

DIMITRI RASSAM, BENJAMIN ELALOUF AND JÉRÔME SEYDOUX PRESENT

DANIEL  
AUTEUIL

CAMÉLIA  
JORDANA



# LE BRIO

A FILM BY  
YVAN ATTAL

VICTOR SAINT MACARY YAËL LANGMANN NOË DEBRÉ YVAN ATTAL

SCREENPLAY ADAPTATION AND DIALOGUES

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2, rue Lamennais - 75008 PARIS  
Tél. : +33 (0)1 71 72 30 00



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## Synopsis

Neïla Salah grew up in Creteil, and dreamed of becoming a lawyer. Enrolled at the renowned Assas Law School in Paris, on her first day she runs up against Pierre Mazard, a professor known for his provocative behavior and misconduct.

To redeem himself, he agrees to prep Neïla for a prestigious public speaking contest. Cynical and demanding, Pierre might become the mentor she needs... But to do that, both of them will have to rise above their prejudices.



## An interview with Yvan Attal

### **What was the point of departure for this adventure?**

The screenplay was offered to me. It is a comedy that follows a young woman, a bit of a 'tomboy', through her public housing complex. She raps, plays soccer, and finds herself at the Assas Law School. The subject interested me - not the tomboy soccer playing or the inner city rap - but the itinerary of a young woman who refuses to fit into pigeonholes in order to get ahead. The film became a bit less of a 'comedy' for me, and besides, that was the general direction I wanted to go in as a director. Producers Dimitri Rassam and Benjamin Elalouf agreed to come along with me.

### **How did you modify the original screenplay: what did you want to keep, and what did you want to bring of your own?**

From the start, there were a few compelling sequences in Yael Langman and Victor Saint-Macary's screenplay, and particularly scenes from the public speaking contest. In fact, I kept what I liked and quickly got rid of the rest. The three of us then continued to work, to restructure and enrich the story, concentrating on the points that I found interesting.

But we also pruned it, we took out some characters, we got rid of the politically correct aspect that I didn't want: the North African girl who gets along with everyone, who has a Jewish, homosexual male friend, etc. Then another screenwriter, Noé Debré, joined us with a fresh outlook to beef up certain moments. It was a great pleasure for me to work with a group. It's much less nerve-wracking than when you're working on your own.

### **You mentioned the comic tonality of the screenplay at the start. How would you describe LE BRIO today?**

It's a 'dramedy', as they say in America. I think it's a movie that prompts laughter, mainly thanks to its dialogue, but that also moves us and raises some questions... When you get down to it, I am incapable of making a movie without some elements of comedy. That would stymie me! Maybe someday I'll direct a real drama, for people to take me seriously. But rather, I'd say that LE BRIO is a film that is simultaneously political and social-minded, but also light-hearted and witty, based on a character, a Frenchwoman of Algerian

descent, who is a victim of the way people are today confined to categories or restricted by prejudices, but who is also a victim of herself and her entourage... In fact I feel very close to this story: in some ways that is my own itinerary. When Camélia Jordana says, "I am Neïla Salah, born in Creteil, the daughter of..."... I am reminded of my own youth in the projects of Créteil, where I grew up, and where theater provided me with the opportunity to open myself up to the world, thanks to hard work and becoming acquainted with texts. Underlying all that is the idea that we need to make an effort to understand, we need to take steps toward the country we live in, we need to make use of its cultural and historical heritage. Especially in our case! Thanks to our authors and philosophers, we understand that we need to think for ourselves, which obliges us to question ourselves.

Those are major, basic issues: the baggage we are born with, how we use our opportunities to grow, accepting that others contribute to enrich us. There are several compelling lines in the film, especially when Neïla says to Mounir, her future boyfriend: "At the age of 12 you dreamed of becoming a soccer

player, at 14 a rap artist, and today of becoming an Uber driver...”

