

THE LAST CHAPTER

a film by Gianluca Matarrese

a coproduction

ALTARA FILMS, Florence

BOCALUPO FILMS, Paris

with the support of

CENTRE NATIONAL DU CINEMA

MFN - Milano Film Network



**36. Venice International
Film Critics' Week**



36. Settimana Internazionale
della Critica di Venezia

la dernière séance the last chapter

a film by
Gianluca Matarrese

ALTARA FILMS and BOCALUPO FILMS present LA DERNIÈRE SÉANCE / THE LAST CHAPTER, a film by GIANLUCA MATARRESE,
written by GIANLUCA MATARRESE and NICO MORABITO, with BERNARD GUYONNET
produced by GIOVANNI DONFRANCESCO associated producer JASMINA SIJERCIC, creative advisor MARIA BONSAITI,
camera GIANLUCA MATARRESE editing GIANLUCA MATARRESE, GIORGIA VILLA, GIOVANNI DONFRANCESCO
music CANTAUTOMA sound design DAVIDE GIORGIO mix TOMMASO BARBARO color grading DIEGO DIAZ
a production by ALTARA FILMS and BOCALUPO FILMS with the support of the CNC and the ATELIER DI POSTPRODUZIONE MILANO FILM NETWORK



THE LAST CHAPTER

Italy / France 2021

HD, color

length: 100'

language: French

Directed by Gianluca Matarrese

Written by Gianluca Matarrese, Nico Morabito

Produces by Giovanni Donfrancesco

Image by Gianluca Matarrese

Edited by Gianluca Matarrese, Giorgia Villa, Giovanni Donfrancesco

Sound editor: Davide Giorgio

Sound mix: Tommaso Barbaro

Produced by Altara Films and Bocalupo Films,

with the support of CNC and the postproduction ATELIER Milano Film Network 2020

Milano Film Network 2020 Award

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

A young filmmaker and an older man on the verge of retiring. It begins as a sexual adventure, mutual desire, games of domination and submission, master and slave. But it becomes much more, an exchange between generations, both joyous and fearful. Between a whip and a leather harness they discuss love, death, the AIDS epidemic of the 80s, a project for a new life, their own bond. An intimate and daring story about friendship and love, a relentless tale of life approaching its ending.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Gianluca and Bernard met on a dating site. After exchanging some teasing and spicy messages, they immediately understand that they share the same erotic fantasies. Thus began their nightly rituals, Bernard became the master and Gianluca his slave.

Bernard likes to film Gianluca during their exploits, for fun, and he regularly sends him their videos after each date. Gianluca, a filmmaker by profession, intrigued by the intimacy recorded in their nocturnal meetings, decides to start filming Bernard ...

The film is initially built around the succession of their nocturnal séances, a flow that altogether could represent a singular meeting: the last of their relationship. The meetings are rythmed by their conversations, where they softly discuss love, death, the AIDS epidemic in the 80s, their new life project, and themselves.

Bernard says that his life has always been like this: "A succession of stories from the same collection. The stories, the characters, the situations change but the thread is the same. I have to start from scratch to write what, I believe, will be the last story in my book".

But one event really changes things: the moment when, after a lifetime as a public employee, Bernard retires. It's a key moment, which Bernard lives as an opportunity to put a seal on his life: stop clubbing, excesses and everything else, and start over, elsewhere. To get out of a certain isolation and open up more to the world, choosing another area in the east of Paris, surrounded by people. On a strictly sexual level, this new awareness coincides with a progressive shift in the ritual of encounters with Gianluca, which for a long time has always been the same: first of all, prepare the tea, which is served in ancient porcelain cups, probably bought from an antiquarian. Then the staging begins, the private representation, made of costume rehearsal, letting imagination and creativity get loose. Little by little, the convivial part, the chatter and the conversations, take up more and more space.

