

MAIGRET

AND THE DEAD LOVER

A FILM BY
Pascal Bonitzer



SAÏD BEN SAÏD
PRESENTS

Denis Podalydès
of the Comédie Française

MAIGRET
AND THE DEAD LOVER

a film by
Pascal Bonitzer

BASED ON GEORGES SIMENON'S "*MAIGRET AND THE ELDERLY*"

with Anne Alvaro, Manuel Guillot, Irène Jacob,
Dominique Reymond, Micha Lescot, Olivier Raboutin,
Laurent Poitrenaux, Julia Faure

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Commissioner Maigret is urgently called to the Quai d'Orsay (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) after the murder of Monsieur Berthier-Lagès, a renowned former ambassador. He quickly discovers that Berthier-Lagès had been carrying on a fifty-year-long love correspondence with Princess de Vuynes, whose husband, in a curious twist of fate, has just died. As Maigret faces the members of both families and the suspicious silence of the diplomat's maid, he goes from one revelation to another...



INTERVIEW WITH PASCAL BONITZER

BY ANNE-CLAIRE CIEUTAT

Your new film is an adaptation of the book *Maigret and the Elderly*, written by Simenon in 1960. The title you have chosen – *Maigret And The Dead Lover* – contains a paradox, combining death and life.

Simenon wrote this text after emerging from a personal crisis, in the middle of his life. He mentioned this crisis in his notebooks. It seems that writing the book helped him exorcise this question of age, a question that also concerns me, inevitably. The characters in this story are old, yet full of energy. The theme is also that of a paradoxical vitality.

You chose to set the action at the beginning of the 2000s.

The story takes place in a very conservative —not to say very reactionary—milieu, in the very heart of Paris's 7th arrondissement. Catholic aristocrats who ignore or disdain the era in which they live.

Simenon is a man of the twentieth century; his hero is too, with the prejudices of his time. I was interested in confronting him with the twenty-first century. Maigret is a policeman who dislikes old-fashioned authority figures, yet is also quite resistant to modernity. With his pipe, his discreet alcoholism, his housewife of a wife, he is a survivor facing the accelerated robotization of our world.

In *The Great Alibi*, where you adapted Agatha Christie, your characters revealed themselves sometimes in their mediocrity, sometimes in their bravery. Here, each character is led to express how they navigate social conventions.

In this corseted world, Maigret seeks, as usual, what lies beneath the veneer of appearances. The people he deals with present a façade of respectability, even arrogance, and his role is to uncover their flaws.

Often, Maigret is confronted with sordid characters, toward whom he can be brutal. Faced with this upper-class milieu, he finds himself destabilized.

This dying world, a kind of “ancien regime”, also survives thanks to its servants. Jacotte, played masterfully by Anne Alvaro, is a fascinating character. She could be the classic image of a mummified spinster; she is quite the opposite. She is never thrown off balance. The interrogations do not unsettle her. She is always one step ahead.

What do you appreciate about the figure of Maigret?

He is linked to a kind of permanence of psychological, personal investigation, and to the institution that was the Quai des Orfèvres (the police headquarters), which has ceased to exist in recent years. Today, investigations are dominated by forensic and technical policing. Maigret therefore embodies the end of a world, that of old-style investigation. I chose to set the story at the beginning of our century, before the arrival of smartphones and the flood of the Internet, rather than today, because in 2026, Maigret would simply no longer exist.

And yet he is very much alive: his taste for good food runs throughout the film!

That is a trait inherited from Simenon. Simenon is very sensory. Maigret enjoys regional dishes and alcoholic drinks. This aspect is often neglected in adaptations, as is Madame Maigret. I wanted to preserve all of that.

You show him cooking, sharing tender and complicit moments with his wife.

That is also somewhat one of my own character traits, since I like cooking. Maigret and his wife form a very close and tender couple, with a claimed petit-bourgeois “normality,” in contrast to the more or less unbalanced individuals the commissioner confronts professionally. I wanted to keep this dimension of the character.

