

Document Citation

Title	'Alias Betty'
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Wellspring Media, Inc.</i>
Date	
Type	press kit
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	24
Subjects	Garcia, Nicole (1956), Oran, Algeria Rendell, Ruth (1930), London, Great Britain Kiberlain, Sandrine (1968), Paris, France Miller, Claude (1942), Paris, France Seigner, Mathilde (1968)
Film Subjects	Betty Fisher et autres histoires (Alias Betty), Miller, Claude, 2001



WELLSPRING

**Winner – Best Actress- Sandrine Kiberlain,
Nicole Garcia and Mathilde Seigner
Winner – International Critics' (FIPRESCI) Prize
Montreal International World Film Festival**

**Winner – Best Actress- Sandrine Kiberlain, Nicole Garcia
Chicago International Film Festival**

“ALIAS BETTY”

a Claude Miller film

**starring
Sandrine Kiberlain
Nicole Garcia
Mathilde Seigner**

**A Wellspring Release
101 Minutes. Not Yet Rated by the MPAA.
35mm. Color. 1:85. Dolby SR.**

Based on the novel *The Tree Of Hands*, by Ruth Rendell

www.wellspring.com/aliasbetty

PRESS CONTACT:

Sophie Gluck/Vivian Huang
Wang & Gluck

PHONE: 212-226-3269

FAX: 212-941-1425

EMAIL:

Wangluck@ix.netcom.com

Fredell Pogodin/Chris Regan
Fredell Pogodin & Associates

PHONE: 323-931-7300

FAX: 323-931-7354

Email:

pr@fredellpogodin.com

DISTRIBUTOR CONTACT:

Suzanne Fedak

Wellspring

PHONE: 212-685-6777

ext. 123

FAX: 212-545-9931

The Cast

Betty.....	Sandrine KIBERLAIN
Margot.....	Nicole GARCIA
Carole.....	Mathilde SEIGNER
François.....	Luck MERVIL
Alex.....	Édouard BAER
Édouard.....	Stéphane FREISS
René l'Arménien.....	Yves JACQUES
Doctor Castang.....	Roschdy ZEM
José.....	Alexis CHATRIAN
Milo.....	Michaël ABITEBOUL
Joseph.....	Arthur SETBON
Madame Barsky.....	Consuelo de HAVILAND
Monsieur Barsky.....	Pascal BONITZER
Martinaud.....	Yves VERHOEVEN

The Filmmakers

Directed by.....Claude MILLER
Written by.....Claude MILLER
Produced by.....Annie MILLER, Yves MARMION
(UGC YM, Les Films de la Boissière, Go Films)
Co-produced by.....Nicole Robert (France 2 Cinéma)
Director of Photography.....Christophe POLLOCK
Art Director.....Jean-Pierre Kohut SVELKO
Editor.....Véronique LANGE
Sound.....Claude LA HAYE

* * *

Short Synopsis

Betty (Sandrine Kiberlain), a young single mother flush with the success of her first novel, suffers the loss of her young son in an accident. Betty's clinically disturbed mother Margot (Nicole Garcia) takes it upon herself to cheer her grieving daughter by snatching a small child, José, at random from a poor neighborhood. Writer-director Claude Miller (adapting a novel by Ruth Rendell) uses this nightmare collision to tour the worlds of sorrow which coincide with Betty's. José's mother Carole (Mathilde Seigner) is a highly sexed bar maid on a downward spiral. Her live-in lover François (Luck Mervil) is a gentle Frenchman of African descent whom the police blame for José's disappearance. He in turn blames Alex (Edouard Baer), a charming forger and scam-artist who may or may not be José's biological father.

Betty, too distraught at first to undo her mother's criminal act, gradually recognizes that keeping the boy will save him from further abuse and a dismal life. This is emotionally confirmed by the ferocity with which José clings to her and, as events build to a climax, validated by the ring of pressures that suspensefully close in on her. On the benign side there are the romantic attentions of a gentle surgeon (Roschdy Zem) -- on the deadly side there is the blackmail threatened by her ex-husband (Stephane Freiss). Both men are in a position to expose her secret.

The collision between Betty's universe and José's is fraught with danger, yet filled in the same breath with a strange benevolence. Betty's inner world as a novelist -- an order into which she has almost desperately escaped in answer to the childhood tortures she suffered at the hands of her own mother -- has been punctured through an outrageous (but instinctively just) act on the part of that same mother. To a degree, her crazy mother has served an angelic function by bringing Betty and José together. Their coinciding worlds are mainly bridged *by* coincidence -- but as Miller demonstrates (with a robust precision that recalls not only filmmakers like Krystof Kieslowski but novelists like Milan Kundera) "coincidence" is not merely the narrative trick of die-hard romantics, but a phenomenon of nature with healing properties

Long Synopsis

We're on a speeding train. A mother and her young daughter are passengers. A smile is exchanged between the two, but then -- in a flash -- mother attacks daughter with a pair of scissors, puncturing daughter's hand.

