

Haut et Court presents

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2016



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FESTIVAL DE SAN SEBASTIÁN
2016



150 MILLIGRAMS

(LA FILLE DE BREST)

A film by Emmanuelle BERCOT

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150 MILLIGRAMS

(LA FILLE DE BREST)

A film by Emmanuelle BERCOT

Based on the book by Irène FRACHON "MEDIATOR 150 MG"

Published in France by Editions Dialogues

Starring

Sidse Babett KNUDSEN and Benoît MAGIMEL

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Material available for download:

<http://www.wildbunch.biz/movie/150-milligrams/>

www.hautetcourt.com/film/fiche/284/la-fille-de-brest

SYNOPSIS

In a hospital in Brest, a lung specialist establishes a direct link between suspicious deaths and the consumption of Mediator, a drug that has been on the market for 30 years. From its confidential beginnings to the media frenzy surrounding the case, this David-versus-Goliath story, directly inspired by Irène Frachon's life, climaxes in a victory for truth.

EMMANUELLE BERCOT INTERVIEW

What made you want to make this film?

Like everyone, I had heard about the Mediator case but hadn't followed it closely. It was the producers from Haut et Court, Caroline Benjo and Carole Scotta, who took an interest in Irène Frachon's book¹ and asked me to read it.

As it was up to Irène Frachon to decide who would make the film adaptation, I had lunch with her in Paris, a few months after the book was published. That was about six years ago. I quickly got the sense that this colourful woman could be an extraordinary fictional character. When she talked about the case, with passion and emotion, it took on a whole new dimension. It was no longer the story of Mediator, but the story of this exceptional woman's fight.

How did Irène Frachon come across during this first meeting?

Very natural, very spontaneous, not political at all. An ordinary person with an extraordinary story. Someone who doesn't react in a calculated way. She has an incredible energy; a sort of bulldozer of *joie de vivre*. Irène laughs a lot, even when she talks about serious matters. She is very emotional, going easily from laughter to tears. Her language is quite flowery, which gives the impression of someone who puts her foot in it, and who doesn't care about conventions.

After this meeting, which took place not far from the offices of the Ministry of Health, I told my producers that I was on board, as long as the film was about this woman and her story. And in the end we were lucky that Irène Frachon chose us.

How did you work with Irène Frachon?

Things happened in different stages. When I took on this project, I had two other films to make: *On My Way* and *Standing Tall*. Firstly, I didn't want to write the screenplay. Not only did I not have the time, but I didn't feel I had it in me to handle such a complex story.

Séverine Bosschem was chosen to write the screenplay. Very quickly, we went to Brest together. We spent a lot of time with Irène during our stay, both at her home and at the hospital. We met all the people involved in the case. For hours, we recorded Irène as she told us the whole story.

Basically, a little less than half the film is built around the adaptation of the book. The other half is made up of first-hand accounts, the secrets people shared with us.

When we returned to Paris, we met next with the Parisian protagonists, the epidemiologist Gustave Roussy in particular, the "mole" from the CNAM [National health insurance fund], Anne Jouan, Gérard Bapt...

For over a year, Séverine Bosschem worked independently. She compiled the thousands of documents Irène had given her, and ended up mastering the technical aspect of the story. Then, but together this time, we defined the rough outline of the narrative. In total, it took about three years to write the film. I took part at all stages so as to redefine the construction, delimit the storyline and develop the different characters. All this while working on my other films.

¹ *Mediator 150mg* a book by Irène Frachon with a preface by Rony Brauman, editions-dialogues.fr

Finally, a few months before we started filming, I rewrote the screenplay to make it my own. During all this time, Irène was always attentive and available to advise us and help us correct any inaccuracies. Antoine, the researcher who was a great help to Irène during the whole case and Anne Jouan, the journalist from *Le Figaro*, were also extremely helpful. She was very mindful of the factual aspect of things.

Then came the difficult question of who would play Irène Frachon.

