

CAROLINE
LOEB

PASCAL
GREGGORY

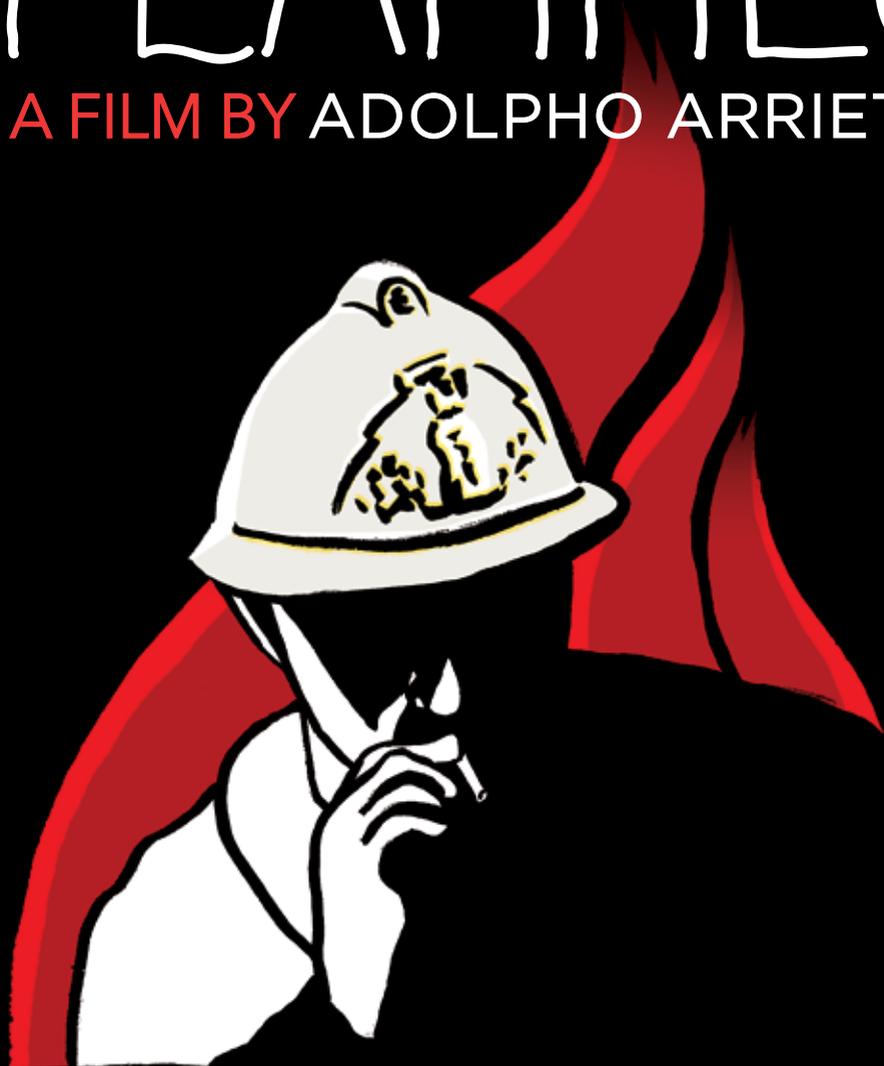
XAVIER
GRANDES

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MASCOLO

ISABEL
GARCÍA LORCA

FLAMMES

A FILM BY ADOLPHO ARRIETTA





capricci presents

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FLAMMES

A FILM BY ADOLPHO ARRIETTA

France | 1978 | 88 min | DCP | colour



Presskit and pictures available on www.capricci.fr

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SYNOPSIS



Barbara, a little girl, lives in an old country house with her father and her preceptor. One night, she dreams of a fireman coming through her window...

Flammes is a inhabited film, haunted by fantasies, visited by ghosts, hold by the remembrance of a decadent literature legacy, and brought back to life thanks to a cinematographic grace split from the inside.

Considered in Europe as a pioneer of independent cinema, Adolpho Arrietta, takes his inspiration from a poetic language that reminds Jean Cocteau's one. Ten years before "La Movida", A. Arrietta invented a surrealistic world populated by underground figures such as angels, transsexuals, and firemen.

INTERVIEW

with Adolpho Arrietta



Extracts from *Adolpho Arrietta, a piece of your dream..*

Underground Paris-Madrid 1966-1995

by Philippe Azoury (published by Capricci)

Do you remember how the *Flammes* project came about?