A common trait among most of the characters in this story is their mental sharpness, which your incisive dialogues—faithful to Simenon's spirit—highlight.

I made the bet on a film where there is just one mystery and people talking. Since it is the complete opposite of an action film, the dialogues had to be as lively as possible. I believe I remained faithful to the spirit of the novel, except for the epilogue.

An epilogue with supernatural overtones. One senses the presence of a ghost, emphasized by this mysterious painting.

That painting—I can say a brief word about it. In the story, it is supposed to have been painted by Mazon's father (the nephew of the murdered ambassador) and to depict his mother; in real life, it was painted by my mother and represents my girlfriend when I was twenty, with whom I have maintained a friendship over the years. I found it amusing to give it a role.

Moreover, I cultivate a certain taste for the fantastic. In detective novels and films, there are often elements that verge on it. Violent death always breaks into reality and opens onto a dimension that contrasts with everyday life—a supernatural dimension. You find this in Hitchcock or Conan Doyle, for example. The detective plot thus gives rise to ghosts. At some point, they must be exorcised and the naked truth must appear. That is the principle of investigation and the search for truth.

Denis Podalydès plunges headlong into the universe of Simenon and your own. Even if he does not have Maigret's traditional physique, he has his inner life.

Denis Podalydès, who of course does not have the bulk of Harry Baur, Pierre Renoir, Jean Gabin, Gérard Depardieu, or Bruno Cremer, seemed to me an interesting gamble for Maigret—not only because of the contrast in build with the aforementioned actors, but also because of his strong likability, the mischief in his gaze, and his relationship to language. In this story, Maigret listens more than he speaks; he is disoriented, and the solution to the mystery comes to him more than he discovers it. Denis slipped naturally into the role, and when one recalls that he was Rouletabille in the adaptations of Gaston Leroux directed by his brother Bruno—Rouletabille being the

absolute opposite of Maigret—it is an achievement that delights me.

We enter the story with an insert on an accessory: Maigret's pipe. How did you and Denis Podalydès design his appearance?

Denis wanted to don the character's ritual attributes—the pipe and the hat. I followed him. As an anecdote, the coat and raincoat he wears in the film are mine.

How did you assemble the cast surrounding him?

I immediately thought of Anne Alvaro for the role of Jacotte. She gave her both authority and humor. Every time I have seen Anne perform in the theater, I have been charmed. In *The Taste of Others* by Bacri and Jaoui, she is unforgettable.

Dominique Reymond took on the role of the Princess de Vuynes with great mastery, as did Laurent Poitrenaux in portraying her son. Micha Lescot, as Mazon, has a striking presence. Julia Faure, with whom I had already worked on *Right Here, Right Now*, brings liveliness, youth, and a touch of modernity to Mrs. Mazon.

Manuel Guillot, who plays Janvier, Maigret's deputy, whose physique is like a transposition of the commissioner's build as described in Simenon's novels, I had noticed in a film by Dupieux, *The Second Act*. He embodied the role perfectly.

As for Hugues Quester, in the role of Maître Aubonnet, I thought of him after seeing him perform recently on stage—more than because of my memory of Rohmer's *A Tale of Springtime* or Sophie Fillières's *Grande Petite*, though that must have played a part as well.

I was pleased to reunite with Matthieu Lucci and Arcadi Radeff, who were friends in Auction and here play roles as a policeman and a grandson, at opposite ends of the spectrum from those in the previous film.

Noël Simsolo had told me that Chabrol wanted to adapt *Maigret and the Elderly*. He had acted under Chabrol's direction, notably in *The Colour of Lies*, and seemed ideal to me for the role of the priest, to which he brings a comic note.

How did you conceive these contrasting sets, between the majestic bourgeois interiors and the stripped-down spaces of the criminal police, including Maigret's apartment?

Maigret intrudes, by virtue of his function, into a milieu foreign to him. The spaces he enters needed to have a distinctive character and a particular light. Mazon's art gallery is defined by its red walls, the princess's private mansion by its blue tones. It breathes the old and the muffled, and stands in opposition to the trivial setting of the criminal police or Maigret's petit-bourgeois apartment.

