

ELIPH PRODUCTIONS AND RHAMSA PRODUCTIONS
PRESENT

LAURENT LAFITTE

SIMON ABKARIAN

MANAL ISSA

THE FOURTH WALL

A FILM BY
DAVID OELHOFFEN

ADAPTED FOR THE NOVEL SORJ CHALANDON
© EDITIONS GRASSET & FASQUELLE, 2013 - PARIS, FRANCE

FRENCH RELEASE : JANUARY 15TH

Lenght : 1h56 – Format : SCOPE – Sound : Digital 5.1

INTERNATIONAL SALES

Le Pacte

5, rue Darcet – 75017 Paris

phone : 01 44 69 59 59

www.le-pacte.com



SYNOPSIS

Lebanon, 1982. To keep a promise made to an old friend, Georges, an idealistic theater director, travels to Beirut for a project as utopian as it is risky: to stage the play *Antigone* on the front line, in order to steal a moment of peace from the raging civil war. The characters will be played by actors from different political and religious camps. Lost in a city and a conflict he knows nothing about, Georges is guided by Marwan.

As fighting resumes, everything is soon called into question, and Georges, who falls in love with Imane, has to face up to the reality of war.

INTERVIEW WITH DAVID OEHLOFFEN

THE FOURTH WALL is based on the novel by Sorj Chalandon ... This author fascinates me. I have read all his books. When I got a call from Christine Rouxel, the producer, who had just acquired the rights to THE FOURTH WALL and was offering to bring it to the screen, I said yes straight away. Even though this adaptation seemed like a real challenge to me: it's a harsh, bitter story, a complicated film to make... But I felt connected to Georges, the main character, and to this civil war in Lebanon that he is going through, which has always interested me, even though I have always found it difficult to understand.

It's a question Marwan asks Georges in one of the film's sequences: "What do you understand about this war?" Did making this film help you to understand it better?

As far as I'm concerned, the film is not intended to explain this conflict. Nor does the novel. A few keys to understanding are given, but for Georges, this war remains unclear, right up to the end. What I saw in the story was more a political reflection on the question of art: how can creation affect the world? And what are the limits of this transformative power? This is the central point of both the novel and the film. In this story, reality crushes everything: theater doesn't stop wars. It forces the artist to remain modest. And yet, conversely, with this film I hope to show the extent to which art and utopia are essential to transforming the world. They do not have a direct effect on reality, but they do shift the values that can change it after a long time for people and societies to digest. Georges' theatrical project, which is at the heart of the story, moves me. It is at the same time a delirious initiative, a little

megalomaniac in its political objectives, and a fragile, poetic, and marginal project in its realization. A utopia.

The idea of community is set out in THE FOURTH WALL: most of the central characters struggle, at one point or another in the film, to be represented.

Beyond the context of this war, it is a very contemporary question: we live in a world that is becoming increasingly fragmented. Every community now has the impression that its political struggle is simply a matter of existing, of being represented, of not being invisible. This pushes discourse and representations to be less and less universal. In the face of these community struggles to exist, the universal is still there through Georges in the film. He is not defending a cause or a community; he wants to prove that war is not the only approach possible.

In your films, this connection with culture and universalism is also reflected in the use of different languages. This is even more the case in THE FOURTH WALL.

I'm drawn to situations where characters find themselves torn between several identities, or caught between several communities. Language is then a place of confrontation or encounter, at the crossroads of the intimate and the political. In THE FOURTH WALL, when the characters don't want to "meet" Georges, they speak Arabic. In fact, I insisted that the Arabic passages not be subtitled.

It seemed important to me that a lot of things should escape him. We embrace his point of view. We quickly realize that he won't have a complete grasp of the situation. Georges is a fish out of water. What I really

wanted to avoid was a story where a Frenchman arrives in Beirut, understands everything that's going on there, and explains the war to those who are experiencing it.

You add a link to tragedy. At the very least, through the film's starting point: Georges' promise to his mentor to stage the classic Antigone in Beirut, but also through the idea of fatality that permeates THE FOURTH WALL.

THE FOURTH WALL is in fact an adaptation of ANTIGONE. Georges is Antigone. I thought Sorj Chalandon's idea of adapting this figure into a contemporary French story was brilliant. But on the sly. Without announcing it. Georges makes a promise to Sam. Then, once he has convinced all these people to follow him, Georges is a prisoner of their trust. It has something to do with fate, a destiny that is stronger than he is, that acts as a force beyond him, that he ends up considering more important than he is. Georges goes from being the leader of a slightly mad project to a character in a tragedy he can no longer control. He crosses the Fourth Wall. The Fourth Wall being the imaginary wall that separates the performance space (the stage) from the auditorium (the real world), that separates the actors from the audience.