That is one of the big clichés about the French suburbs, a cliché nourished by some of the kids in the hood: yesterday the idea was that the only way out was sports or music, and today it is working as a driver! It’s even more insidious, because with soccer or rap, there’s a minimum of work you have to do. You need to have talent, there are things to prove. It is a meritocracy, whereas Uber annihilates all that. But when Neïla says that, Mounir reproaches her with her naivety, studying to land a job, despite her name... I think that kids in the suburbs today are faced with that dilemma.

**The way you show the suburbs is rather original, far removed from the clichés generally used in French cinema...**

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did not want to show how hard it is to live in the projects, because everyone knows that, and we felt it too while shooting the movie. I wanted to establish some distance, and show the character Neïla’s environment. She takes the metro to school, this is her neighborhood, her tower block, her mother, her grandmother, her friends, but the true subject of the film is elsewhere.

**Let’s talk about your direction, as related to the subject you were filming: the university, lectures in the amphitheater, long sequences made up of text. But we’re never bored for one second. Was that a concern of yours?**

Absolutely, that was my primary concern as a director: how to film long monologues, the public-speaking debates, the verbal jousting between Camélia Jordana and Daniel Auteuil? The viewer has to really listen to the dialogue, without feeling lost. And so I had to stage all that simply, but not listlessly, varying the angles and reverse shots. I was careful to show the reactions of the other students, the corridors, the buildings, and then I authorized myself a few wider, flowing camera movements, but without ever getting carried away. I like it when you don’t notice the direction in a movie, when it is at the service of the story being told. I was always plagued by that



concern, because I’ve always made talky movies! Everything also depends on the locations on which you are working... for me shooting in an apartment or restaurant becomes a bit more complicated, whereas an amphitheater is wonderful, it’s very graphic... I had 700 extras, excellent angles, wide frames. I also treated myself to a sequence shot that starts behind Daniel’s back, and moves up the rows as he reads Baudelaire... In fact, I wanted to vary the ways in which I filmed those long scenes of dialogue, but I never let the camera get the upper hand.

**Was Assas University in the film a universe you were already familiar with?**

No, not at all, since I was never a student. What impressed me most was that when I went to observe the first day of school at Assas, there wasn’t a sound in the amphitheater, other than the professor’s voice and the click clack of students typing on their computers! I thought the atmosphere was unbelievable, a little like a rock concert: you come to listen to a guy with a mike, in front of hundreds of kids! He puts on his show and the audience reacts... That’s how I got the idea

for that sequence shot. I used the same technical set up as directors filming rock concerts.

**In LE BRIO, Neïla, a young girl from the suburbs meets Pierre Mazard, a gruff and provocative law professor, sure of what he knows. Did you ever have relations like that with any of your drama teachers?**

Yes, but with a sizeable difference – in the movie, Mazard agrees to prep Neïla for a public speaking competition to escape the threat of administrative sanctions. But in fact, when I arrived at the Cours Florent, I had a run in with a teacher who made me ingurgitate Molière, Marivaux, Musset and Claudel! It took some time, because back then all I wanted to play was SCARFACE or TAXI DRIVER. But things finally clicked, because at a certain point, the power and the poetry of what you are reading will knock you over. I did not come from an educated family, used to reading, and at school something must have passed me by. It was that professor who made me realize how important it was to read. He reeducated me (and other students too), by sharing with us, but



also by provoking us, and at times even humiliating us. Like Mazard with Neïla. But to return to the set design, I remember my own father going to pick up my application forms at the Conservatory (I had injured my knee and was unable to go), and how he told me when he got home how touched he had been by the majesty of the place, the busts of Molière or Marivaux, whom he didn't recognize, but which impressed him. That was when he realized that what I wanted to do was serious. I think that there is some of that in LE BRIO: the grandeur of French culture, the patrimony handed on to us over generations. Our great authors asked questions and tried to answer them, each one contradicting the other. We were speaking of my direction of the film: we also see the Pantheon, French flags, our patrimony. From the very beginning, that was something I wanted to do, and it became part of the film's specs!