How did you work on this razor-sharp editing with Monica Coleman?

Monica favors clean cuts and sudden shifts. This has the virtue of making the narrative more taut. In the sequence with Laurent Poitrenaux, for example, this editing principle makes perceptible the sense of insecurity he feels in the face of Maigret. He moves constantly, as does—though for different reasons—Mrs. Mazon.

I had to accept that this film's hero is a man who enters various people's homes and sits down—that is the difference between a police commissioner and a private detective, who moves around a lot, can throw punches or fire shots, and plunge into dangerous situations. We had to avoid boredom and trust the tension that builds over the course of the story.

For the music, you reunite with composer Alexei Aigui.

He is a remarkable composer, with whom I have worked since Je pense à vous. I like to let him do his thing. I find a discreet elegance in his compositions, a particular quality of presence that subtly accompanies the story being told.

The film is dedicated to screenwriter and writer Jérôme Beaujour.

We adapted Agatha Christie together with *The Great Alibi*. He was my friend. I was, and remain, deeply saddened by his passing. Just as I dedicated *Auction* to Sophie Fillières, it seemed natural to pay tribute to him here. He was an absolutely delightful person.



INTERVIEW WITH DENIS PODALYDÈS

BY ANNE-CLAIRE CIEUTAT

We remember you as a detective-journalist in the role of Rouletabille, as an inspector in *Mortal Transfer*, but as a legendary commissioner, this is a first! How did you respond to Pascal Bonitzer's proposal?

I received it with a mixture of joy and disbelief. Joy because Pascal was offering it to me, and disbelief because I would never have thought of myself for such a role. I had in mind an impassive, massive actor, in the lineage of Gabin, Bruno Cremer, or Depardieu, who played him and inscribed him in the collective memory. I found the word "massive" only once, in one of the *Maigret* novels I read, used to describe Maigret. Simenon no doubt sees him that way, but adds no other adjective and even seems to avoid drawing a precise figure. Maigret is more of a silhouette, a shadow, an outline...

How do you view Pascal Bonitzer's cinema?

I love his very singular cinema. His films systematically escape all kinds of stereotypes, the spirit of the times, and cinematic dogma (if not vulgarity). There is in his work a restraint and an autonomy of fiction that make each film unique—luminous and enigmatic, uncertain and yet very precise in its line, its dialogues, its framing, its direction. He seems never to speak about himself or about anyone in particular, never to "bounce back" off a topical issue in order to insert a commentary, force open doors, or hammer home a point of view.

What does Simenon's universe represent for you?

I know his work poorly, and I'm ashamed of that. On the other hand, I have read several *Maigret* novels with great pleasure. I realize that what I say about Pascal's cinema could also be said of Simenon, who seems to move away from reality only to return to it constantly, through concentric and eccentric movements. A murder takes place in a very real world, a social milieu explored with great acuity (there is something of a sociologist in Simenon), but little by little, through long interrogation scenes—a delight for actors—the fable brings

forth a shadowy world, between dream and abstraction, charged with strange affects, immense and silent passions, and retrospective violence. One reaches a kind of poetry, a great lament of human frailty.

You seem to have embraced Maigret's attributes (the pipe, the raincoat, the hat) with relish. Was this your gateway to accessing the character's inner life?

Not having a "massive" stature, I liked the idea of having these attributes, which also define Maigret's silhouette, his outline. You put on the hat, you slip into the coat, you take the pipe—it's Maigret. It's as if, before being a character, he were a piece in the game, a function: the function of Commissioner Maigret. It is possible that Maigret has no interiority. We rarely know what he thinks. At the very least, he always seems to say less than he thinks and never explains himself, never displays his knowledge (if he has any), never comments, dreams a great deal while thinking—or the reverse—leaving all the space to the person he is listening to...

To what extent did the clothes you wore help you find his steadiness, his verticality?