The scar of that attack is still visible as we cut to the grown hand of Betty (Sandrine Kiberlain) a number of years later, as she goes to meet her mother Margot (Nicole Garcia) at the airport. To the world, Betty is "Betty Fisher," best-selling novelist. Margot still lobbies for her given name, Brigitte, which Betty has always resented. Her mother's incessant, self-absorbed chatter and the memory of that ghastly attack with the scissors are somewhat mollified by the knowledge that Margot suffers from *porphyry*, a violence-promoting blood imbalance which prompted the famous madness of England's King George, and can now be controlled with medication. But much as the two women have come over the years to a partial reconciliation, the sutures on Betty's hand are far from the only scar left by her upbringing.

Betty's young son Joseph (Arthur Setbon) watches the tension between them with lively, curious eyes. He refuses to say a word to his grandmother. "He must be wondering why you talk all the time," Betty tells Margot. Indeed, the only words he speaks in the entire film are the ones he gives in answer to a question about whether he's warm as Betty tucks him in for an afternoon nap. He replies "I am." Those two words have the significance of a ghostly assertion, given that he dies a few moments later. After his mother has left the room, his eyes light on a tiny bird perched upon the windowsill. He gets out of bed and climbs after it.

It is Margot who discovers him. Betty is so beside herself with grief that she collapses at the hospital, blacking out for nearly a month. Margot, with a strength so lucid it almost seems out of character, acts for that time as her gentle caretaker.

Unfortunately, when Betty finally peels herself out of bed and faces the world, she makes two terrifying discoveries: 1) Her mother hasn't told *anybody* about little Joseph's death, not even his estranged father; and 2) By crude way of cheering Betty up, Margot has brought home a small boy (Alexis Chatrian) she plucked at random from the street of a poor neighborhood, as a replacement "son." This is so doubly typical of her mother's nuttiness that the otherwise capable Betty is reduced to a childlike trance of

inaction, at first. What's more -- in a coincidence that startles both women the little stranger's name 'José' turns out to be a variation on her son's name, *Joseph*.

We've had one quick glimpse of this boy, before: When Betty first collapsed at the news of her son's death, José happened to be among the other patients in the emergency room. For a brief instant, as quick as that bird which appeared on Joseph's windowsill, he kneels beside the unconscious Betty in sympathy. And then is led away.

This moment comes at the end of the film's first chapter, titled "The Story of Joseph." What follows is a new chapter, in a new environment altogether "The Story of José."

José's mother Carole (Mathilde Seigner) is a highly sexed barmaid drifting downhill toward an uncertain future. His father's identity is unknown. The police, having little else to go on when investigating José's disappearance, menace Carole's live-in lover, a gentle, jobless Frenchman of African descent named François (Luck Mervil). It was he who'd taken the boy to the hospital the day he had his first encounter with Betty, and where, according to the physician's reports, José was treated for heavy bruises. François denies he has ever beaten the little boy. The police assume José was murdered.

François, feeling wronged ("The Story of François"), nurses a bitter suspicion that the real culprit is Alex (Édouard Baer), a charming forger who is only one of the many thugs and layabouts in Carole's busy circle of lusting admirers. François tails Alex to the house where he is being kept in style, and -- as it happens, that very morning -- being dumped without preamble by a wealthy older woman. She doesn't leave him any money or food but, in a last twist of the knife, tells him he's free to use the house while she's away on holiday.

Alex, who may or may not be little José's father ("The Story of Alex"), is encouraged by Carole to avenge himself through taking full advantage of his ex-mistress's mansion. Using his gifts as a forger, he doctors a trove of deeds and documents and then puts the place up for sale. (In a nice bit of rhymed exposition that underscores his possible paternity, José reveals to Betty a gift for drawing that's in unconscious harmony with Alex's dexterity at faking passports.) Almost immediately Alex attracts a Russian couple with deep pockets. "You don't ask where that money comes from," a chum advises him. But while waiting for the deal to close, he's forced to negotiate a quick, secretive affair with the buyer's cheating wife.

Back at Betty's house ("The story of Betty"), matters are growing painfully complicated. Margot has, with mad purpose, sent José's original overcoat out with the trash, and (to Betty's horror) has dressed him in Joseph's. For awhile, Betty was able to cling to her mother's flimsy lie that José is the son of some friends who are off on holiday. But TV news reports -- filled with images of José, and glimpses of a glum Carole fielding questions from the police -- snap Betty out of her daughterly trance and alert her that she's become the unwilling party to a criminal act.