**And at the same time, the professor who initiates Neïla, Pierre Mazard, is a very ambivalent character: cynical, provocative, mean-spirited, full of himself.**

I asked myself a lot of questions about him, wondering where he got that habit, that irrepressible desire to provoke. Is Mazard really a racist at heart? I don't think so. He's a guy who feels lonely, who probably has some serious personal problems. Who needs to take it out on someone... Neïla at school, the bourgeois woman picking up dog poop while he is out walking late one night. But Mazard is primarily a man who raises questions. At times he may derail in his reflections, he may go overboard, but he is someone who wants things to move, and when they do, it is thanks to his provocations. We caricatured him a little via the comedy of the Neïla-Mazard relations, to hone in on the main theme while staying funny in a formal sense.

We had to distance them from one other, the better to bring them together at some point in the plot... We never really say where Pierre Mazard comes from. We don't know much about his personal life in the film, other than in the scene in which Neïla fleetingly meets his mother in the provinces. There was more in the first draft of the screenplay: an ex-wife, a child he rarely sees, which is why he is able to become attached to another young woman, etc... But that didn't interest me, because those elements were there only to justify his nature. I think that we show more than enough to get a handle on him, to make him more enigmatic, if you wish. The very fact that we know so little makes us wonder about things. And then Mazard does actually tell Neïla at one point: "When you speak too well, you no longer know how to say things simply...". Camélia will be able to lead him to something else, thanks to, or because of what she is: joyous, luminous, lively, intelligent...

**Let's talk about your actors, and about that duo that works so well right off the bat. How did you choose Camélia Jordana for the role of Neïla?**

When she came to audition, I didn't know her at all! I knew that she had sung during the ceremony in homage to the Bataclan victims, with Nolwenn Leroy and Yael Naim: a Muslim, Catholic and Jew together at the Invalides, before the Nation... Camélia exudes humanity. I also remembered the cover of the *Nouvel Observateur* on which she appeared as Marianne, and for me, that already signified that she had things in common with the spirit of her character. I think that she embodies those French young people who want a France that is tolerant, open, but lucid. The subject of LE BRIO struck a real chord in her... And then frankly, during the casting session, when she arrived... you would have thought Madonna! Camélia has unbelievable charisma. We had a real relationship of trust, friendship and closeness throughout the shoot. We share the same origins: Algeria. We share a common culture: my family's cooking smells are the same as hers. What is more, her Mom regularly sent me Tupperware with the Oriental dishes I love. And then at work, I would say that she is a young actress who is curious and wants to delve deeper into things, as encouraged by Daniel...



**Daniel Auteuil, of course, so impressive in the role of Pierre Mazard: complex, and right on the money...**

I loved working with him. He is exactly the actor I was hoping for, in the sense that he has ceased taking himself seriously, even though his work is serious. Daniel was playing in a theater evenings, but in the morning he came on set concentrated and ready to work. He put his whole heart and soul into it. He continued to work conscientiously, he had butterflies, he had fun, he was witty. And then he's humble: when he flubs a scene, he's the first to ask you to begin again. In short, he's an actor who's alive, an actor who knows how to come to terms with things. I also thought he was brave, because his character wasn't easy to play, whether in terms of his attitude, or the lines he has to say. Daniel was never afraid. But he never went over the top, suggesting several variants that became

essential during the edit. I never before felt that close to one of my actors. An actress, yes, but never an actor! We do not at all have the same past, but I think we have many points in common. In fact, for the first time not acting in a film I directed allowed me to fall in love with my actors! Being at the same time actor and director throws relations off kilter: I act, but at the same time watch them act, and all of a sudden they no longer trust their partner/director. Here I was completely devoted to them.

**You just mentioned that you do not star in LE BRIO: was that clear from the start, with no regrets?**

Yes, totally. There too, I was waiting for this moment for a long time: making a movie without wanting to be in the cast. Here I knew from the start that I couldn't play this law professor. First of all, because of my own origins, which would have skewed the relationship with

Neïla... At one point, the screenwriters suggested that I play the president of Assas - wonderfully portrayed by Nicolas Vaudel - but that was neither my register nor universe. There was simply no role for me in this film. No one can play everything!