Unlike the book, which devoted a section to it, you do not mention Georges' militant past, or only hint at it...

There was enough material to make two films from this novel, the ANTIGONE project only appeared after a hundred or so pages. I concentrated on that because I would not have had the space to include the first part, which brings to life the history of the

French radical Left of the 70s, through the friendship of Sam and Georges. Sorj Chalandon explains very well the political disillusionment of that generation. I use the point of arrival: disillusionment. Georges no longer believes in politics, and that, perhaps, makes him a more contemporary character. He is not as emotionally stricken as in the novel, but he carries with him the melancholy of his disappointment with politics. Georges in the film is more melancholic and less played than in the novel.

After FAR FROM MEN and THE LAST MEN, THE FOURTH WALL is your third film set against a war backdrop. What attracts you to this backdrop?

It is not so much the war that attracts me, but the historical turning points. Because these are situations where the questions of identity arise in a very brutal way for the characters. These are moments when you are forced to take a stand, to say who you are and to understand it to act or survive.... It is the outbreak of the Algerian War for FAR FROM MEN, the Japanese invasion of French Indochina in March 1945 for THE LAST MEN. And even in CLOSE ENEMIES, which is a thriller, the story is triggered by a murder that disrupts a criminal clan. In THE FOURTH WALL, it is the Israeli operation "Peace for the Galilee" in Lebanon that accelerates and unravels the story. But these conflicts and the violence they unleash are always filmed from the point of view of those who suffer them. I cannot imagine making a classic war film, from the point of view of those who control the war, decide on it and legitimize it. I prefer to film how characters resist a situation that is completely out of their control.

But that does not stop you from playing with the codes of genre cinema. Your previous films were in the vein of the detective film or western. Here, the scenes of driving through Beirut fuel a certain suspense...

Let me answer in a roundabout way: genre cinema interests me if respecting its codes does not lead to a simplification of the world. I really want to film what I see in all its complexity, the complexity of political positions and of identity. Genre is a form. When it helps to clarify situations, to make them stronger, that is fine with me. To try and put it another way, the genre, the codes, suit me perfectly. But the codes must bend to the complexity of the world, not the other way round. In THE FOURTH WALL, there are indeed scenes of pursuit and sniping that lead to a genre film imagery, like CIVIL WAR. But let's not forget that Sorj Chalandon lived this story. Not exactly as Georges, but as a war reporter. He experienced the prosecutions and was scared when they happened. And at the same time, I know he felt more alive than ever. So that is it. I try to stay on the side of reality and its complexity.

If we are talking about codes, THE FOURTH WALL incorporates something new in your films: a love story.

I have often wanted to go there but have not done so in my previous films because their subjects didn't allow me to. But if there is one thing that links the intimate and the political, it is a love story. Even more so when it involves complex, ambiguous relationships... That is the most important transformation between the novel and this film: in Sorj Chalandon's novel, Georges has a wife waiting for him in Paris. He is very attracted to Imane but develops a certain guilt. There was almost a love triangle in the novel. I removed this life in Paris to strengthen his relationship with Imane.

In the film, Georges does not need guilt to ask himself a thousand questions: is he attracted to the actress, the woman or the character she wants to play? Is he falling in love with a real or fantasized woman? Once again, this relationship brings us back to the tension between reality and illusion.

This love story also ties in with an element that has often been an underlying theme in your films: the notion of loyalty...

It is my personal journey: at first, I was interested in paternal relationships (IN YOUR WAKE), then in brotherhood, and now, with THE FOURTH WALL, in romantic relationships... But loyalty is a common theme in all my films. Probably because I think it's a corollary of identity: to whom must I be loyal? To what law must I answer? What values must I obey? These questions fascinate me because they are extremely difficult to answer. Georges is very touching in this respect because he is consumed by questions of conscience about loyalty, from the promise he made to his mentor to his relationship with Imane, to whom he feels he is indebted.

It is a very complex role indeed. How did you decide to cast Laurent Laffite?

I chose him for several reasons: first and foremost, because he's a great actor, whom I've always found to be just right, whatever his roles. Secondly, because he knows the theater intimately, having worked at the Comédie Française and having acted and directed there. I relied heavily on him for all the scenes in which Georges directs the play. He's an actor's director himself. Laurent practically took charge of these sequences, modifying dialogues and situations. Obviously, I intervened if I didn't like it, but it was very nice to be able to rely on someone with that experience. All we had to do was make sure he didn't slip into irony. We worked together to keep the first degree, which is important to me.