What's worse, as she gives José a bath, she discovers his torso is covered with ghastly bruises. Betty can intuit that these were dealt by Carole, in fits of drunken rage. (Across town, Carole, who has no illusions about her shortcomings as a mother, confesses an intuition of her own to Alex: "I have this funny feeling. Maybe José's safe and sound, after all. Maybe he found another family. A mother. A good mother, this time." Sensing Carole is, in her violence and self-absorbed nature, a shadow of Margot, Betty begins to think seriously about keeping José.

She resists, for a time. There comes an opportune moment when she takes her mother back to the airport, and sees her off: It would be so easy now to leave José in a crowded area, where the police could easily find him, and no trail could lead them to her. But just as she's done this and is walking away, José calls out her name -- the name she chose for herself -- at the top of his lungs: "Betty!!!!" He comes running and she embraces him, making blushing apologies to the two security guards who've taken an interest. The maternal connection is too absolute, now; She takes José home.

Although Betty is now convinced that keeping the boy will save him from further abuse and a dismal life, she realizes that this is not how the world would see it were she ever caught.

The threat of exposure comes in two forms. The first is oddly benevolent: Dr. Jerome Castang (Roschdy Zem), a kindly surgeon who admires Betty's novel and had tried hard to save her son, chances across her while she is out shopping with José. He is solicitous, plainly eager to court her, but she feels obliged to keep him at arm's length, recycling her mother's lie about José being the son of neighbors. Dr. Castang isn't troubled; he persists in his courtship, and seems so trusting of Betty's judgement that one can imagine she might eventually be able to reveal her secret to him.

Unfortunately, Betty's ex-husband Édouard (Stephane Freiss) is a neglectful, deadbeat poet who chooses this, of all moments, to show up on her doorstep. ("The Story of Édouard.") He has been so much out of the picture that he even refuses, at first,

to believe Joseph is dead. He blithely assumes José is his son, and that Betty, with her talent for fiction, is just making up wild stories to punish him. Édouard is out of money -- that's why he's shown up. With Betty being a successful author, he reasons, this is as good a time as any to transform himself into a responsible father.

However, when he sees José's picture in the paper, he not only realizes Betty is telling him the truth, he grasps what a legal predicament she's in and sees a chance to avenge fate with a little blackmail.

As these colliding pressures drive Betty to take decisive action -- in a climactic chapter entitled "The Last Day" -- writer-director Claude Miller, working from a novel by Ruth Rendell, deliberately stands traditional film noir on its head. After all we've been shown a world in which larceny, cheating, kidnapping and blackmail are licensed behaviors. Most of the characters (even Betty's mother) commit such acts with nary a backward glance. Whereas Betty, ever upright, ever responsible, is obliged to transgress the most radically against her own nature, acting boldly in defiance of both the law and her peace of mind, all in the name of motherhood.

"I like working with characters who push the margins," Claude Miller has said. "They reveal something about ourselves -- [we who are] supposedly 'normal,' but really abnormal, like everyone else." Drawn to Rendell's novel because she writes suspensefully but resists the usual dynamics of hero and villain, Miller spins a variety of fates at the climax of ALIAS BETTY -- some grisly, others benign.

Édouard's efforts to blackmail Betty bring him into direct contact with Carole, as well as the many treacherous imperatives which drive the denizens of her world. François arms himself, perhaps to shoot his way out of the tight corner the police have put him in. Carole's boss Milo (Michael Abiteboul), who alone among the characters has never had a chapter to himself, has been burning with secret passion for her from afar -- and is now bursting to impress himself upon her once and for all.

Betty's own rush to the airport puts her on a parallel path, not only with Alex, who is escaping the country with a briefcase full of loot from his crooked house sale, but also the detective, Martinaud (Yves Verhoeven), who led investigation of José's disappearance and is now hoping to take his family on vacation to Singapore -- Betty's destination.

A symphonic roundabout of fates ensues. There's a buoyancy of spirit; even as some characters die. One corpse even falls upon an upward-bound escalator, an image in keeping with that long-ago moment when Joseph died, innocently climbing after a

bird. Death tends to be an ascent, in the cosmos Miller envisions. Indeed, it's no accident that much of the climax is set at the airport, where so much of the story began, and where halfway through Betty made her great decision not to abandon José to his fate, but to keep him. If she has her way, flight will be a life-giving transformation.

As busy as the climax is, it is anchored by the power of Betty's relationship with her mother. Mad, and maddening as Margot has been -- demanding, criticizing, using her illness to dodge responsibility for the havoc she has wrought on Betty's life -- it has become increasingly clear that her crazy act of bringing Betty and José together is the only expression of love of which she is capable.

"All women are not made equal when it comes to maternal instinct," as Miller has pointed out. "It was important for both Nicole Garcia and I that her act be perceived as an act of love."

The collision between Betty's universe and José's is fraught with mortal danger, but filled in the same breath with a strange benevolence. Betty's orderly inner world as a novelist -- an order into which she has almost desperately escaped in answer to the childhood tortures she suffered at the hands of her own mother -- has been punctured through an outrageous (but instinctively just) act on the part of that same mother. To a degree, her crazy mother has served an angelic function by bringing Betty and José together.