**Only one and a half years separate your two last films as a director - do you plan on keeping up that rhythm?**

I would love to. Unfortunately, you don't get scripts of this quality very often. This one was offered to me while I was editing "The Jews", which made it possible for me to rewrite it while still working on the edit. When you have to start over again from scratch like today, it requires more time, and it makes you lose what you've shaken free of while shooting. Rapidly following one movie with another deconsecrates things, it reduces the time it takes to adapt to a set, it diminishes the importance of the moment of the first sequence... There are mechanisms that need to be revved up again when you haven't filmed (or acted for that matter) for two years. But even if you have the impression of being freer, that in no way reduces the anxiety of making a movie!



## *An interview with Daniel Auteuil*

**LE BRIO is your first collaboration with Yvan Attal. You had never played with him, or been directed by him. What was your idea of him, and was that idea confirmed by this film?**

To answer you, I would say that people generally resemble what they make, and I think that Yvan's films are a lot like him. I let myself be surprised by the way he is, his enthusiasm, his energy, youth and generosity, and even his contradictions... While working with him, I rediscovered everything I had supposed about him. We only knew each other a little. Claude Berry introduced us during the shoot of *ONE STAYS THE OTHER LEAVES*, and since then, we've only ever run into each other in passing... But for the last few years, he was one of those people I wanted to work with, whether as an acting partner, or a director.

**And now that you have worked with him, what would you say about Yvan Attal the director?**

What was important is that Yvan had a definite point of view about what he wanted to do. As an actor, I always come on set rather neutral, very open-minded. As for my character, I imagined a man who is angry, and Yvan wanted me to exteriorize that anger. Since the role is very much founded on words, we also had to stylize things to avoid looking tedious on screen. We talked about it, and I understood perfectly what he was getting at, and everything went quite well... You see, playing with a director who is also an actor is always a pleasant experience, because he knows all the mechanics, he knows what he can ask of an actor, and how to ask it.

**What was your first impression when reading the screenplay, and discovering your role, Pierre Mazard?**

I immediately thought of a kind of contemporary Pygmalion. In the end, I think that George Bernard Shaw's play shares the same cynicism! But the advantage of *LE BRIO* is that it also talks about our own times, thanks to credible and identifiable characters and situations. I immediately saw how rich and beautiful the material was. I recognized the possibility of making an intelligent film that talks about who we are today...



**Pierre Mazard, a law professor sincerely in love with the French language and French culture, is also on first sight a rude man who makes use of provocative methods, and especially with the character of Neila, played by Camélia Jordana. In spite of his excesses, do you understand him, and were you touched by him?**

Yes, of course, otherwise I wouldn't have been able to play him. His harshness is a character trait that means that Mazard cannot help using a form of rudeness to get by... But ultimately, he is handing something on... I believe that we have all one day or another encountered "mentors" who may not wear kid gloves, but who are very good at what they do...

**Via the encounter between a young woman from the projects and a kind of stuffy Parisian personality, LE BRIO also deals with the way we use our opportunities to succeed, with the importance of an education and culture, and talks about notions of failure and success, the feeling of having or not having a place in modern society...**

Yes, but the story relies on appearances. The stuffy personality you mention is only so in the opinion of others, whereas he may actually be more modern and younger than many of his students! This is first and foremost a film about prejudices, and I love that in the end, intelligence triumphs. Neila imposes herself, above and beyond Mazard's prejudices, in what was an uphill battle... but a battle that paid off! And so, all right, he is not politically correct, he is a provocateur, but I like that we can show something like that in a film today.

**In the film, we realize that he's a man who may have a difficult personal past, but Yvan Attal and his screenwriters do not go into any great detail about that. Did you need to invent a past history for him for yourself?**

Yes, but I didn't spend a lot of time on it. And since, in any event, that past history is not shown, allow me to keep it a secret!