I immediately liked the costume proposed by Marielle Robaut, Pascal's faithful costume designer. Soft, simple shoes, a suit of the same kind, and a coat of Pascal's—brought by Pascal—that fit me straight away. A scarf, a hat. Steadiness is that: when things fall into place immediately, seem to adjust without fixing anything rigidly. I felt good. I wanted to sit down and listen to people. To do nothing other than ask the questions that always come at just the right moment, in Simenon's dialogue as in Pascal's adaptation.

What do you appreciate about Maigret?

The art of listening and hearing, both at the same time. He listens to the words of witnesses or suspects and hears the inner lament, what contradicts the spoken words. This psychoanalyst side is fascinating to play. I like his art of postponing judgment, his way of never wanting to deduce too quickly. Something in him lets things happen, waits for the right moment. There is in him a patience, a melancholy, and also an indulgence in the face of misfortune, crime, and violence. And I like that he preserves, despite everything, a form of joyful normality, almost an assumed conformism, as we see when he is back to himself, with his family or friends, thinking about good food and the cooking awaiting him. All this makes the character infinitely likeable to me, but also mysterious, by virtue of being hollowed out, leaving interpretations and commentary aside.

Faced with an investigation in which no one seems guilty, Maigret finds himself at an impasse. How did you play the doubt that runs through him?

Doubt does indeed seem to me to be the major—and even methodological—attitude in which Maigret settles, without agitation or overt anxiety. Doubt is the almost natural state of the investigator. One watches the smoke escape from his pipe, like a thought in constant formation and deformation. One moves forward not knowing, elaborates hypotheses, digs deeper, makes mistakes, starts again. False leads are as interesting as true ones. It's paradoxical: doubt keeps you upright and slowly allows access to the truth, thanks to the blanks one leaves, the blur. The truth is white. I loved that.

How do you perceive this story with its melancholic undertones?

This story, plunging into an ultra-Catholic, completely closed milieu, touched me deeply. I have known people like that, in Versailles, my hometown—people out of time, out of the world, almost naturally destined for tragedy. When such people experience passions, they draw us into a dark world of muffled noise and repressed fury; we are deep in Bernanos, a novelist I love. Religion turns them into madmen and martyrs, who will gain nothing from their spiritual investments or their desiccated loves. I must say that Anne Alvaro brings to her role an immensity that is sometimes comic, sometimes tragic, which deeply moved me.

How would you describe Maigret's gaze on the milieu he is led to frequent and on the characters he encounters?

He is first of all completely surprised, especially when he takes the measure of the character played by Anne. Where could she come from? He is immediately curious, seduced by the strangeness of a person who withholds herself, even makes herself suspect, and fits into no preconceived category—neither really a spinster nor an archetypal governess. He does not judge; he seeks to know, to perceive, even before understanding. Of course he is not of that world, but that is precisely what attracts him, despite himself. Maigret is always captivated by the man or woman in front of him. It is otherness that interests him, what will always elude him. That leads him, I think, to a fundamental form of indulgence toward people, whom he never condemns.

In his domestic space, Maigret readily takes to the stove—good food matters to him in all circumstances! We discover him as a bon vivant, tender and complicit with his wife.

In detective films, the married cop is often led to neglect his wife, swept up in and by his investigation, which makes him sleep elsewhere, risk his life, as if he ultimately had no one by his side. Maigret, on the other hand, loves his wife, returns to her as soon as possible, and would leave his home for nothing in the world. That is one of the very givens of the character and of the novels that feature him. Yet another American crime-fiction cliché avoided by Simenon. This leaves room for humour, for a form of peaceful joyfulness that compensates for the darkness of the crimes or the other characters. The real world is both sad and full of flavours.

And the dialogues and their brisk delivery?

That is Pascal's touch, which he borrows here from Simenon, who never fears long dialogues, and Pascal has made the most of them. He is the one who sets the tempo, through his way of being and listening, of relaunching and inflecting the rhythm. The writing is very finely articulated, learned with pleasure and relish, because there is always humour and surprise in the lines, into which Pascal injects a wealth of personal details as savoury as the dishes Maigret relishes. He feels at home in Simenon and with Maigret.