Their coinciding worlds are mainly bridged by coincidence -- but as Miller demonstrates (with a robust precision that recalls not only filmmakers like Krystof Kieslowski but novelists like Milan Kundera) "coincidence" is not merely the narrative trick of die-hard romantics, but a phenomenon of nature with healing properties.

About the Writer/Director

Claude MILLER

Award-winning writer/director Claude Miller started out as François Truffaut's assistant. Miller began directing films in the mid-seventies and is best known to U.S. audiences for *THE LITTLE THIEF* from a screenplay by Truffaut. His films include *THE CLASS TRIP* winner of the Jury Prize at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival and *THE ACCOMPANIST*. Miller was on the competition jury at this year's Cannes Film Festival and also serves as the Vice-President of ARP, the French organization representing writers, directors and producers.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 2001 | Alias Betty |
| 1998 | Class Trip <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Jury Prize - Cannes 1998</i> |
| 1994 | The Smile |
| 1992 | The Accompanist |
| 1988 | The Little Thief <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Méliès Prize - Cannes 1988</i> |
| 1985 | Impudent Girl, also known as Charlotte and Lulu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>1 César 1986</i> • <i>Louis Delluc Prize- Cannes 1998</i> |
| 1983 | Deadly Circuit |
| 1981 | Under Suspicion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Grand Prix du Cinéma Louis Lumière 1981</i> • <i>1 Prix Méliès 1981</i> • <i>Best Scenario – Montréal Film Festival 1981</i> |
| 1977 | This Sweet Sickness |
| 1976 | The Best Way <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>1 César 1986</i> |
| 1971 | Camille |

About the Novelist

Ruth RENDELL

One of the most honored and critically acclaimed modern crime writers, best-selling author Ruth Rendell has won three Edgar Awards from the Mystery Writers of America—two for short stories (1975, 1984) and one for the novel *A Dark-Adapted Eye*. Rendell won a Silver Dagger in 1985 for the novel *The Tree Of Hands* on which the film is based. The “best mystery writer...anywhere in the English-speaking world” (Boston Sunday Globe) is the author of *An Unkindness Of Ravens*, *The Killing Doll*, *The Fever Tree And Other Stories Of Suspense*, *Death Notes*, *Current Crimes*, *Shake Hands Forever*, *A Demon In My View*, *The Lake Of Darkness* and numerous other mysteries. Her books have been translated into fourteen languages.

About the Cast

Sandrine KIBERLAIN (Betty)

Sandrine Kiberlain is an award-winning actress who, since the early 1990's, has been the muse of many French auteurs including Benoit Jacquot, Jacques Audiard, Laetitia Masson and Laurence Ferreira Barbosa.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

2002	C'est le bouquet ! Jeanne Labrune	1995	To Have (or not)....Alice Laetitia Masson
2001	Emilie est partie....Léa Thierry Klifa	1994	The Indecisive Guy.... Gaelle Laetitia Masson
2001	Alias Betty Claude Miller	1994	The Patriots.... Marie-Claude Eric Rochant
2000	Everything's Fine, We're Leaving.... Béatrice Claude Mouriéras	1993	Normal People Are Nothing Special Florence Laurence Ferreira Barbosa
2000	False Servant.... Le chevalier Benoît Jacquot	1993	Méprises multiples.... Kim Christian Charmetant
1997	Quadrille.... Claudine André Valérie Lemerrier	1993	Tom est tout seul.... Laurette Fabien Onteniente
1997	Love Me Gabrielle Rose Laetitia Masson	1993	Comment font les gens.... Irène Pascale Bailly
	Rien sur Robert.... Juliette Sauvage Pascal Bonitzer	1993	L'Instinct de l'ange Richard Dembo
1998	For Sale.... France Robert Laetitia Masson	1992	Stranger in the House.... Marie Georges Lautner
1997	Seventh Heaven... Mathilde Benoît Jacquot	1992	Weaker Sexes! Serge Meynard
1997	Quadrille.... Claudine André Valérie Lemerrier	1991	Des filles et des chiens Sophie Fillières
1995	Je suis venue te dire Laetitia Masson	1991	Milena Véra Belmont
1996	A Self-Made Hero.... Yvette Jacques Audiard	1990	Cyrano de Bergerac.....Sister Colette Jean-Paul Rappeneau
1996	The Apartment.... Muriel Gilles Mimouni	1986	On a volé Charlie Spencer!.... Employée de la banque Francis Huster
1996	Beaumarchais the Scoundrel.... Marie-Thérèse Edouard Molinaro	1986	Cours privé Pierre Granier-Deferre

Nicole GARCIA (Margot)

