fascination. I saw his films, which I liked a lot, and he knew my work. So we wanted to do something together.

What was your initial reaction on reading the script of CYCLING WITH MOLIÈRE?

I liked everything about it: the story, the dialog, the language theme. I felt that this was really a character I could play – there's a little voice inside that whispers that kind of certitude when you're an actor. Although the project is a challenge, you know you'll find the way to tackle it. Philippe Le Guay offered me the role of Gauthier, but I guessed that things weren't yet set in stone. I knew how the script had come about: I wasn't necessarily the right guy. That's something I feel sometimes. Whatever the case, I must have been sufficiently eloquent for Philippe to mention me to the producer. The second stage consisted of convincing Fabrice Luchini to see me on the credits: it was key for him to know that we could make this journey together.

How did you go about it?

Philippe Le Guay organized a lunch. We met in a restaurant in Paris's 9th *arrondissement*, where we were both regulars. It was a very quiet lunch, very amicable, with no pressure of any sort. Then came the third stage, the most complex: that of the script reading. It was then that I realized I was really up against it: Fabrice really weighed up my ability to handle Molière's language. It was like two soloist musicians who don't know each other and who suddenly find themselves playing a duet – you have to have the same approach to the music. Other reading sessions followed, which were very helpful. They meant I arrived on set quite relaxed, with mutual respect. I'm a big fan of Fabrice. I like his intelligence and his humor. I find his erudition and his memory fascinating. But I admit that before I met him, his level of culture scared me a bit. I'd seen him eat journalists alive on television. I was afraid I'd be just a mouthful for him. A certain complicity grew up between us, which came about because I let myself go and didn't put up any guard. I was in a sort of honesty.

How do you analyze the clash between Serge and Gauthier? Is it a philosophical battle, a theatrical one, or a battle of egos?

They are first and foremost driven by the quest for power: a man who wants to get something from another. We follow the shifts in their power relationship, as each by turns takes the upper hand over his rival. Serge and Gauthier are two actors, but they could just as easily be two businessmen. They're in a permanent conquest which involves seduction, but also cruelty, sadism, humiliation, and dependency. It's almost a game out of Beckett between them. They could be on a desert island. Making *CYCLING WITH MOLIERE*, I didn't feel I was making a film about actors, even though of course we can see the reality of the actor's work.

Molière and rehearsing “The Misanthrope” plays a key role in their face-off.

Of course. The whole script is interwoven with the issues posed by “The Misanthrope”. It contains some fundamental truths about our relationship with society and relations between men. Two philosophies clash: that which favors indulgence towards men, and that which rails against their folly. Both Serge and Gauthier use these arguments to attack each other. But Le Guay put the emphasis more on the conflict between the two individuals, rather than the conflicting ideas. What is great with Gauthier's character is that he makes a journey. At the start, he arrives like a Philinte, and gradually, he finds his Alceste side. He sheds his veneer of amiability, puts aside a kindness that is in the end quite hypocritical, and embraces his true nature. He has Serge to thank: by pushing him into a corner, Serge allows Gauthier to discover his inner desire. At the end of the film, my character is in a position to play Alceste because he finds within himself the rage that he has not been able to express before. During his week on the Île de Ré, a sort of therapeutic compression occurs which allows him to unleash the anger inside him. It was fascinating to act out this transformation.

And yet at the end, on stage, Gauthier falls victim to a “blank”.

He fluffs a line on which he struggled throughout rehearsal. When we filmed that scene at the Théâtre de l'Atelier, Gauthier did indeed “blank”, but he was addressing Serge in front of the audience. He was talking to him about his regret at not having put on the play together. Then, my character continued the scene and was brilliant in the role of Alceste. But Philippe Le Guay chose to cut the rest of the scene, and that was the only point on which I disagreed with him. When I saw the finished film, I said to him: “With that, you have condemned Gauthier. The audience understands that the only person who could play Alceste was Serge.”

Let's talk about the rehearsal scenes, all of which are very different.

I love the language of classical theater. I often feel more at ease in that than in certain everyday scenes. The hard bit was regulating my character's progress. To begin with, when Serge and he work on Act 1, Scene 1, Gauthier doesn't get inside the text. He has a flimsy appreciation of the play. He wants to modernize it, which is utterly ridiculous, as if a musician set out to perform Mozart without playing all the notes. I had to give the right measure to his faux-pas. As the rehearsals continued, I felt more and more comfortable. Of course, I was light-years away from Fabrice, who knows “The Misanthrope” by heart. That's a gap I couldn't hope to make up and I didn't try to.

Beyond the conflict between the two actors, we really get the feeling we're

witnessing a “work in progress”.