How did Pascal Bonitzer guide you on set and upstream? What kind of director of actors is he?

We agree, in a few conversations (a lunch and a preliminary reading), on a few basic principles that are also methodological principles (two or three character traits, lines well learned, lightness of execution—all of this being implicit from reading the script), then on the costume—we knew it was decisive, the costume. Then rehearsals of the dialogues: Pascal listens with extreme acuity, with a musical sense, and his face is then so expressive that one immediately detects reluctance or pleasure. We adjust. We place ourselves within the set, always rich in scenic possibilities, and realize that he chose it and had it arranged very rigorously: the set is in itself an axis of direction. We resolutely enter the sequence we are working on with a rigor that then makes me think of certain theatre rehearsals, because of the length and density of the dialogue. There, Pascal is entirely in the play, and that is the joyous dimension of the work. He lets nothing slip, and yet we are free. We are free and we do exactly according to his intuition. It was wonderfully exhausting. I slept well at night.

A word about your partners—their solidity, their voices, the discreet humour that sometimes filters through some of them?

It is a cast of great actors and actresses, many of whom have been especially consecrated by the theatre. When Pascal announced it to me, I was over the moon. I was also reunited with friends with whom I had acted or whom I dreamed of meeting and having as partners, such as André Marcon or Hugues Quester, for example. I have already spoken of the admiration I have for Anne Alvaro. She is a tragedian who turns cinema into a vast and delicate playing field. Her voice has always enchanted me; it adds a crack, a corseted madness that made the character absolutely fascinating to me.

Reuniting with Irène Jacob was a gift for which I am grateful to Pascal, and she gives Madame Maudit a perfect strength and gentleness. Acting with Dominique Reymond, Laurent Poitrenaux, and Micha Lescot is a joy at every moment. They wonderfully embody this grand bourgeois, Catholic, and decadent world, with a Buñuelian humour. Micha and I have known each other and been friends for more than

twenty years; acting with him is also child's play, because he restores all my innocence by making me laugh and constantly surprising me. The big scene with Julia Faure was also a godsend: she had a long dialogue—I speak little in that scene—and I was a spectator of her immense humour and her virtuoso intelligence.

I felt a powerful emotion acting with Hugues Quester, so touching and funny as a sickly notary, as I did with André Marcon, my boss, who is also a master to me, and in discovering Manuel Guillot, the extraordinary and affable Janvier! I do not want to forget Stéphane Mercoyrol and Arcadi Radeff, who were very precious partners.

Are you sensitive to the film's discreetly fantastic dimension that emerges from certain shots lit by Pierre Milon? Did it influence your performance?

I felt a particular light, especially in certain sets—the interrogation room, for example, or Mazon's shop—and I felt good there, but it was not entirely conscious. It was as if the playing area were delimited and isolated us from the world, offering us the possibility of fully absorbing ourselves in it. We were in a zone where our words had a singular flavour and resonance. I don't quite know how to put it, because it is more now, thinking back on the happiness these scenes brought me—this entire shoot was a continuous joy within a continuous density of work—that I realize the beneficial and inspiring effect of the light that Pierre Milon created with such gentleness and discretion.



CAST

Denis Podalydès of the Comédie Française

Anne Alvaro

Manuel Guillot

Irène Jacob

Dominique Reymond

Laurent Poitrenaux

Micha Lescot

Julia Faure

Jeremy Lewin

Olivier Rabourdin

Arcadi Radeff

Cyril Gueï

Matthieu Lucci

Stéphane Mercoyrol

Nikola Krminac

Laure-Lucile Simon

Noël Simsolo

Hugues Quester

MAIGRET

JACOTTE

JANVIER

LOUISE

THE PRINCESS OF VUYNES

PHILIPPE DE VUYNES

MAZERON

CHARLOTTE

CROMIÈRE

THE PROSECUTOR

JULIEN DE VUYNES

LAPOINTE

LUCAS

MOERS

FORENSICS TECHNICIAN

DOCTOR PAUL

ABBOT GAUGE

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