Nicole Garcia is one of France's beloved actor/directors. As an actress, she has appeared in more than twenty-five films and has worked with many French directors including Claude Lelouch, Alain Resnais, Bertrand Blier and Claude Sautet. As a director, she made the hit film PLACE VENDOME. Her latest feature, THE ADVERSARY, was shown at the Cannes Film Festival.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

2002	Tristan.... Mrs. Driant Philippe Harel	1982	What Makes David Run ? Anna Elie Chouraqui
2001	Alias Betty.... Margot Fisher Claude Miller	1981	Bolero.... Anne Meyer Claude Lelouch
1999	Kennedy and I.... Anna Polaris Sam Karmann	1981	Stepfather.... Martine Bertrand Blier
1997	Post Coitum Brigitte Roüan	1980	My American Uncle....Janine Garnier Alain Resnais
1995	Fugueuses Nadine Trintignant	1979	Mors aux dents...Mrs. Le Guenn Laurent Heynemann
1994	Life's Little Treasures....Ariane Michel Deville	1979	Operation Ogro...Delores Gillo Pontecorvo
1990	Overseas....Zon Brigitte Roüan	1978	The Skirt-Chaser....Marie-France Philippe de Broca
1988	La Lumière du lac....Carlotta Francesca Comencini	1978	Butterfly on the Shoulder...Sonia Jacques Deray
1986	15 Août Nicole Garcia	1976	Cool, Calm and Collected Bertrand Blier
1986	A Man and a Woman : 20 Years Later Claude Lelouch	1976	The Question Agnès Charlegue Laurent Heynemann
1985	Peril.... Julia Tombsthay Michel Deville	1976	Women Duelling.... Elsa Jacques Rivette
1983	Waiter!....Claire Claude Sautet	1974	Let Joy Reign Supreme Bertrand Tavernier
1983	Mots pour le dire...Marie José Pinheiro	AS DIRECTOR	
1983	Stella....Stella Laurent Heynemann	2002	L'Adversaire 2000
1982	A Captain's Honor.... Patricia Caron Pierre Schoendoerffer	1998	Place Vendôme
		1994	The Favorite Son
		1990	Every Other Weekend
		1986	15 Août

Mathilde SEIGNER (Carole)

Mathilde Seigner is one of France's rising young stars and has appeared in Tonie Marshall's VENUS BEAUTY INSTITUTE, Anne Fontaine's DRY CLEANING and Dominik Moll's WITH A FRIEND LIKE HARRY.

SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 2002 | Tristan.... Emmanuelle Barsac
Philippe Harel |
| 2001 | Inch'Allah Sunday.... Mademoiselle Briat
Yamina Benguigui |
| 2001 | Alias Betty...Carole
Claude Miller |
| 2000 | The Milk of Human Kindness Josiane
Dominique Cabrera |
| 2000 | Le Mal des Femmes
Daniel Vigne |
| 2000 | The Girl from Paris...Sandrine Dumez
Christian Carion |
| 2000 | With a Friend Like Harry....Claire
Dominik Moll |
| 1999 | Le Coeur à l'Ouvrage.... Chloë
Laurent Dussaux |
| 1999 | Hometown Blue.... Mylène
Stéphane Brizé |
| 1999 | Time Regained....Céleste
Raoul Ruiz |
| 1999 | Beautiful Mother.... Séverin
Gabriel Aghion |
| 2000 | Venus Beauty Institute.... Samantha
Tonie Marshall |
| 1997 | Francorusse Sophie
Alexis Miansarow |
| 1997 | Long Live the Republic...Corinne
Eric Rochant |
| 1998 | Dry Cleaning.... Marylin
Anne Fontaine |

An Interview With Claude Miller, Writer/Director

Your film, ALIAS BETTY, is the film version of Ruth Rendell's book *Tree Of Hands*. When did you discover this book?

I wasn't familiar with Ruth Rendell's work before I saw Claude Chabrol's LA CÉRÉMONIE, which I liked enormously. Afterwards, I started to read Rendell's books. Among the dozen books that I devoured, there was one, *Tree Of Hands*, which seemed to me very interesting for a film. What I like about Rendell's work is that there are always rich and complex female characters. Their often-conflicting desires make them ambiguous, which also appeals to me. In addition, her story lines are based on problems related to social class. This was as evident in LA CÉRÉMONIE as it is in *Tree Of Hands* which involves two worlds, Betty's (Sandrine Kiberlain) and Carole's (Mathilde Seigner), that otherwise would never meet.

How does the author use them?

Ruth Rendell uses them as the foundation of her conflicts, and this is true in all of her novels. For example, her story lines are rarely based on a crime. Typically in suspense novels there is always a good guy, bad guy dynamic. This is not so in Ruth Rendell's novels, where she is empathetic to all her characters, even the most disturbing. In LA RÈGLE DU JEU, Jean Renoir says: "What is most difficult in life is that everyone has his reasons." In the world of Ruth Rendell, that is true as well.