Bernard decided to take advantage of the move to get rid of many things. He wants to go free and unburdened, he says. And then he selects: the impressionist-style painting of his first companion, the glass drop chandelier too large for the new living room, the showcase full of coral and starfish, the stuffed rooster, the gilded lion hanging from the sideboard, the sideboard itself ... not to mention everything he stocked in his two garages for twenty years, including his vintage car. He is too lazy to fix it and spare parts cost too much. Looking through the junk accumulated in the garage, he finds a moldy consumed suitcase. He explores its content together with Gianluca, finding the crumbs of his memory, the memories of the loves that AIDS snatched from his arms, the traces of an adoptive family that rejected him, the rigid education that forged him, a mother and father he never knew.

Gianluca follows Bernard on his move, observes the installation in his new apartment with his camera, the organization of his old habits and the establishment of new ones. He follows him in his last attempt to resurrect his latest car, in treating his aging body filled with ailments.

Witnessing the domestication of Soso and Coco, Bernard's two cats, his daughters, to get them used to the new territory, the director is faced with an unexpected event: the loss of one of them. The anguished search that follows and the closeness with Bernard in such a tense moment leads Gianluca to the awareness of the frailties of his former lover: his sense of guilt about being a survivor, the obsession with wanting to keep with him what he loves, him included, for fear of reliving the sense loss and being alone.

It is the luminous story of a loneliness, the loneliness of each of us.

DIRECTORS NOTES

I met Bernard during a phase of my life where I was immersed in an intimate search linked to desire, to the exploration of my drives and myself through my body.

As soon as I met Bernard, I immediately felt the desire to record his testimony. Little by little, I identified the themes that motivated me to deepen this knowledge and tell his story.

Maybe I kept dating him, not just for sex, but to find out more about him, about me, and about things I could never imagine.

Eventually, I realized that my story and my research were not about sex. Sex was a vehicle of meaning, the metaphor of the inner state of my main witness. The photograph of a precise era that Bernard embodies with his experience.

If all stories deserve to be told for what they are, then this is the story of an encounter: of how my relationship with Bernard evolved over time, of how this man came into my life and how sex stepped back into the background turning into affection and complicity made up of small daily rites that have somehow replaced the Sado-maso rite. Above all, it is the story of an out-of-the-ordinary man with an experience with suffering and pain that few would have endured. At the same time this man is animated by a universal feeling in which anyone can recognize himself: the will to leave a mark, a trace and thus demonstrate, first of all to himself, that his life did not pass in vain.

I approached the so-called practices of sadomasochism in a completely casual way, I never thought that they could correspond to my nature, but I continued to experience them as a tourist, as an adventurer who, during a trip to a distant and unknown land, gets lost. I tried to learn new things and come home with memories. This helped my personal evolution and gradually I realized that all of this was deeply linked to my own history.

In the past, I had a relationship with a boy of my same age. We lived together for four years, he was a pianist, a brilliant, bright, creative boy. He was an adept of hard sexual practices (fist, bondage, domination ...) but together we had almost never shared this type of experience (or at least not in such an extreme way). We had rather vanilla sexual intercourses, sometimes we would spice it up, but nothing comparable to what I got to practice after our relationship was over.

However, this allowed me to get in touch with a new world, and in my ex-boyfriend's entourage I met a number of men of the same generation as Bernard, often with very similar stories, attitudes, behaviors, and habits. I was fascinated by the freedom they had to evolve in these practices, by the philosophy behind their way of experiencing sexuality or conceiving life as a couple. Sexual drives I was not familiar with, that I trivially associated with terms such as perversion or obsession. Especially for someone like me, Italian, with my Catholic background and the sense of guilt running through my veins. I felt a sense of repulsion and at the same time of great attraction.

My ex-pianist boyfriend was HIV positive, he had been diagnosed as such at the age of 19, in 1994, two years before the arrival of the first tri-therapies in 1996. When they had announced the news, they told him he had "a few years of life". He thought he was damned.

As a reaction, I suppose, he launched himself body and soul into sex, and started practicing extreme sex, he quickly became a regular at Parisian sex clubs like Keller, becoming in a few years a famous character in the hard sex underground community in the early 90s.