And what about Simon Abkarian and Manal Issa?

Simon, I was lucky that he wanted to make this film. And it is probably no coincidence: he grew up in Beirut's Armenian community. Both he and his family were familiar with the historical context of the film. I think there was a personal and emotional stake for him in playing Marwan. His involvement in the role moved me both on and off the set. Not to mention what he helped me to understand about the reality of Lebanon. I'd seen Manal in Danielle Arbid's films, where she had a cinegenic and natural charisma. She was the perfect Antigone for me: not in any elaborate intellectual way, but sensual, radiant, and sensitive. The combination between them and Laurent amplified certain elements: Simon and Manal gave Marwan and Imane their Lebanese side, whereas Laurent was really, like Georges, a Frenchman arriving in this country. For the other roles in Lebanon, which are all played by Lebanese, I was lucky enough to be able to draw on an incredible pool of actors and actresses: the current situation in the country means that they have little or no work and were therefore available.

A situation that you were able to see at first hand while filming in Beirut.

There are many places in Beirut that are still marked by the civil war, which we used as backdrops. They were all almost natural settings for a film that was supposed to take place in 1982. We used very few special effects to modify them. Unfortunately, I didn't feel I was making a period film. This city still hasn't recovered from the war, and there are still many places that remind us of the fragility and tragedy of the situation in this country, where the state is in the process of disappearing. The logistical difficulties were innumerable.

But Sabine Sidawi, the Lebanese producer, thanks to her perseverance and networks, enabled us to get through these difficulties.

And to shoot in a city where there is no longer any water or electricity supply. But beyond the difficulty of the shoot, the most troubling aspect was the porosity between reality and illusion, between past and present. Like shooting in Palestinian camps between two commemorations of the massacres we were depicting.

As we speak, this context has become tougher, with Israeli bombing raids on Beirut. This reinforces the sense of tragedy, of a never-ending cycle, which infuses THE FOURTH WALL. How do you experience this?

THE FOURTH WALL was completed before 7 October 2023. I was shocked to see images on TV news so like those in the film. And when I saw the film again, I cried.

This event and what followed obviously changed the context in which the film was received. What doesn't change is the desire to avoid any partisan or simplistic discourse, present from the very beginning of the script. The desire to say that every death is tragic. THE FOURTH WALL depicts the bombing of Beirut and the massacre of Sabra and Shatila, which could be seen as an attack on Israeli foreign policy in the '80s and, by extension, today. But the film also shows the rocket attacks on Israel. The film aims to portray this tragic situation from a human perspective, in all its reality and complexity. What's a little breathtaking is that the Lebanese team who made the film found themselves in a situation very similar to the one we were striving to portray. In its own way, THE FOURTH WALL expresses this: reality is unbearably brutal. We must not submit to it.

We must continue to build utopias, so that sooner or later, hope will reappear.

DAVID OELHOFFEN

After a series of short films leading up to *SOUS LE BLEU* (selected at the Venice Film Festival and nominated for a César in 2006), David Oelhoffen went on to direct five feature-length films. *IN THE WAKE* with Jacques Gamblin and Nicolas Giraud, presented at Cannes Critics' Week in 2007.

FAR FROM MEN with Viggo Mortensen and Reda Kateb, awarded at the Venice Film Festival in 2014. *CLOSE ENEMIES* in 2018 with Matthias Schoenaerts and Reda Kateb, also screened in official competition at Venice. *THE LAST MEN*, produced by Jacques Perrin, presented at the Deauville festival and awarded the director's prize at the Warsaw festival in 2023. And finally, *THE FOURTH WALL*, starring Laurent Lafitte, Simon Abkarian and Manal Issa, in which he adapts Sorj Chalandon's bestseller published in 2013 by Grasset, Prix Goncourt des Lycéens, Prix des lecteurs du Livre de Poche and Prix du Choix de l'Orient.

2025 THE FOURTH WALL
2024 THE LAST MEN
2018 FRERES ENNEMIS
2014 FAR FROM MEN
2006 IN YOUR WAKE

INTERVIEW WITH SORJ CHALANDON

THE FOURTH WALL has already been adapted into a play and a graphic novel, but this is the first time it has been made into a film...

In the theatre, there are even six or seven different adaptations... In any case, I chose not to intervene, either in this case or in previous ones. You must let people make the books their own. I have been to some theatre presentations, some of which were quite different from the novel, for example a version in which everything was narrated by a female character. It was a bit strange for me, but I am fine with it. I have always told people who wanted to adapt my novels that I was there if they needed me, that they could call me whenever they wanted, but that it was their job and not mine. I want them to have absolute freedom. And although I often hear novelists say they have been betrayed by adaptations of their books, it's something I've never felt.