You wrote the script and dialogue for ALIAS BETTY. Is your adaptation faithful to the novel?

The structure, I think, is very close to Rendell's book. I also was very faithful to the characters, except for François (Luck Mervil), who wasn't black in the novel.

I had to rewrite all the dialogue because the book takes place in London - in the cockney milieu in Carole's case. I hope that Baroness Rendell will like the film; her work has often been adapted for British television. She is a national treasure, a sort of English "Simenon."

Throughout ALIAS BETTY you emphasize extremes. Incredible cruelty is followed suddenly by boundless love...

Isn't life like that? Every day of our lives is composed of all of these contradictory feelings. In Rendell's novel, there are characters and situations that terrify me, that disturb me, and that make me laugh...

The film's opening scene in the train with Margot (Nicole Garcia) and Betty as a child is disconcerting, perturbing, almost "Hitchcockian." Is it a tip of the hat to the master of suspense?

Almost all the directors of my generation have been touched by Hitchcock! When there is a violent or disturbing scene that must traumatize the audience even a little, Hitchcock is there. In the scene you mentioned, Margot demonstrates great tenderness towards her young daughter, then a notice containing the definition of *porphyry* appears, foreshadowing imminent danger. I really wanted to undermine appearances and terrify everyone by doing this.

Exactly what is porphyry?

It is a blood-related illness caused by the excess or the lack of a specific enzyme that results in insanely selfish or violent behavior, but for only very short periods of time. Nicholas Hytner evoked *porphyry* in his excellent film THE MADNESS OF KING GEORGE.

Tell me about Margot, a complex, unstable, extreme being, magnificently portrayed by Nicole Garcia.

Her character is on the edge; she does things that are extremely violent and selfish, bordering on the insane. I like working with characters [who] push the margins because they reveal something about ourselves—people supposedly "normal," but really abnormal like everyone else. What interests me about Margot is her perception of her past with her daughter. She asks herself questions about the kind of life that she led Betty into. As we approach fifty, we ask ourselves if we have been good to our children. We all have a list of things we would like to do over again. In the film, these things are treated as tragedy, suspense, and violence, in other words as drama.

Margot, who lives in Spain, comes to Paris for a couple of days to have some tests done. She moves in with her daughter Betty (Sandrine Kiberlain). From the moment they meet each other, tensions from their past resurface. How would you analyse the complicated relationship and violent emotions between Margot and Betty?

When Betty comes in contact with her mother, her whole childhood comes flooding back to her. And when your childhood was terrifying, painful and difficult, it is awful to have to experience the complicated emotions that you have tried to deal with and overcome. The accidental death of Betty's son Joseph exacerbates this situation. Betty is once again a victim and so tends to be more vulnerable to Margot's influence. Betty thus returns to the least desired stage in her life, she regresses towards her childhood.

Physical violence, like verbal and emotional violence, provides a subtext for the whole film. Dramatic situations follow one after another, beginning with the accidental death of Betty's beloved son Joseph...

In an adult's imagination, the worst thing that can happen is the death of his or her children.

And then Margot kidnaps little José, Carole's unloved son who is also four years old, to give to her daughter Betty.

Once Margot kidnaps José, Betty is completely powerless. If she confesses, her mother will go to prison or be committed. For a rational adult, there is nothing worse than having to act irrationally. It is another trap for Betty, whereas for Margot, kidnapping José is an act of bribery. It was important for both Nicole Garcia and I that her act be perceived as an act of love.

In contrast to Betty, a normal mother portrayed by Sandrine Kiberlain, there is another mother, Carole, played by Mathilde Seigner, who mistreats her son José. Do you consider her an unfit mother or do you forgive her due to extenuating circumstances?

Carole is a typical example of a character caught in a pattern of violence. She repeats what was done to her as a child, and sometimes even gives worse than she got. A battered child, she beats her own child. Carole, who probably had a terrible youth, is otherwise a beautiful girl, vigorous and sensual, whom men find attractive. Her

“hypersexuality” is a dangerous force that can destroy anything in its way. As for her economic and social status, she is a spectator of a sort. There is a moment when the spectacle of the privileged class and those who have no problems making ends meet – a spectacle largely amplified by the media - doesn’t make for a very good show. You can understand her rage, her envy.

Is it the child from Montreuil who is talking now?

(Laughing) Yes, maybe, but also the citizen of today. It is definitely because of that that I appreciate Rendell’s novels. My life has been such that I know both poverty and privilege. But, this isn’t the first time that I have dealt with subjects where social injustice and cultural differences are featured: [my other films] L’EFFRONTÉE, L’ACCOMPAGNATRICE, and LA PETITE VOLEUSE also dealt with these themes. I would like to direct a “Pygmalion 2000.” G.B. Shaw also discussed all of this in an amusing but profound way.