It was as if he wanted to mock his damnation, as if he had found a way to feel alive, without trivializing, or without rhetoric. Extreme sex became a cry for life, a cry for survival, a vital and organic drive that banished away the specter of impending death.

Everyone experiences sexuality in their own way, everyone has their own personal path, I don't want to make generalizations, or cheap psychoanalysis. But, my experience put me in front of a rather recurrent pattern: most of the disciples of S&M sex I met were survivors, AIDS victims, whatever their serological status.

When I separated from my partner, I unconsciously (or not) wanted to live this experience on my skin (literally), and after some occasional meeting without a future, I ran into Bernard. He naturally assumed the role of tutor, the teacher, and I was the disciple, his servant. Sex was our only means of communication, dialogue, exchange: we really and deeply met each other during our sexual games (with a whip).

After an on-and-off journey through this universe, we became friends.

Sex was no longer part of our relationship, Bernard began to pass on his memory to me, he decided to tell me his personal story. It is at this very moment that I identified my intentions, the objectives of the story, what the story was about and themes I would have liked to explore.

Through our conversations, with this film project, Bernard leaves me something of him, a testimony, a legacy. Involuntarily, I became his testament.

Bernard is 63, I'm 38. Who am I to him? A son? A brother? The Italian boyfriend that AIDS snatched from his arms when he was my age?

Bernard changes house, and says he will want to burn all his old photos. Why?

An orphan, adopted by a family that rejected him because of his homosexuality, Bernard never wanted to know his origins, he doesn't want to know where he comes from, but he knows perfectly well where he wants to end up.

What does it mean to retire? Withdraw from life? What do we take with us, what do we leave behind?

What are the goals when we know we are heading towards the end?

When do we become old?

Will Bernard stop practicing hard sex? Will he stop going to nightclubs?

It is a possibility.

Like his cats, Bernard licks his wounds and carries them with him, from one chapter of his novel to another, from one house to another; burning everything won't do him any good.

Will I be Bernard's last lover? Witness of the last whiplash, before locking it up forever in a box or in an old moldy suitcase?

I have recorded some of our intimate conversations, imagined and recreated others that took place during our sexual encounters. The moments in which between a whiplash and a bondage session, we had long breaks in the dark of the night and conversed softly about everything: about love, about death, about the AIDS epidemic in the Eighties, about his new life project, about us.

These conversations punctuate the story tracing the path of the narration: Bernard's journey from his old house located in a calm and silent environment, to his new home in the middle of a city intersection; the evolution of his habits; his relationship with the cats, a metaphor for the fear of yet another abandonment and existential loneliness.

Despite the topics addressed, Bernard never appears austere, nor sad, nor trashy. He is a bright and brilliant character, his gaze on life is as tender as that of a child.

I carefully researched a sex-linked aesthetic for the sequences with the sound recordings of the conversations. My will was to film the close-up details of the sessions between Bernard and me, his latest lover.

An activity that I experience as that of a theatrical show, a show on stage, a game. I wanted to film the backstage, the preparation, the accessories and the costumes, the before and after the performance, when everything is upside down on stage and off stage. I am not interested in the act itself, the pornography of the erotic fantasy is

staged. What interests me are the effects, the reasons, the consequences, everything around them. What it represents.

This film does not want to be just the portrait of a man out of the ordinary, but rather the expression of a look, my gaze on Bernard. Our meetings, our evolving relationship represent the story, the narration.

I also wanted to explore, under another interpretation, the parallel between the position of domination in sex and in cinema. The roles that shift relentlessly, between director and character, between author and subject of the story (object of desire). Bernard dominates me, but I let myself be dominated and I lead him; Bernard films me, I let myself be filmed and then I film him but he seduces me with his story and drives my camera, and makes me observe him.

Despite the strong impression of reality, the film is based on a solid narrative structure, a script written before the shooting, together with Nico Morabito, co-author of the previous film "Fuori Tutto". From the progressive change in the nature of our encounters, which start from sexual exploits and become something else, up to the evolution of the relationship, its beginning and its end; my role, my character; the balance in the relationship and the themes that emerge.