It's a book that goes beyond the adventure of creating Antigone in Beirut and has a real connection with directing. If only by putting your own experience into fiction. Do you think it was the most predestined book to be adapted?

I hoped for it. Secretly, I wrote it like a film, basing it on exchanges of points of view, like a basis for dialogue. Perhaps because my memories made me think of this book in images. But at the same time, I knew that some things wouldn't work. Firstly, because it was about an old event, almost forgotten by the public. Secondly, I thought it would be an expensive film to make. Thirdly, I had no idea it could be shot in Lebanon. In fact, there were other offers before David's.

One of which would have been to shoot the film in

Lebanon. Including one that would have been shot in Morocco, which was no longer set in Lebanon but in Iran...

Isn't THE FOURTH WALL a special case? Your novels use to have an autobiographical link, but this one is particularly strong.

Of course, from Sorj to Georges, you do not have to look very far... There is something of me in all my books. Surprisingly, it was harder for me to see the film based on PROFESSION DU PERE than THE FOURTH WALL. Jean-Pierre Améris's film is magnificent, but it was me, a battered child, that I saw on screen... David Oelhoffen's film brought to the surface the extreme violence of my twenty-three years as a war reporter. I saw it with my daughter. At the end of the screening, she took me in her arms and said, «I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't fully understand your pain». It was before I saw it that I got scared: was he going to make me 'go back' to Beirut?

Did you write THE FOURTH WALL to, in a way, exorcize what you experienced there?

No. Writing does not cure me. I want to keep everything: my hatred, my anger, my fear... Nothing frees me when I write. On the other hand, when I won the Prix Goncourt des Lycéens for this book, and I met students, I explained to them that I had never felt so alone in my whole life as when I went into the Sabra and Shatila camps. Some of those kids said to me: 'You weren't alone, sir, we were there'. That is why I am writing: so that the kids playing war with their Playstations feel they've been taken there.

I never want to forget the children of Shatila. And it

would have been the same if I had been in Damour, when the Palestinian militias exterminated that Christian village, or today in Rafah. There can be no discussion: these are the same children, the same deaths.

Votre livre ne racontait cependant pas que cela : une première partie, consacrée à Samuel, le mentor de Georges, n'est plus dans le film...

Maybe that's normal. THE FOURTH WALL contained two books of its own. One on the far-left movement and the other on about Georges in Beirut. Perhaps this was a mistake. If I had to do it again, I'd probably only have put in the part that gave that led to the film. But when you write a book, you want to put everything in it... Even more so in this case where I wanted to confront the origins of my violence and the experience of, physically facing a war. So, I had to set Georges' background, where he comes from, to better explore where he is going.

Were you familiar with David Oelhoffen's previous films before this one?

I had seen FAR FROM MEN. Which I saw again two or three times. One of them with my daughters to teach them what a teacher was...

I asked you this question because his films often confront the political and the intimate. But THE FOURTH WALL is a book that fully encapsulates this point of view...

It is a theme that's always been there. From the ones about Ireland to PROFESSION DU PÈRE... But there is something more special about THE FOURTH WALL.

When I went to Sabra and Chatila, I didn't cry at what I saw. But I came back transformed. Later, when my daughters were born, I spent my nights getting up, touching their skins, checking they were alive... In those days, we didn't yet talk about post-traumatic stress disorder... With **THE FOURTH WALL**, I tried to go back to where it hurt. I have always worked on the intimate, but this book was a way of inscribing my personal pain in a national, even global, history. When I worked for newspapers, I always had little spiral notebooks. On the right, I write down what I see, on the left what I experience. My novels are all my left-hand pages.

From that perspective, how do you feel when you see Georges embodied on screen?

I am crying. But it is beyond him: I went to see the part of the shoot that took place in Luxembourg. In particular, the scene at Samuel's grave. Just seeing the fake grave with his name on it made me feel he was real. And I started to cry because it was as if everything existed again. As for Georges, Laurent Lafitte blew me away. At first, I thought he was too old for the role. Especially since when I went to Beirut, I was very young, barely thirty. And then, I found myself in his eyes, the eyes of a lost kid. What's more, David had the intelligence to take away his anger, which was mine. In the book, he is never as appeased as he is in the film.

However, there is an extra dimension in the film compared to the book, which can be seen as built around three relationships: those of Georges to Samuel, Marwan, and Imane. The latter takes on a much more significant role in the film...