I had asked myself this before I even wrote the screenplay. And I couldn't come up with the answer. I couldn't think of any French actress that could play the part. You can imagine my problem: for almost three years, as I was writing the screenplay, I didn't know who was going to play Irène Frachon. It was Catherine Deneuve who found the solution. We had just finished *Standing Tall* and were having dinner together - she told me about an actress who played in *Borgen*. "*You should watch the series, this actress would be great for the role and I think she speaks French,*" she told me. The very next day I started watching *Borgen*. I also came across a TV interview with Sidse Babett Knudsen in which she spoke French pretty well, if with an accent.

After this, everything happened very fast. Caroline Benjo and I went to Copenhagen. The meeting went very well. Sidse read the script, which was still a work-in-progress. She accepted the role very quickly. To be honest, if Catherine Deneuve hadn't suggested Sidse for the role, I don't think anyone else would have thought of her!

We then had to inform Irène Frachon, who was very curious from the start to know who would play her. We had lunch together and were, quite frankly, very worried. Wouldn't she find it odd that we had chosen a Danish actress she had never heard of? The exact opposite happened. We had barely mentioned Sidse's name when she started to scream. She was... ecstatic! We obviously didn't know this, but the Frachon family are huge *Borgen* fans. For Irène, to have Sidse play her on screen was an absolute dream.

So in terms of casting, you didn't try to stick to reality. You could have chosen an actress from Brittany....

Well, Irène Frachon isn't from Brittany, to begin with! (laughs). I knew from the start it wasn't an issue. This woman's fight is universal. No matter where she comes from, it has the same power. However, I did think that Irène Frachon might have been annoyed. After all she's French and it's a French story. But as she is a very intelligent, very open-minded and intellectually honest woman, it didn't bother her.

Irène Frachon has always been open about her Protestant faith. It is even an important, constituent facet of her personality. However, it's an aspect that doesn't appear in the film. Can you tell us why?

You're right, Irène Frachon's faith is an extremely important factor. She held on partly thanks to her faith, partly thanks to her family and the incredible people around her. However, Irène's faith is completely omitted from the film and we only catch glimpses of the family. Why? It would only have made sense if it wasn't anecdotal, and there is only so much you can tell in two hours. I also wanted to make this story as universal as possible and at the same time to avoid singling Irène out too much. I must add that she never expressed the

desire to have her faith mentioned in the film. But she did lend Sidse her Huguenot cross so she could wear it on set. So that aspect of the character is not completely omitted.

Do you remember the first time Irène Frachon met Sidse Babett?

Of course, though I wasn't there for the very first moments. I had planned to arrive fifteen minutes late. It was in a restaurant close to the production office in Paris. When I arrived, I found they already had a great connection. They are both very warm people, with an incredible energy. Their energies immediately connected. Sidse did not know Irène Frachon of course, nor was she familiar with the Mediator case. She was discovering and absorbing the character she was going to play.

Do you see a physical resemblance between the two?

No (laughs). I soon gave up on the idea of finding an actress who looked like Irène, firstly because there isn't one. Their resemblance lies in the energy they are able to exert and their "clown-like" natures.

In your personal life, have you already had to deal with the medical world?

Yes, a lot. I think it's one of the reasons Irène Frachon wanted me to share this story. My father was a heart surgeon at Lariboisière Hospital in Paris. For a long time, I wanted to be a surgeon. My favourite hobby when I didn't have school was to go and watch my father operate. From the ages of ten to twelve, I spent a lot of time in operating theatres. When I was about fifteen, I did an observational internship in several surgical units at Lariboisière. I've always been fascinated by hospitals. I like going to hospitals. I feel good there. I think perhaps Irène appreciated that.

So before you went to La Fémis (*prestigious French film school*), you wanted to study medicine?

Yes, until I was about fifteen. Sometimes my father would warn me, telling me it was a very tough line of work for women. For men also - I hardly ever saw him. I remember he was very wound up against pharmaceutical laboratories, their lobby, their power. It was something we often talked about at home.