**Pierre Mazard moves in the world of academia, in the lecture amphitheatres of Assas Law**



**School. Those are visually impressive locations on screen. Is that a world you were familiar with?**

Not at all, other than for occupying the university in Avignon in May 1968. I was already on the job market back then, and so I never went to university. That being said, I have always been fascinated by university careers, and the idea of knowledge: to think that a man or woman who teaches can teach you things that build you up intellectually! As for me, I did that self-taught, and I still continue to learn today. But I admit that finding myself in the middle of that immense amphitheatre in the film felt a little like being in a cathedral of intelligence. Knowledge and culture are sacred things.

**I would like you to talk to us about Camélia Jordana, your partner in the film, and with whom you form a moving, formidable duo that works from the very start...**

I had already seen her and heard her sing on TV. And I liked her voice a lot, but I didn't know her at all personally. While preparing the film, and on set, I encountered a young actress who immediately understood how important her role was. Camélia was aware of what was at stake, and I think that she's awesome in the film. We had a very precise script, because BRIO is also a film about words. The emotions you mention escaped our grasp at a certain moment, and thank God for that.

**Your interpretation of Mazard is solid and complex: did you get the feeling that you were encountering a unique character at this stage of your acting career?**

An actor also evolves on the basis of who he is, and that is what he brings to his roles. As time goes by, you play with the weight that the years have given you. I would say that I benefit today from the luck of having had a career made up of encounters with awesome directors and excellent partners. A working life in some ways... The role of Mazard was not clear-cut (which is what made it fun to play), but the story through which he moves is clear: the need, the necessity of handing things down. I feel the same thing right now as a director. It's a desire that develops over time. Like the desire to also act in the films I direct. Sharing my next film with Gérard Depardieu, Sandrine Kiberlain and Adriana Ugarte is an immense pleasure.



## *An interview with Camélia Jordana*

**We know you as a musician and singer, but over the last few years you have been regularly appearing onscreen. What is the origin of that desire to act?**

Where I grew up, the artistic milieu was made up exclusively of amateurs. Becoming an artist and having the life I lead today with my artist friends was not an accessible future for me. And then music became my profession... I quickly told my manager at the time that if dreams come true, I had another one: being an actress. And so I met my agent then, and began to go to auditions.

**Which actresses or films made you dream when you were young?**

Nicole Kidman, Kate Winslet, Victoria Abril and the films of Pedro Almodovar, with all of which I kind of grew up. I also remember that in high school, Jim Jarmusch's *DEAD MAN* really floored me, like a sort of revelation... It was at that precise moment that I understood that, thanks to cinema, we have access to real freedom, both in terms of form and content, something that I hadn't realized until then.

**The role of Neïla in *LE BRIO* is no doubt an important milestone in your budding movie career. Until now the roles you have chosen have been rather demanding and interesting, whether in *CHERCHEZ LA FEMME*, *ALL THREE OF US*, or *BIRD PEOPLE*...**

I am lucky enough to be the guiding light of a musical project, and I think that the cinematographic projects I get involved in have a meaning similar to what I want to tell in music. What leads my choices in cinema are first of all a screenplay, then a director and a cast. For me, a film must evoke a cause that I want to stand up for, that I feel close to.



### **And so I imagine that the character of Neïla fit into that category...**

Yes of course. She is a character who moved me deeply when I read the script. Neïla is a young woman who has understood that language is a weapon, and that by learning to use it, she could defend herself and those who need her. I really liked dealing with that kind of intelligence... I also liked the idea of an encounter between two generations, Neïla's and Pierre Mazard's, who confront each other, even though each has grown up in the same country and they share a common culture, without ever having met before. Their encounter is due only to Neïla's tardy arrival for her first course with Mazard, an encounter that is fairly explosive! But life sees to it that each one needs the other to proceed towards their respective goals... I think it is very interesting that the film examines the issue of 'living together', but without ever becoming demonstrative, or underscoring anything. It is never a string to be pulled during the story. I add that I very much liked the fact that Yvan chose to end the film on the line: "Miss Neïla Salah, you may speak." I have the feeling that people my age are weighed down by an image conveyed by disillusion. Our generation is almost amorphous, ghostly, riveted to its cell phones like a prolongation of oneself; but from another perspective, that same youth does not necessarily have access to all those things they have always