I didn't dare develop it in the novel. I'm incapable of writing love. "They kissed" is already too much for me. It must be my prudishness. But people close to me who have seen the film have reminded me that they

understood that Georges in the book was in love. The difference is that in the film, he's free to be. In fact, I was dreaming of the scenes between Georges and Imane that David added. I know how to write about brotherhood and friendship. Not about love. And when people say to me, "But that wasn't in the book", I reply, "No, but it's in the film".

THE FOURTH WALL is being released at a special time, when Lebanon is once again in conflict with Israel.

How do you feel about this?

Unlike David Oelhoffen, the professor could not read between the lines. The first sentence of the book is a Syrian tank moving forward. I wrote it years before the Arab revolutions before the war in Syria. Because I had the impression that it was going to happen, that what had happened in Lebanon was just a foretaste of history. When I returned the manuscript to the publisher, it was the book of a guy who had been through the war in Lebanon but who did not think it was going to get any worse. Since October 7, it has suddenly been in the news...I'll tell you an anecdote. One day, at the Besançon Book Fair, a teenager came up to me. He told me that his teacher had asked him to write an essay on **THE FOURTH WALL** and which was what the author had meant, but that he wasn't very good at it. Taken in, I told him I would write him a first draft, and he would just have to rewrite it in his own style so it wouldn't show. So, I wrote that the "author" had returned from Lebanon with an enormous malaise, with a feeling of betrayal towards the people he had known there, by leaving them in the war. The teacher gave him back his essay annotated with an "Irrelevant. It's a geopolitics book to explain what the Shiites and Sunnis are". I was offended. In its own way, this film is a reparation...

CASTING

LAURENT LAFITTE	GEORGES
SIMON ABKARIAN	MARWAN
MANAL ISSA	IMANE
BERNARD BLOCH	SAM AKOUNIS
TAREK YAACOUB	NAKAD
NASRI SAYEGH	JOSEPH BOUTROS
PIO CHAHINE	CHARBEL
ELIE NJEIM	NABIL
DANA MIKHAIL	YEVKINE
TRACY YOUNES	MADELEINE
KHITAM AL LAHHAM	KHADIJA

CREW

DIRECTED AND WRITEN BY DAVID OELHOFFEN

PRODUCED BY CHRISTINE ROUXEL, MAYA HARIRI, BRUNO LEVY

CO-PRODUCED BY BADY MINCK, ALEXANDER DUMREICHER-IVANCEANU,
ANDRÉ LOGIE, GAÉTAN DAVID, JEAN-LUC ELHOUIESS

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JOFFREY HUTIN

EXÉCUTIVE PRODUCER LEBANON SABINE SIDAWI

COLLABORATION AU SCÉNARIO CATHERINE STRAGAND

ORIGINAL SOUNTRACK TOM GATTI, JÉRÔME REUTER

PHOTOGRAPHY GUILLAUME DEFFONTAINES AFC

EDITING SANDIE BOMPAR

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR ZAZIE CARCEDO

SOUND PIERRE MERTENS, QUENTIN COLLETTE, ANGELO DOS SANTOS,
RANA EID, LOÏC COLLIGNON

SET DESIGNER HUSSEIN BAYDOUN, CHRISTINA SCHAFFER

COSTUMES OLA ACHKAR, MAGDALENA LABUZ

MAKE-UP ROULA ZAHAR

CASTING JUSTINE LÉOCADIE, NICOLE KAMATO, BADY MINCK

PRODUCTION MANAGER RENATA RAHME, NADINE CHAUSSONNIÈRE,
AMAURY SERIEYE, SYLVIE PEYRE

A COPRODUCTION ELIPH PRODUCTIONS RHAMSA PRODUCTIONS

WITH MOVE MOVIE AMOUR FOU LUXEMBOURG PANACHE

PRODUCTIONS LA COMPAGNIE CINÉMATOGRAPHIQUE L'ÉMISSAIRE DE BAAL

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF CINÉ+ OCS AVEC LE SOUTIEN DE CANAL+ DU FILM FUND

LUXEMBOURG DE EURIMAGES ET DE WALLIMAGE (LA WALLONIE)

WITH THE SUPPORT OF TAX SHELTER DU GOUVERNEMENT FEDERAL DE BELGIQUE ET LE

WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF TAX SHELTER DE MOVIE TAX INVEST

IN ASSOCIATION WITH LE PACTE TV5MONDE PROXIMUS VOO BE TV ET DU

CINEVENTURE 8 ENTOURAGE SOFICA

CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINÉMA ET DE L'IMAGE ANIMÉE

FRENCH DISTRIBUTION AND

INTERNATIONAL SALES LE PACTE