"The Last Chapter" is a film about farewells but it is also a film about memory.

Bernard's testimony becomes an attempt to leave a trace, to preserve the memory of a wounded community in a dark age for the whole world. Presenting the film at the International Critics' Week becomes an even more emblematic gesture: remembering the drama and suffering of a community that is still struggling to have visibility about its rights.

Far from a classical portrait, a reportage or a filmed testimony, the film wants to be an original object with its own style, identified by my own gaze on the relationship with Bernard and on the themes that surfaced from our encounter.

Just like in my first film "Everything Must Go" in which I see myself, which is certainly a little autobiographical, but not psychoanalytical, and that wants to remain universal due to its themes and all the different possible levels of interpretation.

Gianluca Matarrese

DIRECTOR'S BIO-FILMOGRAPHY



Gianluca Matarrese (1980) was born in Torino and moved to Paris in 2002 to study cinema and theater. He graduated in History and Critique of North American Cinema at the University of Torino and Paris VIII, also graduating at the Ecole Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq in Paris. In 2008 he started working in French television, as author, reporter, artistic coordinator, segment producer. His own sit-comedy show aired for 100 episodes on OCS networks in France. He also works as an actor for cinema and theater in France. Between 2013 and 2014 he directed two short-films. *My Movie-like Kiss* was awarded the Achille Valdata at the Torino Film Festival.

In 2019 his documentary *Everything Must Go* won the award for Best Italian Documentary at the Torino Film Festival. He is currently working on two films, *Fashion Babylon* e *A Steady Job*, the latter co-directed with Mattia Colombo.

LA COPRODUZIONE

The Last Chapter is an Italian-French coproduction between Altara Films (Florence) and Bocalupo Films (Paris).

ALTARA FILMS is a production company, based in Florence, Italy, who's dedicated principally to the production of creative documentaries, in Italy and abroad. The films produced have won many awards and have been shown in several of the most important international film festivals, such as Venice, Rome, Rotterdam, Cinéma du Réel, Dok Leipzig. Among the partners the company has made films with, there are numerous international television channels such as ARTE, YLE, RAI, NDR, SVT, DR, RTBF, SBS, Australia and others.

The most recent films include:

Il Risoluto, by Giovanni Donfrancesco (160'/90') ITA/FR/GER Prod. Altara Films, Les Films du Poisson, RAI Cinema, NDR-ARTE (La Lucarne) with support from CNC. Venice International Film Festival; Rotterdam International Film Festival.

Oltremare, by Loredana Bianconi (84'/58') ITA/FR/BEL Prod. Altara Films, Cvb, Stella Films, ARTE France/Istituto Luce, with support from CNC and Procirep. Best film Yoga Award al Biografilm Film Festival Bologna; Prix du Jury et Prix Documentaire sur Grand Ecran at Modena Via Emilia Doc Fest.

The Stone River, by Giovanni Donfrancesco (87') ITA/FR Prod. Altara Films, Les Films du Poisson, RAI CINEMA, with support from the Regione Toscana, CNC. Winner of the Globo d'Oro 2014 for the best documentary at Rome International Film Festival; Cinéma du Réel Young Jury Award; Yerevan International Film Festival Grand Prize for best documentary; Cinemambiente Turin Jury's special award; Anuu-Ru Aboro Film Festival, New Caledonia, Jury's special award; Reykjavik International Film Festival; DOK Leipzig; RIDM Montreal; ZagrebDox.

BOCALUPO FILMS is a Paris-based production company whose founding purpose is to support original and innovative film projects that explore the diversity of cinematic territories.

Films produced by the company have been shown or awarded at numerous international festivals from Rotterdam to Visions du Réel, from Cannes Acid to Locarno, from Tokyo to Sao Paulo, from Karlovy Vary to the Viennale.

THE LAST CHAPTER - STILLS