Why do you always feature the theme of troubled childhood in your work?

I find that there are more difficult and painful conflicts between children and adults than there are between men and women, for example. Which is profoundly unfair, given the unequal balance of power. Unfortunately, in our societies, being an adult means making compromises. Childhood is just the opposite of this. I am always struck, intrigued and upset by the way children have to deal with adults who are liars, cheats, violent, authoritarian, perverse; something we all are, to a certain extent. I am fascinated by the point of view of those children who don’t understand any of this but who suffer the consequences of our problems.

In your opinion, does maternal instinct exist?

All women are not made equal when it comes to maternal instinct. They are more or less prepared to have it or not, just as you and I are more or less prepared to deal with vice and virtue. In fact, what I am interested in is what the child assimilates when his parents and his childhood were a disaster for him. My film starts very badly and ends happily: Betty leaves with José in her arms, thereby creating an implicit reconciliation with Margot. You can never replace one child with another, but you can love another one. Our capacity to love, or to hate, is infinite.

The relationship between Betty and little José begins badly...

That's normal. She is suffering so badly that she doesn't know what she is doing. This child represents her loss, which is impossible to deal with. But, despite her mourning, her suffering, she still has the strength to scream, and this leads to her healing. For Betty, the immense chasm left by Joseph's death needs only to be filled. Betty will end up discovering this, and herself, thanks to José.

How did you discover this adorable boy, Alexis Chatrian, who portrays José onscreen?

Two weeks before filming, I still hadn't found him—I was very nervous. And then, we found his picture. His mother had just registered him with various agencies because she found him so shy and uncommunicative. She thought that if he were to do acting or modelling, it would help him, which turned out to be the case. He was amazing, extremely nice. Everyone fell in love with him. He isn't a typical "beauty" for advertising. We discovered a wonder.

Gravitating around the edges of Betty's and Carole's worlds are male characters such as Alex (Édouard Baer), François (Luck Mervil), Édouard (Stéphane Freiss) and Dr. Castang (Roschdy Zem). Who are these men?

Alex uses the fact that women find him attractive to try to make his way in life. I like him a lot, even if he isn't very intelligent, and maybe because he isn't. He is a gigolo, easygoing and a bit lazy. The way Édouard Baer acts this part makes me think of a Gassman or a Manfredi in the Italian comedies of the 1970s. Infuriating but charming! François is the character with the least luck. He has no training, and is more often unemployed than employed. He makes a fundamental mistake by thinking that with a pretty white woman, Carole, in his life, he will integrate better. As for Édouard, the man that Betty left, he is hurt, bitter and has ruined his life. In this part Stéphane Freiss is magnificent and very different from the leading men roles that he usually plays. And finally, there is Dr. Castang (Roschdy Zem), a refined character who crosses Betty's path. He opens a door for her...

On a purely technical level, did the fact that you used digital video to make your previous film, LA CHAMBRE DES MAGICIENNES, influence the visual creation of ALIAS BETTY?

Yes, even though I filmed ALIAS BETTY in 35 mm film with large cameras. I wanted to keep two elements I discovered while making LA CHAMBRE DES MAGICIENNES: a variety of viewpoints within a scene by always filming with two cameras and no fixed cameras. I wanted an “edgy” film. So ALIAS BETTY was filmed with hand-held cameras.

An Interview With Sandrine Kiberlain (Betty)

Maternal Love

Claude Miller offered the role of Betty to me two years ago, before I became a mother. Since I already appreciated Ruth Rendell's novel and Claude's work, I immediately accepted the part. But I was only familiar with the type of maternal love that my mother has for me, which for me is essential, a need, a protection, and a reference point. However, when I became a mother, I discovered a love that was beyond everything, one that you cannot imagine until you experience it. I therefore felt very differently about this story when I read it, and then when I was acting in it. When her child dies, Betty is in the profoundest depths of misery. I could embody her hopelessness because I had a vague idea of what she must have felt. I am generally of the opinion that you do not need to be a homeless person to portray a homeless person. However, I believe that I would have portrayed Betty differently if I were not a mother. While filming, my work is to forget everything that I have read to try to best portray the present moment, as in life. The shock, which left me reeling, hit me while I was watching the film. I asked myself how I did it, as though I had been unaware of what I was doing during the filming. If I had to portray Betty again today, I would approach it as a duty, not a pleasure, since it is such an emotionally demanding role.

Family

There is the one that we have and the one that we make. It is the one that we have that makes us, therefore it is necessarily related to the family that we make! Family is the basis for everything: our likes and dislikes, what we look for in a man, a woman, a friend or a lover; and what we will try to recreate when we have children. I was fortunate enough to love my family. My family gave me love, a sense of values and a balance that are all essential to deal with life. Betty's family is small. The relationship between Betty and her mother is symbiotic, emotional, destructive, but that is the moral of the film. Neither the mother nor the daughter can survive without the other. When Margot kidnaps the child, she is trying to give life back to her daughter. When Betty decides not to return the child, she gives life back to her mother.