After *Le Chateau de Pointilly*, making a film about the relationship between father and daughter was still on my mind. Sade permeates *Le Chateau de Pointilly*, and *Flammes* stems more or less directly from there. The starting point of both films is the same: father and daughter. But afterwards, this little girl grows up and becomes a young woman.

The same actor plays the father in both films, Dionys Mascolo (Xavier Grandès also plays the object of fantasy in both films). I do not know how I got the idea for the other character, a preceptor. The story could easily have been a love triangle between father, daughter and preceptor. But, as if that was not enough, I had a vision of a fireman...

A vision?

Yes, a vision. The fireman just appeared. I was the most surprised of all. I remember it quite well. I was lying on my bed as usual

writing, and then suddenly the image of a firefighter just imposed itself. It just popped up and its appearance changed everything. Everything started to move and evolve.

The fireman started giving it a much more interesting overall sense. As long as I stayed in the triangle, I was moving through a typical pattern, or worse than that, a psychological pattern. So the fireman came in and swept out all the psychology. He and all the madness that his uniform provokes made it feel like a story that was finally, truly interesting: an immoral story.

The fireman's fetishism

Except for Xavier, the firemen are real?

There are some real ones and some actors. The real firemen were very funny because, they'd never acted on screen in their lives but they got it all, right away, as



if they had been doing it forever. They were especially good at understanding the sexual innuendo in the story. They knew that we were telling a perverse story. For once a film told the story of their fantasies... The real firemen are the ones who visit the house. The handsome one, who comes to see Caroline instead of Xavier, was an actor who'd also been a model for Saint Laurent: Jaime Santiago. The other firemen are from the nearest firehouse.

When Barbara told the fireman not to move, “stay like that”. What is going on in this scene?

She wants to retrieve the exact image she had of a firefighter from when she was a little girl. She found the same position and staged it so that it was an exact replica of her first vision. Life begins to imitate the dream.

Is the “disguise” key to the film?

The film is openly fetishist. The key to the whole story is probably in a phrase two thirds of the way into the film when Xavier and Barbara are wondering what they would do if they had the courage to go away. Then Xavier, in a little timid voice says, “We can still pretend...” Their doubt is legitimate. If the character playing Xavier was no longer a fireman it would no longer make sense and perhaps she wouldn't tolerate him anymore. She knows it, and he knows it. You see the uniform and Xavier say also like a clue, “We can

still pretend. What else can we do?” The meaning of the film is there. In place of reality there are games, disguises, the fetishism of the disguises, and this game makes everything else bearable. There is no eroticism outside the game, outside of the disguise. The essence of eroticism is fetishistic. It is very personal, and without general rules. Sade inspired *Le Château de Pointilly*. But with *Flammes*, I dug to an even deeper place.

Did the house lead to any constraints in staging?

First of all, I like nothing better than two-character compositions. As for the house, the rooms were so varied that the scenes distributed themselves around the rooms. Of course, the size of the rooms influenced shots and imposed some choices in terms of angles and framing. I tried to be faithful to the space. Barbara's bedroom was chosen and you could see a hallway from there. I didn't try to choose a more practical or more convenient hallway. I wanted to use the hallway overlooking the room, once I chose the room...

It is really a haunted house. People go in and don't come back out.

Yes, that's right. I had a house with precise dimensions in mind. Building it would have cost me an arm and leg and this house had a very literary climate. Anyone can invent and get caught up in the film, in a suspension of time and it's not entirely my doing. I only considered dimensions: how to cut scenes, place characters, where rooms led, their proportions - very down to earth things. Dominique Hennequin and I also thought about sound mixing.

The key to the whole story is probably in the phrase: “We can still pretend...”

Inside was hard and stuffy, and outside was airier with crickets and summer night skies. We had to keep the contrast from getting too cumbersome.

You already knew when you were writing that everything would be indoors?

Yes, I imagined it as a piece of theater. With its entrances and exits. You noted that this is a film in which there are countless doors that open or close - ritual appearance and disappearance. You choose your scene; you decide when to leave... That's probably why I worked the dialogues so much. For a moment I thought I'd do *Flammes* on stage. For the first time and beginning with the written stage, the theatre was the horizon for my work. I see Dionys mostly as a theater actor too. I was very interested in what Marguerite Duras was doing with Renaud & Barrault: *Des journées entières dans les arbres*. This film comes from the theater but it is still very pure cinematography. Rivette, also, no doubt...

The taste of the beauty

It seems that you aren't very orthodox, nothing is forbidden with you...