I was worried that those rehearsal scenes would look phony, but in the end you really see actors at work, wrestling with a text. You can feel their passion, you can appreciate their difficulties – the arduous technical chewing over the words, the effort of memory and attention to meaning. That’s only a bit of the iceberg that an actor’s work on a play involves, but it comes across as authentic.

Molière and his “Misanthrope” emerge modernized.

That’s the strength of Le Guay’s script. This is cinema, so there’s no point projecting the text as you would on stage. As a result, it resonates with a more modern ring. I showed the film to some foreign friends, and they were fascinated by the whole Molière theme. It seemed very accessible to them, despite the fact that they were totally unfamiliar with the language of 17th century France. That’s another of the film’s virtues.

The trio you make up with Luchini and Maya Sansa gives a great lightness to the film.

Personally, I think it’s absolutely delightful. I get great pleasure from those moments between them. One obviously thinks of JULES AND JIM by François Truffaut, and Philippe Le Guay didn’t hesitate to borrow the music to underline its heritage. The Italian woman played by Maya Sansa is necessary for the plot: she allows the narrative to come full circle. Without her, Serge and Gauthier would continue to rehearse indefinitely. The painful bite of jealousy that she inspires in the two men was a smart choice by Philippe. I really love all the external shots in the film: the scenes on bicycles in the marshes, and when they go house hunting. They inject some oxygen into the story, which could otherwise have been static.

Philippe Le Guay happily claims to be the inspiration for your character.

And that’s very nice. I’ve never before had to embody the philosophy and inner self of a director. The result was that I have rarely felt so well defended on a film set.

Do you share his penchant for Philinte?

I am a Philinte in life: I always look for the positive side in human relationships and I can be charming to the point of hypocrisy. But my temperament as an actor leans more towards Alceste. Theatrically, I’m much more comfortable with excess. It’s much harder for me to stay in the controlled, wise tone of Philinte.

INTERVIEW WITH PHILIPPE LE GUAY

CYCLING WITH MOLIERE came about in an unusual way.

I was preparing for THE WOMEN ON THE 6TH FLOOR and I was trying to obtain Fabrice Luchini's agreement to play the lead. Fabrice is fairly absent-minded; he would leave the script in taxis or hotel rooms, so he never had the text to hand. I arrived on the Île de Ré to give him a new copy, which I put on my bike-rack and headed off to meet him by bicycle. But I got lost in the marshes. Fabrice came to find me, also by bike. We took the tracks across the marshes and I told him: "You're a real misanthrope, holed up in your retreat!" And right away, he started reciting the beginning of Molière's play: "*What is it? What's the matter? – Leave me, pray...*" He played both roles to perfection, that of Alceste and of Philinte. He knows practically the whole play off by heart. And right there, all of a sudden I saw a film, and a title came to me: CYCLING WITH MOLIERE. The story of a reclusive actor on the Île de Ré.

And all that was while out cycling?

Indeed! The sky was cloudy, the sun was going down, the gulls were circling above us. It was a coming together of the text with its theatricality and life itself. Fabrice immediately kicked the idea on. About 30 years previously, he had a project to stage "The Misanthrope" playing Alceste and Philinte alternately with another actor. A short while later, I talked to him about the idea again, and he said: "I'll do it."

Did he imagine directing the film himself?

Yes. He was thinking about a DV shoot, three weeks of improvisation with a small crew, captured on the hoof. Then three months went by, and in the end he abandoned that idea.

What happened next?

We made THE WOMEN ON THE 6TH FLOOR and a year after that, I asked him if I could reprise the idea of Alceste. I had a very simple situation in mind: an actor comes to seek out another who's living as a recluse on the island to ask him to play in "The Misanthrope". Imagining Fabrice as a recluse was easy for me: the scarf, the fur-lined jacket, the three-day beard. I immediately thought of Céline living in Meudon. I almost gave him a dog, but that would have been too much. That's how we both imagined the original idea for the film. I find that degree of closeness touching, after making four films together.

We can feel that Fabrice Luchini inspired you throughout for the character of Serge Tanneur.

Exactly, Fabrice is an inspiration. I drew on what I knew about him, his love of texts, and also that tendency for misanthropy that he exhibits sometimes. He harbors a dream of withdrawing from the world which, fortunately, he doesn't act upon.

And then we had endless discussions about people, and ourselves. He says there's no such thing as generosity, that everyone works on their own little interests. And I play the role of the naive, the guy with the rose-tinted spectacles. I argue for altruism and going beyond one's self. We went off on endless digressions about people's behavior. Fabrice is the pragmatic one, and I'm the indulgent one. Fabrice thinks that indulgence is a mask that I wear, something which flatters my narcissism. He's perhaps not altogether wrong.