In the film there are, from a medical point of view, two incredible scenes: open heart surgery and an autopsy. Let's begin with the operation. Was this familiar territory?

For this scene in the operating theatre, I was indeed on familiar ground. That didn't stop me from going to see a heart operation to refresh my memory before the shoot.

When we were filming, all my sensations came back to me... It was very exciting to shoot an open heart operation, with staff from the CHU in Brest: a real surgeon, real anaesthetists, a real nurse....

Only the operation was fake, but it looks so authentic! For sanitary reasons alone, I couldn't risk filming a real operation. I could have used the camera installations you often find in operating theatres but I would only have had video footage. As it was vital for me to be able to choose my angles, we quickly opted for a classic three-camera technique - we couldn't repeat the same actions again and again. For the interior of the body, we used special effects.

Your decision was to show and almost touch the organs - the heart in particular - with the camera.

It was vital to see the organic and physical damage caused by Mediator. To allow the audience to see and feel the effects this medication had on certain people's flesh. In any case, I always strive to make my films as close to physical reality as possible.

Let's talk about the autopsy scene. You also relied on special effects here...

Right! We definitely didn't kill the actress! I don't know if it's allowed, but I know that it would have been extremely difficult for me to film a real autopsy, someone's body without their approval. I had never seen one before this film. So I asked to see one. It's... how can I put it... a metaphysical experience. In my life there will be a "before" and an "after" this autopsy. It's something both dizzying and unbearable.

Nevertheless, you chose to share this experience with the audience...

The autopsy was in the script from the start. It was a very important moment for Irène, a sort of revelation, a moment when things fell into place. After seeing one I wanted to share my experience with others. I know some people won't be able to watch, but I wanted, once again, to allow the audience to experience the physicality of things. And God knows we sugar-coated the reality in the edit!

It's rare to see a scene like this in cinema. And it's impossible not to react while watching this body being cut open and dismembered.

Finding the right balance was important to avoid the audience rejecting it. We show certain things but not the worst. The scene focuses on what Irène is feeling when she sees what her patient's body has endured.

Before you began filming, did you watch films or series about this kind of investigation?

I don't watch a lot of series. I did however watch a lot of procedural movies. *Erin Brockovich* is for me the ultimate reference. In this genre, it's a perfect film. I also watched or rewatched films like *All the President's Men*, *Norma Rae*, *Moneyball*, *The Rainmaker*, *The Verdict*...

The writing and editing are very tight in a very "American" style...

I did try to embrace the way American cinema tells this kind of story. The *mise en scene* is indeed quite different from that of my other films. I was aiming for efficiency.

In the film, a character says: "You only find what you're looking for". We could add: "You can only film well what you strongly feel".

I need to be passionate about the story I'm telling. I found a stronger connection with Irène Frachon than with the Mediator case itself.

The film is also a sharp denunciation of the health administration. In that sense, it's also a political film, more than just a portrait of this Erin Brockovich from Brest.

I hide behind Irène. She is the one who denounces; I'm only following her journey. I'm not denouncing anything she hasn't already denounced herself. All the facts mentioned in the film have been proven.

Jacques Servier, the powerful CEO of the laboratory named after him, doesn't appear in the film. Why?

We stuck to Irène Frachon's point of view. She never went to the Servier laboratory. She never met Jacques Servier. I could have shown the "bad guy", as is often done in this kind of film which pits two sides against each other. I hesitated a little, but finally decided that we would tell the story only from Irène's point of view. And therefore we wouldn't see anything she hadn't.

Many viewers will discover the collusion that can occur between certain doctors and certain pharmaceutical laboratories. Before becoming interested in this case, even though your father talked about this with you, did you imagine this kind of practice would reach such proportions?

I'm not naive; I understand the power of pharmaceutical laboratories. But I also know that there are a lot of doctors who work very well with laboratories, without any conflict of interest or corruption. As Irène says in the film: "I also collaborate with laboratories and support therapeutic innovation."

