

EMPTY HANDS

(LES MANS BUIDES)

SYNOPSIS

The story could be told from the point of view of Perroquet, an irritating parrot who saw his mistress, old Madam Catherine, die because of too many excess, and be buried on the sly by Eric the mechanic. The story could also be told if we stop at the trains that cross this small town not far from the borderline between two countries. Train wagons with dreamer controllers who are lost, like Sophie; cars unloading their load of passengers, like the too-seductive Gerard who, in fact, is only passing through.

The story could also be understood through the bottles served by Yann, the cafe barman, who shares them happily with his friends Eric and Jean-Claude, the policeman. We could also choose the sinuous tour of a box of cookies that contains the economies of Madame Catherine (a tour that, at least, is not as complicated as the tour of her corpse through a village full of public works). The money will escape from Eric to end up in the pocket of his nephew's trousers, inside a washing machine...

And this story could also be told through the washing machines, now that Eric offers one to Maria, who is going out with Jean-Claude, even if she doesn't stop flirting with the mechanic. And it's not necessary to talk about Philippe's horrible paintings; he's the boss station assistant, and he's in love (and very jealous) with little Lola, Anna and Yann's daughter. But Philippe is jealous because, at the same time, Lola is interested in Axel.

Let's finish with the importance of the nature and the landscape, who observe these poor human who are caught in their own prisons. The nature has the best (or at least, the happiest) point of view of the story, which is, at the same time, sinister, funny, simple and very tangled.

TECHNICAL INFO

Produced by Eddie Saeta S.A. and JBA Production

Distribution by Wanda Vision, NirvanaFilm

Release: 3 de September de 2003

Filming period: November and December 2002

Sites: Portbou, Portvendres and Serra de les Alberes

Format: 35 mm / Colour / 1:1,85. Negatiu Kodak 5263 y 5246

Laboratory: Image Film

Copies: Image Film / Eclair

Sound suite: Sonoblok

Edition suite: Polidori

CREW

Script	Marc Recha
In collaboration with	Mireia Vidal & Nadine Lamari
Direction	Marc Recha
Executive Producer	Lluís Miñarro (Eddie Saeta) & Jacques Bidou (JBA Production)
Production director	Valeire Delpierre & Alain Monne
DOP	Hélène Louvart, AFC
Art direction	Alain- Pascal Housiaux & Patrick Dechesne
Edition	Ernest Blasi
Live sound	Jean-Luc Audy
Mixes	Ricard Casals

CAST

Mme Catherine	Dominique Marcas
Axel	Jérémie Lippmann
Perroquet	El Verd
Eric	Olivier Gourmet
Gerard	Eduardo Noriega
Lola	Jeanne Favre
Philippe	Sébastien Viala
Maria	Eulàlia Ramon
Sophie	Mireille Perrier
Anna	Mireia Ros
Jean – Claude	Lluís Hostalot
Ramón	David Recha
Chansons:	Dominique A.

NOTES BY THE DIRECTOR

In every village there's a coffee shop, a police station, a mechanic and something very important, a square where everyone keeps turning around, because even though the eighties' development plans, it hasn't been transformed into a traffic circle... But in this village there is also a train station. We are not far away from the border, but we are not on it: neither for those sentimental people who are looking for the limit between here and somewhere else. So, this is a little town flooded by the surrounding mountains, and where the sea is not enough to take a breath.

There's a legend everywhere. In this case it's called Mrs. Catherine. Still Parisian, though she left the capital 60 years ago. She had been a dancer in the big casino, she loved passionately a Catalan revolutionary, and then she married a man from the French Resistance. In the present, she lives between her past memories and the wine, with a fox fur around her neck, and with the company of her parrot "Perroquet."

Around her there's Eric, a mechanic who only can be understood by the motorcycles. He would like to love Maria, but he isn't good with feelings. Things don't work either with his nephew Axel; Eric took care of him when he got out of the reformatory. Axel would like to be loved by those people he admires. Meanwhile, he takes care of Mrs. Catherine, with whom his uncle usually gets drunk. Axel is in the motorcycles business to please Eric, but it doesn't satisfy him. Sophie, his sister, takes care of him when she is home, but she's always moving from one place to another, working as a ticket collector at the SNCF. She is often there: from one coach to another. But that's as if she didn't move at all. And it's worst when you work in one side of the borders and your family lives in the other.