That philosophy is conveyed by Lambert Wilson's character.

Lambert Wilson is my on-screen representative! Gauthier Valence is a star on TV, a hero who everyone wants a piece of, and who feels he has to please people at all costs. That said, he's not under any illusions about the lameness of the series in which he stars. You end up understanding why Gauthier Valence wants to play Alceste: he has something deep inside him he wants to defend.

Tell us about the choice of Lambert Wilson.

Lambert belongs to that great tradition of Anglo-Saxon actors who can do everything. He comes over as totally slick, yet at the same time, he's a man with his share of inner wounds and shadowy zones. Lambert is fantastic at acting sincerity and self-mockery. He didn't hesitate to give himself a new look, with that impeccable hairdo and its flamboyant flick. And like the white overcoat, which makes him at once majestic and laughable. Opposite the harsh figure of Fabrice, his bearing gave a lot of flesh to the couple.

On paper, your project might have seemed quite radical.

It's true there's a minimalist side to it: two actors rehearsing Scene 1 of "The Misanthrope" for the duration of a film. But there is the power of the characters and the mirrored game they play alongside Molière. Rather than the plot, it's the characters that give a film its identity. I love taking the time to bring them to life and give them contradictions.

You made sure you included some pauses for breath.

That was the great advantage of filming on the Île de Ré. Not in a vacation setting, but in a rather desolate place, with empty streets, closed shutters, the vast windswept beach. There's a melancholy beauty to those abandoned holiday locations.

During rehearsals, Serge and Alceste have opposing points of view on the text of “The Misanthrope”.

I wanted them to continually come back to the same arguments, so you see the text holding out on them, and have them attacking each other. That’s why I decided to stick to Act 1, Scene 1. It sums up the philosophical positions of Alceste and Philinte, the eternal problem of the choice between indulgence and truth. I didn’t want to stray around through the whole play and do a succession of selected excerpts.

In any case, the text is so inexhaustible that you don’t grow tired of hearing it over and over. It’s the opposite of the cliché according to which the classics need to be “dusted off”. Here, it’s Molière who dusts us off.

Each rehearsal is filmed in a very specific way.

There are eight rehearsals and they each have a different theme. In each case I had to come up with a directorial approach to bring this out. I thought a lot about the duels in BARRY LINDON by Stanley Kubrick, or those in SCARAMOUCHE, the magnificent film by George Sidney. From one combat to another, the advantage changes hands. At the start, Gauthier gets it all wrong: he hasn’t captured the character, he’s overacting.

Luchini and Wilson are wonderful because they agreed to display the mistakes, the groping around. In the first reading, Fabrice was supposed to act in an excessive style which he then realizes is false. In fact, he’s brilliant. Even in excess, even in anger, he delivers a true Alceste. Then, when he’s contained, it becomes even more moving. The viewer can appreciate what’s gone into getting to that point. We go inside the actors’ back kitchen. This educational dimension was at the heart of the project.

There’s something fantastic about seeing them grope around.

People can be irritated by the narcissistic side of certain actors, but you just have to see them practicing their craft and you can appreciate their selfless side, the passion they have for words. Serge and Gauthier know that Molière is bigger than them, and they put themselves at his service. They are driven by a mission to convey.

Each emerges from this confrontation a better person.

I wanted to bring them back to their respective cores. Serge strips Gauthier of his veneer of TV star, and Gauthier gives Serge back his desire. He goes from that sort of vindictive, painful misanthropy at the beginning, to a lofty detachment. At the end, on the beach, he’s reconciled with himself. These two men did each other good.

Let's turn to Maya Sansa's character.

In this variation on "The Misanthrope", we needed a Célimène. But in the isolation of the island, it was impossible to make her a seductress as in Molière. I went for the opposite: Maya Sansa's character is even more misanthropic than Serge!

Francesca is an Italian who's come to the island to sell a house in the wake of a painful divorce. She is wounded, still raw. She says we're all going to die, that our flesh will go flabby, we'll rot in the grave and everything will end up as dust. She's a sort of female Cioran. But despite all that, the character had to be attractive, and I thought of Maya Sansa who I'd really liked in *BUONGIORNO NOTTE* by Marco Bellocchio, and *VOYEZ COMME ILS DANSENT* by Claude Miller.

The trio makes one think of JULES AND JIM by François Truffaut.

That was inevitable: as soon as some friends ride bikes in a film, it's *JULES AND JIM*!

Why did you include Zoé, the porn actress?