I let the scenes decide. The scene knows the truth how it should be filmed. You have to trust to the scene and not approach it with an established grid or style. Each particular character must be listened to and understood. I give them each a chance. I am not a dictator. Perhaps because I'm too attached to my actors. I'm also very obsessive and know how each actor needs to be specifically lit. You have to learn how to look at the actors. I have a tendency to

I let the scenes decide. The scene knows the truth how it should be filmed.

want them to look as beautiful as possible on film. I love Dionys Mascolo's nose and forehead, so he is often in profile. Caroline Loeb has powerful expressions; I film her straight on. Close-ups suit Xavier well. Pascal Greggory has a very harmonious silhouette and a face that goes well in three-quarter screen, slightly tilted.

Biette, Narboni, Daney, all the critics speak about your precision in directing the voice, your good ear...

This precision comes from a gentle atmosphere I'd put in place on the shoot. During rehearsals I let them go satisfied with the softness that emanated from their voices, their unity and the chemistry between them. What I truly controlled were the silences. I asked the actors to count to five between a question and a response. I controlled the spaces between phrases this way. I found the tone immediately like this. Silences prevent people from climbing too high too fast. I'd chosen the actors with this in mind. I liked their voices; I knew they could be gentle monsters.

Did you always envisage *Flammes* in color?

At that time, black and white was the standard, and color was something exotic - especially in the sphere of underground. Garrel, Akerman, Schroeter, Eustache shot mostly in black and white. Warhol did too from time to time. But I was never



really satisfied with black and white. It was the standard and I wanted the luxury symbol of color. You can play with color. My paintings are very colorful too. But in *Flammes*, I do not remember seeking out a color in particular. I didn't ask Caroline to choose particular garments. There is shadow play. For example when the preceptor gives the door a kick to go from her room to Caroline's, she passes through a small black area. Thierry, who was anything but conventional, didn't think it worthwhile to light that spot, and he was right. He intelligently lights only the characters, allowing for plenty of shadows all around them. The shadow is essential material and we've lost the habit of using it in movie making.

Did you used to cut your movies so much before *Flammes*?

Indeed, there are many frames, and very classic cuts. I wanted it too be harmonious. It was thought out well before, almost mathematically. The changes in frames, axis and scale respect the rules of classic cinema – of those films that Langlois shows at the Cinémathèque. I see *Flammes* as a classic movie based on a dream project. This was not new to me. When Lotte Eisner, Langlois' companion, saw *Le Jouet criminel*, she told me, "This film is made of dream material." It is a phrase that I've always kept with me. It defined my relationship with cinema, especially editing.

The shadow is essential material and we've lost the habit of using it in movie making.

I could afford to be in a readily conventional form because it allowed me to stay on this dreamlike thread. I never believed in this film trend in the 1970s – dreams filmed at full speed, with accelerated edits and lights rigged to a maximum. I prefer very sovereign lighting and pictorial framing. Very calm. A painterly framing.

"A piece of your dream"

Did you always intend to start *Flammes* with a dream scene?

Yes. Even if I don't exactly call it a "dream." It is more like a vision that happens at that moment when you just wake up, where the phantom of the dream is still present, staring at you. I wanted to start the film at this very haunted moment. It is not a dream; it is the end of a dream... And besides, she says: "I saw the fireman," and not "I dreamt of the fireman."

The sentence that the father said to the little girl in the prologue: "A piece your dream got stuck on the glass..."

I love the idea that a dream is something that sticks. The first photographs were made on plates and the image was sort of glued to the surface. Celluloid is also a kind of skin or surface onto which we paste our dreams. I am a filmmaker of dreams. I'd be lying to claim otherwise.

When Claire, the preceptor, vanishes you film her dream...

Yes, this dream is filmed from behind the back. She is saved by a firefighter but you don't know for sure if it's her. At the same moment, she returns to Barbara's



fantasy. Their rapport is based on the unspoken; it is very ambiguous. You feel there is something maybe lesbian, but also domination, masochism. I left it in the dark. Her harsh air combined with submissiveness and the way she runs after Barbara, bows before her should be sufficient to get an idea of what could happen how it could happen. I chose Isabel García Lorca, the niece of García Lorca for her beautiful but cold severity. I felt she would be good for this type of suggestion.

After Barbara asks Caroline: "You never wanted to make love to a firefighter?" There is a strange cut to a stormy night, which we think at first might be a representation of the dream in question...