Physical and Verbal Violence

The “physical” idea of things is very important. I find that in French cinema this element is often forgotten since we have too much of a tendency to intellectualize everything. In this film, when things become impossible to deal with, they are expressed physically as is often the case in real life. There is physical violence between Margot and Betty. This violence reveals a love that is difficult to show otherwise, since words can’t express the profound injury. Physical violence leaves permanent damage while words fade away.

Selfishness

Betty had to leave to escape her mother’s pressure and make her life somewhere else. She has survival instinct, which allows her to decide between “fight or flight” at crucial moments. I personally think that it is important to be selfish. In some cases, you even have to learn to become selfish or otherwise life is a waste. Obviously this depends on individual personalities: when you come into contact with someone who is completely self-centered, it is awful. On the other hand, when you give too much to others, you have a tendency to forget yourself and thus you don’t know yourself and cannot offer what is needed. In a word, you can’t be too little or too much.

Ruth Rendell

I understood what Claude Miller was proposing to me since I was already familiar with the author’s work. I had read and then seen the movie version of *LA CÉRÉMONIE*, Claude Chabrol’s film. Later I dove into her other novels, which struck me by their cruelty and violence. Strong emotions, rich and complex characters which are often miserable and come from varying social contexts, whose destinies merge in a complicated web of intrigue. I am sure that Ruth Rendell will be pleasantly surprised when she sees the film.

Claude Miller

There are certain films that are very meaningful to me. In my opinion, *L’EFFRONTÉE* is one of the best French films of all time. Along with François Truffaut, Claude Miller gave me the secret desire to make movies. So, I always wanted to work with him. One day, he called me to say that he was considering me for a specific story, and that he would send me the book. Afterwards we communicated by exchanging post cards. François Truffaut was on the first post card—very symbolic. Claude is a touching and anxious

man, which makes him even more endearing. Other directors should learn from his humility and his pleasure in making cinema. And, above all, he respects his actors. With him, you really feel like an actress, in the greater sense of the word. He has confidence in us, all the while supporting and guiding us. The story is very oppressive, but we were laughing all the time while filming. That is also Claude's talent—he is able to bring together a cast of very different personalities that compliment each other extremely well and that share one trait in common: humor! I was thrilled with this experience. Claude has become a friend.

Normality

What is normality?

Injustice

I am usually very composed, but injustice drives me crazy! When I am a victim of injustice, or a friend is, I lose all sense of reason. I think my life revolves around trying to do everything possible so that things are kind and fair, but that is impossible! Injustice is being born in one place and not another; it is not having enough doctors in a country because it is too expensive; it is being falsely accused. Sickness and injustice can ruin a life. The tragedy that Betty experiences is the worst possible injustice of all. It is beyond everything. There is no word for it. But it is also a part of life. Certain people can rise above...

An Interview With Nicole Garcia (Margot)

Maternal Love

It can be the most ambivalent love. A child isn't simply an other; he or she is an other and yourself at the same time. When Margot strikes Betty, it is herself she really wants to hurt. Because of this crime, committed during childhood, it is no longer possible for her to share with Betty. Margot will have to correct her mistakes before Betty can become her daughter once again.

Family

All that can be said has been said about it. However, it is within a family that one learns to love.

Physical and Verbal Violence

Margot has been freed from it. She is "crazy." What freedom!

Selfishness

For Margot, her selfishness is an SOS. Too agitated to take care of others, it is her daughter Betty's pain that finally reaches her. The film offers Margot the possibility to reconcile with Betty. She will make up for the terror and humiliation that she was responsible for in Betty's childhood.

Ruth Rendell

She never fully developed this character. Maybe because she was afraid of her, Rendell only makes references to her. Maternal love gone astray is terrifying. Margot is a creation of...

Claude Miller who isn't afraid of her, since he is familiar with all the more somber aspects of human nature. In all of his films, he examines this dark side that is central to many of his characters. It is amazing what Miller's directing tells us. He throws these three women into a force, into the crosshairs of chaos and of breathlessness from which he saves them. In each of his films, Miller creates an appropriate style of storytelling.

I had the double desire to portray this character and to film with Miller. This wasn't the time for me to be an actress, because I was location scouting for my own film, L'ADVERSAIRE. I stopped though. I didn't want to lose the opportunity to meet with Miller, or with Margot.

Normality

A great character is someone who pushes the limits and makes us question our own normality. This is what Margot does, I think, with her excesses, her disappointments, her worries, her fragility. She never really became an adult.

Injustice

The "good mother" is bourgeois and lives in an ideal world. Down below, in the housing projects, there is the "bad mother"...and so what if it is this part of the city that creates the characters who inspire this story...?