There's also Jean-Claude, a predictable and reliable person, he's got a raise as "chef-assistant" from the local *gendarmerie* (although he could also have been a vine grower): everybody loves him and he loves Maria. And she likes him. But she can't get dumb Eric out of her mind. However, she is getting tired of those irresponsible guys, who have left her all the time; she is from somewhere else, she came from Barcelona, and at the moment she works as a post woman. She has made friends; Yann, the barman, was the first one she met. Thanks to him she met Eric. Yann is always there to fix everything, without knowing that his wife is the one who makes sure that everything works out. Anna has become a little bit temperamental and she relieves her bad humour on her daughter Lola, but Lola doesn't allow intimidations. Not even from Philippe, the stationmaster, who is in love with her and very jealous, to whom she looks at over her shoulder.

There's also Thierry, the father of Sophie's two children, a calm and unemployed man, who dedicates his life to his children's happiness, or Pierre, the lady's occasional boyfriend, that would rather be something else than a good screw. And there are also all those train passengers that we won't see any more, all those border's people who are tired to see each other all the time and can't get out from the geographic and economic narrow line of their life...

Anyway, that entire beautiful world is included here, where everybody is too much alike. Even though they know that, it doesn't help them to carry on with it. Until Gerard's arrival. He's passing by, coming from somewhere and going somewhere else. He's absolutely seductive. He really knows what to do to make people like him, but is that what he really looks for?

In fact, there's an important question to care about, just before Gerard's arrival: Let's remember Mrs. Catherine! We have left her sunbathing in the vineyards. So, the next day, a sunny day, a good day to die as the Indians would say, she dies. Just like that. Eric is alone with her, and he doesn't know what to do. She had just showed him all her life's savings, converted into shiny euros. So he can just think of hiding her dead body. And here is where the politicians take part! A Mayor decides to get out from the darkness just before the elections day. His public work's program messes up the whole village, converting the old lady into an old "arlesian" in decomposition. Eric, beneath the crowd, has a hard time picking and hiding the corpse to bury her. Without saying that this idiot has started to take the money, and is being pursued by "Perroquet", the hysterical parrot. The mess is on, and the annoying body secret will turn into a public secret.

¡Even Gerard hears about the secret! And don't forget Gerard, who will end this story with his departure. A story of memories, of regrets, of... ¿who knows?

Et voilà, we have everything: death, love and money. The big city is ready for a big cleaning. But in this case we are talking about a small village, so the cleaning talks about an old lady corpse that walks around several trenches full of mud, about attraction stories and feelings sentenced to finish, and about an amount of money that is going to end up inside a washing machine.

Marc Recha

AWARDS AND FESTIVALS

2007

- BAMCINÉMATEK. Retrospective about Marc Recha (New York, USA)
- FESTIVAL DE LINZ. Retrospective about Marc Recha (Austria)

2004

- PRAGA CINEMA FESTIVAL (Czech Republic)
- EGYPTIAN THEATRE (Hollywood, United States)
- BUENOS AIRES FESTIVAL INTERNACIONAL DE CINE INDEPENDIENTE (BAFICI) (Argentina)
- INTERNATIONAL FILMS FESTIVAL HONG KONG
- FESTIVAL DE CINE DE GUADALAJARA (Mexico)
- II PREMIS BARCELONA

2003

- FESTIVAL DE CINEMA DE CANNES – Official section “Un Certain Regard” (France)
- PÉSARO FILM FESTIVAL (Italy)
- PUSAN INTERNATIONA FILM FESTIVAL (Korea)
- TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Canada)
- FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIÁN (Euskadi, Spain)
- HAIFA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL (Israel)
- TUBINGEN (Germany)
- SEMANA INTERNACIONAL DE CINE DE VALLADOLID (Spain)
- FESTIVAL DE PUERTO RICO / SPANISH CINEMA NOW (Puerto Rico)
- FESTIVAL DE CINE DE LA HABANA (Cuba)
- FESTIVAL DE CINEMA DE ROMA (Italy)

PRESS CLIPINGS

Variety – “The most accessible film by Marc Recha.”

Libération – “Marc Recha, architect of chance.”

Les Inrockuptibles – “A black comedy in the line between France and Spain, between reason and madness.”

Le Monde – “A body, policemen, a gun that circulates, a parrot who knows too much, a treasure, an unknown handsome guy... But this film is not a fairy tale.”

Libération – “A high fight film (in front of the American cinema).”