That said, certain facts in this case really surprised me. The fact that Antoine, for example, the researcher who helped Irène establish her case scientifically speaking, was not approved by the INSERM [French Institute of Health and Medical Research] simply because some employees of Servier were members of the jury. Isn't that crazy?

In the film, someone says: "There is no real fight without fear". Fear - Irène's fear - is omnipresent. Do you feel that fear too?

No, not at all. I don't get scared easily. Irène talks a lot about the fear she felt. She certainly went through some tough times. For example, when she was forced to remove the subtitle of her book, "How many dead?" When she talks about this, you can tell she hit rock bottom. It was hard to convey this in the film. However, even though this is a genre film, I didn't want to focus on her paranoia, the feeling that the whole world was against her, that she was surrounded by enemies. Furthermore, she was never threatened physically; neither were her children. We would definitely have had to twist reality to convey that on screen and I always wanted to stick to the facts of this story, without extrapolating or distorting them.

She often said that her fear came from the fact that she thought her children, her family, could be threatened. That was unthinkable, to the point that if it had been the case, she would have been prepared to give everything up. Tell us about her husband.

This man loves his wife unconditionally. And it's mutual. This family is incredible; I've never seen one like it! The dream family! Profoundly united, all admiring one another. When I had the screenplay read, many people told me that a family like this doesn't exist; that it can't

exist. In fact, not only does it exist - as the whole film crew can testify - but it's thanks to this extraordinary family that Irène managed to hold on. She wasn't on her own.

Irène Frachon has said many times that there should be a law to punish those who attack whistle-blowers. I imagine you agree?

Yes, one hundred percent. Whistle-blowers should be protected and we should punish those who attack. However, the exact opposite that's just happened in a court case in Luxembourg. The whistle-blowers were sentenced. A court was therefore able to tell a whistle-blower: "You were right to help reveal these facts, however, as it's forbidden, you will be sentenced." It's appalling!

In your opinion, what drives Irène Frachon's courage? Her acute sense of justice?

Her pure doctor's instinct. Her sincere vocation. She has never been career driven, but is widely considered a very good physician. Perhaps not a great scientist, but a fine practitioner with flair and first-rate diagnostic powers. I think she managed to see her fight through thanks to her empathy for the victims. And also her ethical and moral convictions. Irène Frachon fights for a just cause. She's pure. In her candour, she doesn't see evil. She is a doctor solely to treat and care for people. She doesn't seek power and therefore was never scared to stick her neck out.

How did Sidse Babett Knudsen manage to take on this role?

What I wanted was to share Irène Frachon's vision and incredible energy. Irène is what people call a 'character' in life. We worked a lot on this aspect of things. Irène's walk, her body language is something Sidse and I really sought to reproduce.

It took Sidse a little while to grasp the character and to slip into the skin of this inexhaustible woman who can herself also be exhausting. Her gift of the gab, her vitality, her flowery language, her *joie de vivre* at all times. We were never after a strict imitation, but it only took one afternoon with the Frachon family for something to click. The work on the wardrobe also helped the process. I also wanted the rhythm of the film to be sustained and Sidse worked very hard on pronunciation and dialogues.

Do you see similarities between Irène Frachon and Birgitte Nyborg, the heroine in *Borgen*?

Birgitte Nyborg can be impressive. She works in politics, she wants power. I think this is the big difference with Irène Frachon who couldn't care less about all that. She wants justice to triumph, which is a very different thing. And her motivations are not personal. But both share the same kind of energy, even if it isn't exerted for the same reasons.

In terms of lighting, what were you aiming for?

We had to shoot a lot of scenes indoors and it was difficult to light these very un-cinematographic interiors. We were also filming at a frantic pace. When we had some time, we tried to dramatize the scenes and scenery with the lighting. The scene with the "mole" for example, the guy from the CNAM: this luminous world has nothing to do with the atmosphere in administrative offices.

You worked closely with your editor on the cutting, to give it a very strong rhythm.

The film was already tightly edited in its conception before it was filmed and that was a choice from the start. There are a lot of shots and different angles. It was my first time tackling genre film. I wanted the story to really move forward and the rhythm of the investigation to carry the audience.

