



Une vieille maîtresse

The Last Mistress

Catherine Breillat

FRANCE, 2007
French

114 minutes ■ Colour/35mm
Production Company: **Flach Film/**
CB Films/France 3 Cinema/
Studio Canal/Buskin Film
Producer: **Jean-François Lepetit**
Screenplay: **Catherine Breillat**, based on
the novel by **Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly**
Cinematographer: **Yorgos Arvanitis**
Editor: **Pascale Chavance**
Production Designer:
François-Renaud Labarthe
Sound: **Yves Osmu, Yves Levéque,**
Sylvain Lasseur, Roland Duboué,
Emmanuel Croset
Principal Cast: **Asia Argento,**
Fu'ad Aït Aattou, Roxane Mesquida,
Claude Sarraute, Yolande Moreau

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International Sales Agent: **Pyramide**
International
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Heroically returning to the cinema after a near-fatal stroke, Catherine Breillat has lost none of her provocative brio. In fact, she has taken on the greatest logistical challenge of her career with *Une vieille maîtresse*, a gorgeous period piece that took eight months to shoot and cost as much as all her other films put together.

The film represents what one might call a "consistent change" for Breillat. While it does not engage in the shock tactics of *À ma sœur!* or *Anatomie de l'enfer*, she is still very much interested in women and sex, and their centrality to any discourse about gender, power and social construction. She also loves telling a titillating story – and this is a great one. Roughly inspired by early nineteenth-century writer Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly's notorious novel of sexual intrigue, *Une vieille maîtresse* concerns the attempts of sexual libertine Vellini to interrupt the plans of her dissolute young lover, Ryno de Marigny, to marry the virtuous gem of the French aristocracy, Hermangarde (Roxane Mesquida). The film plays out through a series of extended conversations among aristocrats, deploying that hilarious and sophisticated dialect of French sexual intrigue associated with *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and its ilk. These wonderful exchanges are punctuated by bestial sex, when passion overrides courtly manners and good intentions get debased by lust.

Breillat has found a soulmate in the larger-than-life Asia Argento, who thrills as Vellini, the half-Spanish, foul-mouthed trollop of the Paris salon. She rips the screen

apart with her passion and rage, making quick work of delicate Marigny (played by exquisite newcomer Fu'ad Aït Aattou, whose face is straight out of Caravaggio). Characteristically, Breillat creates a counterpoint to the heat between her actors with a cool, dispassionate camera, always a bit distant, observant and wary. The result is a magical journey that only an iconoclastic master like Breillat could deliver.

We also take a particular pride in this film as Argento and Breillat first met in Toronto at the Festival and discussed making the film here; its screening marks a kind of reunion and closes an artistically meaningful circle.

■ Noah Cowan



Catherine Breillat was born in Bressuire, France. She began her career as a writer, publishing her first novel, *L'Homme facile*, at the age of seventeen. After pursuing acting and writing several novels and screenplays, she made her feature film directorial

debut with *Une vraie jeune fille* (75). Her other films include *Tapage nocturne* (79), *36 fillette* (88), *Sale comme un ange* (90), the anthology film *À propos de Nice, la suite* (segment, 95), *Parfait amour!* (96), *Romance* (99), *À ma sœur!* (00), *Breve traversée* (01), *Sex Is Comedy* (02), *Anatomie de l'enfer* (04) and *Une vieille maîtresse* (07).

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