This transition was less powerful at first - less strange, less ambiguous. You just saw the

face of the preceptor with no answer. I actually removed the shot of the face and went directly to the storm. It is more troubling (especially since it is absolutely artificial) and it's as if she'd touched on an extremely dramatic point with this question or like a child's tale: the gods are making their anger heard, a bit like that... It's a terrifying effect that was used in some films of the 1930s or 1940s. I enjoy doing that. And since there is a dream format in place you don't necessarily leave this world: the dream, the vision and everything that comes from the unconsciousness. It all infuses the strange atmosphere in the film. I really like this ambiguity. ●

ADOLPHO ARRIETTA

Biography



Born in Madrid in a wealthy, bourgeois family, Arrietta discovered cinema at the age of seven years old when he was given a “Cinematik” that he used to project his own cartoons. At thirteen he started painting more seriously encouraged by his mother, a piano prodigy, and he also discovered *Orphée* et *Le Cuirasse Potemkine*. In 1964, at the age of twenty-two, he made his first short film, *Le Crime de la toupie*, with his friend and actor Xavier Major who appeared in all his films to follow. *L'imitation de l'ange* was shot two years later - an explosive film which owes as much to Rimbaud as to Vigo. It was also the beginning of a move to Paris - Adolpho and Xavier lived at the Hotel des Pyrenees, at Saint-Germain-des-Prés. In 1969, Marguerite Duras was stunned to discover *Le Jouet criminel* with Florence Delay and Jean Marais. His method of “distribution” never changed. His movies were self-produced and made without a script. The editing was done in parallel to the shoot.

He started shooting another film in Duras's apartment, a wild tale inspired by Sade's *Le Château de Pointilly* starring Dionys Mascolo and a young Flora, who'd never before acted: Françoise Lebrun. In the wake of May 68 Arrietta was the first underground filmmaker. His fairytale universe has a different type of angel: his transvestite friends, and the Gazolines

were the heroes of *Intrigues de Sylvia Couski* (1974) and *Tam-Tam* (1976). The themes of Arrietta's cinema start taking form: artists who dream of becoming their own works of art, the body as the site of creation, identity reinvented.

Arrietta shot *Flammes* in 1978. He was not the producer this time and Saint-Germain was no longer his territory but he was still behind the camera. For the first time, the screenplay was worked out months in advance and he revisited his major themes: idealism, play and cross-dressing, fetish and burning desire.

Today Arrietta is largely ignored, in Spain and France alike. He is, at best, the discreet passion of a scattered few throughout the world. His name is not often enough alongside those of his cinematic kin: Eustache, Garrel, Rivette, Schroeter, Warhol, Anger, Smith. His films (like with those of Biette, Vecchiali Guiguet) are difficult to find and are missing from even the most serious moviegoers lists. Having been featured on the cover of the *Cabiers du cinema*, he has long and ardently been supported by Marguerite Duras and Alain Pacadis. In 2003 he was one of the heroes of Paris and writer Enrique Vila-Matas. Warhol regularly asked to see his films. Yet none of this has made Arrietta less of an unknown.

Filmography



- 1966** *El crimen de la pirindola* (Spain, 19')
- 1968** *La Imitación del ángel* (Spain, 20')
- 1969** *Le Jouet criminel* (France, 37')
- 1972** *Pointilly* (France, 28')
- 1972** *Le Château de Pointilly* (France, 37')
- 1974** *Les Intrigues de Sylvia Couski* (France, 71')
- 1976** *Tam Tam* (France, 59')
- 1978** *Flammes* (France, 88')
- 1983** *Grenouilles* (France, 37')
- 1989** *Kiki* (Spain, 22')
- 1990** *Merlin* (Spain, 59')
- 2004** *Eco y Narciso* (Spain, 19')
- 2006** *Vacanza Permanente* (Italy-Spain, 40')
- 2009** *Buñuelino Cocktail* (Spain, 9')



technical and artistic
INFORMATION



With

Caroline Loeb: Barbara
Xavier Grandes: the fireman
Dionys Mascolo: Louis, Barbara's father
Isabel García Lorca: Claire, the private tutor
Pascal Greggory: Paul, Barbara's brother
Jeffrey Carey: Jim
Marilú Marini: Barbara's mother
Jaime Santiago: the second fireman
Paquita Paquin: the first personal tutor
Eloïse Bennett: Barbara (child)

Length: 88 minutes

Country: France

Year: 1978

Language: French with English subtitles

Original format: 16 mm

Screening format: DCP

Image ratio: 1.37

Sound: Stéréo

Director and writer: Adolpho Arrietta

Cinematographer: Thierry Arbogast

Sound: M. Pardon, Dominique Hennequin

Music: œuvres de Maurice Ravel

Editing: Adolpho Arrietta

Production: Anatole Dauman

Producer: INA

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