After *Standing Tall*, you are once again working with Benoît Magimel.

He's kind of my fetish actor! I wanted him to play Antoine, Irène's strong arm, the one who provided her with the scientific skills she lacked. I knew he could convey Antoine's good-heartedness, gentleness, humanity and slightly childish aspect. Irène was also very lucky to have met some incredible people along the way. She was a warlord, but had magnificent soldiers at her side. The film is also the story of a team. As someone says in the film, without them she would have done nothing. But they wouldn't have done what she did.

***Standing Tall, 150 Milligrams...* two films in a way haunted by the idea of justice.**

Absolutely. Since childhood, I have been obsessed with the idea of justice.

Would you say you are a politically committed director?

No, not especially, I'm not really an activist, to be honest. I have my opinions, my ideas and my feelings of indignation, but I rarely follow them into action. It's only when I'm behind the camera that I become involved. If I make a portrait of a politically engaged woman, it doesn't necessarily mean I am too.

But your films often have a political dimension...

That's great if my films allow me to invest myself and express myself a bit more than as a citizen. I am absolutely involved in the story I'm telling and support entirely the point of view.

Did you ever consider playing Irène Frachon yourself?

Never! It didn't even cross my mind. I no longer want to act in the films I direct anyway. I love working with actors. Directing myself would mean denying myself the pleasure of working with someone else!

In the end, is Irène Frachon a true heroine?

Absolutely! I think the huge noise this case made is based on who she is, her personality, but also on the fact that she is a woman.

And the film is directed by a woman and produced by women...

(laughs) Right!

However, we can't say that Irène Frachon is a feminist.

That's what I was about to say. I'm not sure that she is, strictly speaking. In fact, I don't know. She is a brave woman. Maybe she was sensitive to the fact that other women were telling her story.

Was the educational aspect of the film a concern when writing this film? It's not easy to comprehend and therefore put across such complex ideas...

It was important that people who knew nothing about the Mediator case should want to see *150 Milligrams*. When I was writing the film, this preoccupation with popularization was omnipresent. How could I make this understandable? We tried to simplify things as much as possible. In the end, the screenplay is slightly technical at the beginning, but this aspect then disappears completely.

In the end, with this type of film, I don't think it matters very much if you don't understand everything. You very quickly become attached to Irène's fight, to what she's feeling, the energy she has to exert to make things move forward. The technical aspects become a minor preoccupation. It's ok if the audience doesn't grasp all the subtleties of the case.

Often, in procedural movies, even the best ones, we don't understand everything. Take Michael Mann's *The Insider* for example. I love this film, I don't understand half the details, but I don't care, I'm with the characters, I want to move forward with them.

Hundreds of deaths could have been avoided if the Servier laboratories and health authorities had done their job well. How can we describe the attitude of the justice system in this case? Slow, too slow? Indulgent, too indulgent?

For the moment, the criminal trial is constantly being pushed back. Let's hope that something does finally happen. The victims also have the right to justice.

Irène Frachon sometimes quotes Albert Einstein: "The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who do nothing about it."

I believe this absolutely. Few of us can identify with Irène Frachon. On the other hand, a lot of us can identify with those who sit back and watch others solve problems.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

After training as a dancer, Emmanuelle Bercot turned her sights on the theatre and acting before enrolling in La Fémis. In 1997 she directed her first short film, *Les vacances*, which was awarded the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. In 1999, her graduation film *La puce*, which also marked the discovery of actress Isild Le Besco, won the Cinéfondation prize in Cannes and was released theatrically in France.

In 2001, her feature debut, *Clément*, premiered in Un Certain Regard at Cannes, where it was awarded the Prix de la Jeunesse (Youth Award). With her sophomore feature, *Backstage* - screened in Official Competition at the Venice Film Festival in 2005 - Bercot continued to explore the theme of adolescent angst, in this case through the troubled relationship between a star singer (Emmanuelle Seigner) and an obsessive young fan (Isild Le Besco).