The character of Zoé serves another function. Since *CYCLING WITH MOLIÈRE* is a film about actors, I thought it would be fun to introduce a porn actor – a sort of ground zero of the profession – for whom Serge and Gauthier set a trap by asking her to read some alexandrines. But something happens with her. You can clearly see she's no Sarah Bernhardt, but the freshness with which she reads the verses produces an unexpected emotion.

Zoé also has another purpose; she brings something contemporary to the film. I'm fascinated by those interviews with porn actresses who talk quite seriously about their craft and their aspirations. All that, while remaining totally blasé about the rapport with sexuality, as if there was absolutely no problem.

The Île de Ré is magnified in the film, and sometimes slightly mocked.

There's that tirade when Lambert says: "I hate the Île de Ré, the blond kids on their bikes, the Catholic families, etc." In the film, the island has two faces: there's the out-of-the-way place with the pouring rain, and then there's the island with its hyper-civility. What's more, Gauthier points out Serge's contradiction in withdrawing to this urbane location. Serge didn't head to Siberia on Lake Baikal. The film needed this social dimension. In a certain way, it's a transposition of Molière's *Court of Versailles*. At the end of the play, *Alceste* cuts all ties with social life.

How do you work with an actor you've known for 20 years?

In fact, Fabrice's character in *Alceste* is a far cry from his role in *THE WOMEN ON THE 6TH FLOOR*, and I found it very stimulating to explore this other dimension of his nature. Contrary to how he is perceived from the outside, Fabrice doesn't intellectualize his characters. He has a wicked instinct to get round this cliché, to not act "what's on paper". You know he has energy, and how on stage he can magnetize an audience of 800, but in cinema his acting style is the contrary. He doesn't control anything, he empties himself. He who is so associated in the public's mind with the words and the text would have been a marvelous actor in silent movies. I loved filming his look, the way he receives his partners' lines.

Did you leave a lot of room for improvisation?

The subject of the film is the actor's freedom, so it would have been absurd to forbid them from improvising. Fabrice and Lambert threw themselves into parodies of ways of delivering alexandrines. But I didn't want to draw on their own lives – they remain fictional characters. I don't like the way certain directors want to expose the actors, to break them down, strip them bare. To me, that seems like a power fantasy.

All the same, CYCLING WITH MOLIÈRE deals with a struggle for power.

I realized this almost despite myself. Ten years ago I directed NIGHTSHIFT, about a perverse game of manipulation between two workers in a bottle factory. Strangely, despite the difference in setting, there's something of that theme here. Lambert's character comes to put himself in Luchini's hands, and expects to be put to the test. He is vulnerable because he is doing the asking, and Serge toys with his desire. The film will show how he frees himself from this dependence. It's a light version of a serious theme.

CAST

Serge Tanneur.....	Fabrice LUCHINI
Gauthier Valence.....	Lambert WILSON
Francesca.....	Maya SANSA
Zoé.....	Laurie BORDESOULES
Christine.....	Camille JAPY
Tamara.....	Annie MERCIER
Meynard.....	Ged MARLON
Taxi driver.....	Stéphane WOJTOWICZ
Madame Francon.....	Christine MURILLO
Raphaëlle La Puisaye.....	Josiane STOLÉRU
Madame Bichet.....	Edith LE MERDY

CREW

Director.....	Philippe LE GUAY
Producer.....	Anne-Dominique TOUSSAINT
Based on an original idea by.....	Fabrice LUCHINI and Philippe LE GUAY
Screenplay.....	Philippe LE GUAY
Original music.....	Jorge ARRIAGADA
Director of photography.....	Jean-Claude LARRIEU
Editor.....	Monica COLEMAN
Set designer.....	Françoise DUPERTUIS
Costume designer.....	Elisabeth TAVERNIER
Costumes.....	Anne AUTRAN-DUMOUR
Sound.....	Laurent POIRIER – Vincent GUILLON
Mixing.....	Emmanuel CROSET
Production manager.....	Jean-Jacques ALBERT
First assistant director.....	Hubert ENGAMMARE
Make-up.....	Michelle CONSTANTINIDES
Hairdressing.....	Milou SANNER
Casting director.....	Tatiana VIALLE
Continuity.....	Sylvie KOECHLIN
Unit manager.....	Didier CARREL
Director of post-production.....	Matthieu BLED
Coproduction.....	LES FILMS DES TOURNELLES
 PATHÉ
 APPALOOSA DÉVELOPPEMENT
 FRANCE 2 CINÉMA
In association with.....	SOFICINÉMA 8
 SOFICINÉMA 9
With the participation of.....	FRANCE TÉLÉVISIONS
 CANAL +
 CINÉ +
With the backing of.....	Département de la Charente-Maritime
 and the Région Poitou-Charentes
In partnership with.....	The CNC