heard about, and has decided to take matters into their own hands to get it... What is funny is that it also depends on the use of new technologies, the flow, permanent instantaneousness, the possibility of making one's desires come true by saying: "I do not belong to my parents' generation of, I can get whatever I want". There is another important theme in the film, handing things down... knowledge, culture, the French language, beautiful texts... And that handing down marks Neïla and Mazard, despite their differences, because they are going to need each other...

### **How did you perceive the character of Pierre Mazard? Is he provocative, reactionary, a fascist, or just a man who is unhappy?**

I would say that is he provocative because he is unhappy. Daniel manages to make of him someone who can touch audiences, because he expresses his solitude, his pain... I do not think that Mazard is an ignorant racist, afraid of others because he does not know them: he is an important Parisian lawyer, he does not live closed in on himself, even though he is quite alone. His provocation is a comfortable approach on which he relies year after year in his courses, always finding a new scapegoat in the amphitheater. Besides, the steps he takes toward Neïla and the steps she takes in his direction will not change him. He remains a provocateur...

### **And so it is Daniel Auteuil who embodies Pierre Mazard: talk to us about your encounter with him during the film... Did you need to get over the fact that you were face to face with one of the great actors of French cinema?**

I was in fact very touched by the idea of meeting and working with a gentleman who is also a great actor, and all the more so since I have been seeing him in movies since my early childhood, and my family likes him a lot... In fact, it was all very simple! Daniel told Yvan a funny joke just after saying hello to me, and so we all burst into laughter, and that put me at ease. At work, Daniel is not someone to let his emotions show, he is very shy. But he expresses his attentiveness and kindness discreetly and delicately. So it was a great pleasure and honor to work with him.

### **Yvan Attal was the architect of that encounter. What did you think of him as a director, and also as a man?**

I already had a great deal of admiration for the actor and director. We met during the last try-outs and in no time at all we felt that there was something very familiar, almost fraternal between us... It was based on a tonality, on his sense of humor. It was all very fluid, like with people you have just met and who already feel like old friends! That was confirmed on set where he didn't need to make any long speeches to direct me, he just needed to speak to me, sometimes giving me nothing more than a hint. Yvan and I have a culture in common, and that brought us closer together. In *Promise at Dawn*, Romain Gary speaks of his mother's 'Russian gestures'. I think that Yvan and I share Semitic gestures. It's not just a matter of education, it's also a way of being, and we recognized ourselves in that

## Cast

Neïla

Le Professeur / Pierre Mazard

Mounir

La Mère

Le Président

Benjamin

Camélia JORDANA

Daniel AUTEUIL

Yasin HOUICHA

Nozha KHOUADRA

Nicolas VAUDE

Jean-Baptiste LAFARGE

# Crew

Director	Yvan ATTAL
Screenplay, adaptation & dialogues	Victor SAINT-MACARY, Yaël LANGMANN, Noé DEBRE et Yvan ATTAL
In collaboration with	Bryan MARCIANO
Based on an original idea by	Victor SAINT-MACARY
Cinematography	Rémy CHEVRIN (A.F.C.)
Film Editing	Célia LAFITEDUPONT
Original Music	Michael BROOK
Sound	Pierre ANDRÉ, Thomas DESJONQUÈRES, Jean-Paul HURIER
First AD	Dominique DELANY
Casting Department	Gigi AKOKA
Production Design	Michèle ABBE
Costume Design	Carine SARFATI
Script Supervisor	Marie GENNESSEUX
Location Manager	Charles ZEMER
Production Manager	Patrice ARRAT
Produced by	Dimitri RASSAM et Benjamin ELALOUF
Coproduced by	CHAPTER 2, MOONSHAKER II, PATHÉ PRODUCTION, FRANCE 2 CINÉMA, CN6 PRODUCTIONS
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