Emmanuelle Bercot continues to act from time to time, appearing in films by Claude Miller, Bertrand Tavernier, Benoît Jacquot, Olivier Assayas and Maïwenn, whose *Polisse* she also co-wrote.

Her television credits as director include *Le choix d'Elodie* (1998 – winner of the Laurier d'Or 1999 and the Prix du Sénat) *Tirez sur le caviste*, in the series *Suite Noire*, starring Niels Arestrup and Julie-Marie Parmentier (winner of the French Syndicate of Cinema and Television Critics Prize in 2008), and *Mes chères études* (aka *Student Services*), for Canal+ in 2009.

In 2012, Bercot directed one of the episodes in the portmanteau movie *The Players*, starring Jean Dujardin and Gilles Lellouche, followed by the feature *On My Way*, which screened in Official Selection at the 63rd Berlin International Film Festival in 2013.

In 2015, her feature *Standing Tall* was selected to open the 68th Cannes Film Festival, where she won the Best Actress Award for her performance in Maïwenn's *Mon roi*.

CAST

SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN	IRÈNE FRACHON
BENOÎT MAGIMEL	ANTOINE LE BIHAN
CHARLOTTE LAEMMEL	PATOCHE
ISABELLE DE HERTOIGH	CORINNE ZACHARRIA
LARA NEUMANN	ANNE JOUAN
PHILIPPE UCHAN	AUBERT
PATRICK LIGARDES	BRUNO FRACHON
OLIVIER PASQUIER	ARSENE WEBER
GUSTAVE KERVERN	KERMAREC
PABLO PAULY	CHARLES JOSEPH-LOUDIN
MYRIAM AZENCOT	CATHERINE HAYNES
EDDIE CHIGNARA	CHRISTOPHE LAUGIER
RAPHAEL FERRET	FRED LE BLOSTAT
CHRISTOPHE MEYNET	DAVID the research assistant
GILLES TRETON	YANNICK JOBIC
GARANCE MAZURECK	FLORE MICHELET

CREW

Director	Emmanuelle BERCOT
Screenplay	Séverine BOSSCHEM and Emmanuelle BERCOT
Based on the book by Irène FRACHON	« MEDIATOR 150 Mg » Published in France by Editions Dialogues
Screenplay Consultant	Romain COMPINGT
Producers	Caroline BENJO Carole SCOTTA Barbara LETELLIER Simon ARNAL
Editor	Julien LELOUP
DP	Guillaume SCHIFFMAN AFC
Sound	Pierre ANDRÉ Jérôme CHENEVOY Séverin FAVRIAU Stéphane THIEBAUT
Original Music	Martin WHEELER Bloum
Special Effects	Pierre-Olivier PERSIN aka POP
Production Designer	Eric BARBOZA
Costume Designer	Pascaline CHAVANE
Casting	Antoinette BOULAT ARDA Sonia LARUE
Production Manager	Philippe DELEST
Unit Production Manager	Karine PETITE
Continuity	Isabel RIBIS
First Assistant Director	Léonard VINDRY

CONTACTS

TIFF

Canadian PR

Ingrid Hamilton
ingrid@gat.ca
+1 416-731-3034

SAN SEBASTIAN FILM FESTIVAL

International PR

Caroline AYMAR
caroline.aymar@unifrance.org
+ 33 6 85 42 87 26

International PR

Andrea Grau
andrea@touchwoodpr.com
+1 416 593 0777 ext 201

Anne-Lise Kontz
anne-lise@touchwoodpr.com
+1 416 820 6363

Anne Pampin
anne@touchwoodpr.com
+1 416 938 9074

International Sales

wild bunch

Carole BARATON & Fanny BEAUVILLE
cbaraton@wildbunch.eu • fbeauville@wildbunch.eu
Olivier BARBIER
obarbier@wildbunch.eu
Émilie SERRES
eserres@wildbunch.eu
Silvia SIMONUTTI
ssimonutti@wildbunch.eu

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