



UK Premiere of 4K Restoration

The Razor's Edge

The Razor's Edge Ghazl el-banat

Director: Jocelyne Saab

Production Companies: Ciné-Vidéo, Aleph, Sigmarc

Participation: CNC - Centre national de la cinématographie, Ministère Français de la Culture, Ministère Français des Relations Extérieures, Téléfilm Canada

Producer: Gabriel Boustani

Production Managers: Amal Makarem, Jean Lara, Anne-Marie Otte

Assistant Directors: Antoine Beau, Mohamed Soueid

Script Supervisor: Milka Assaf

Screenplay and dialogue: Gérard Brach

Arab dialogue adaptation: Samir Sayegh

Original idea: Jocelyne Saab

Photography: Claude La Rue

2nd Camera: Jocelyne Saab

Assistants to 2nd Camera: Hassan Naamani, Marwan Houry

Stills Photography: Catherine Laroque

Editor: Philippe Gosselet

Art Directors: Marc Julien, Hala Shoucair, Pascal Kellerman

Costumes: Seta Khoubesserian

Make-up: Ali Diab, Seta Khoubesserian

Hair: Seta Khoubesserian

Music: Siegfried Kessler

Sound: Pierre Lorrain

Mixer: Paul Berto

Technical Consultant: Jean Achache

Artistic Direction: Rafic Boustani

Linguist: Samia Naim-Sambar

Translations: Tahar Ben Jelloun

Cast:

Jacques Weber (*Karim*)

Hala Bassam (*Samar*)

Juliet Berto (*Juliette*)

Youssef Housni (*Donatien*)

Denise Filiatrault (*mother*)

Ali Diab (*father*)

Khaled El Sayed (*blindman*)

Claude Préfontaine (*Elie*)

Souheir Salhani (*Leila*)

Lebanon-France-Canada 1985

102 mins

Digital 4K (restoration)

Restored in 4K in 2025 by Association Jocelyne Saab in collaboration with Cinémathèque suisse and La Cinémathèque Québécoise



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+ pre-recorded intro by Mathilde Rouxel, co-founder of the Association Jocelyne Saab

Jocelyne Saab on 'The Razor's Edge'

This film represents four years work but also a struggle against war. Whether in France or Lebanon, no-one on the production side of things was willing to believe it. First of all, I had to trust in my capacity to convince of the legitimacy to think fiction and feature in a country at war. To stand up against accusations of anachronism (step over the fact of being regarded as anachronic) and this in Paris as well as in Beirut.

I'd been kicking an idea around in my head for two years. I told myself that I must present that idea to the greatest. When one has seen war, one ceases to feel fear and so, I wasn't now to be intimidated by a producer. I had taken real risks in war reporting so I thought I may as well go straight to Gaumont, having read in *Le Monde* an interview of Toscan du Plantier in which he stated that young cinema had to be encouraged, preaching risky production politics.

This was back in '82; I told my story without submitting a written script. I expressly said, 'I'm telling you a tale of Lebanon so as to tell you a tale of what's going on here as well.' I added that the place offered ideal cinema conditions. This was ironical to someone conscious of what a country at war means but at the same time it was true, because everything is extreme. The story was much what it is now but did not stick to reality anymore.

The main idea about that girl whose hymen is resown was recognised by Gaumont as a strong idea and a strong vision of things but I was conscious of the fragility of my script. And so, I asked if it would be possible to get a scriptwriter to formulate my ideas. They agreed on the principle and I told them I wished him to be Gérard Brach. I saw him as the one who would understand this idea of helplessness and locking up in war in which we lived.

It wasn't so much the Brach – Polanski or Brach – Antonioni landmarks that induced me to think that way but a kind of intuition of the Brach myth. I met him without convincing him at first. Like a lot of people, he first adopted an attitude of rejection, evoking straight away the moral problem. 'I can't shoot movies while others are making war.' That lasted about a year, before his decision toppled and until he took it upon himself to get down to writing.

I kept going back and forth between Paris and Beirut; every time I came back to Paris, I'd bring him what I reckoned was the 'metal' for the script, I'd improve the story and at the same time I'd bring fragments of a world and culture unknown to him. He entered that world with passion: from the study of arabesque calligraphy to Arab poetry of the middle ages up to modern times. I'd send him books, show him my films and also talk to him about Egypt, where I often travel; I even showed him Shadi Abdel Salam's *The Mummy*. Abdel Salam came to see him and spoke of ancient Egypt. What is fascinating is that he not only wants to know about the culture, but what is deeply set within you. There are movies where you invest yourself totally, things spurt out, as with a volcano, and that's what he likes to grasp. On top of that, I'd come from a ten years' war; he saw that immediately and it hooked him because he'd also known war in his youth.

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I quickly sensed that I shouldn't hide or cheat him. I had to deliver myself as I was. He had to get down to work, to knead and mix two separate matters: objective information and my own sensitivity, my vision. The first time, I gave him a hundred pages. 'It's not consistent enough,' he said. I brought an extra hundred: 'Alright,' he told me. I always managed to see myself in what he did: he'd manage to put order where I couldn't and yet it imposed itself as mine. Sometimes it happened that I wouldn't feel, in his writing, things that I believed to have stressed; later, while shooting, I'd see them again. I think that he too, in shooting, found what he'd written, with the accepted delays of course. For example, the scene in which the adolescent girl dances an oriental dance wearing the foreign woman's clothes. That dance wasn't written down because I'm the oriental: only the jealousy scene existed. But he appreciated. There is an extreme thoroughness in Brach's written work, as in watchmaking, and, when attempting to change the order in sequences, I made shooting errors that later proved difficult to mend.

The film is two parallel lines. The story of two beings and the story of a city. In a regular city these two parallels would never meet, in a city at war they do.

The model is a real person: an adolescent, refugee from a Beirut slum, had finally dropped into an apartment neighbouring mine. I'd watched her grow for three years. But I wanted to tell two stories. Firstly, the intrusion of this adolescent into a world foreign to her own had fascinated me, and that of a character representing my generation of intellectuals and artists torn between two cultures and ripped apart by the tragedy of war. This generation, participating in the same disillusionments as Europe's, and to top it all, at war. The same disillusioned generation in Europe was only conscious of war as a spectator of Vietnam, Chile or Cambodia.

I came from documentaries, and had a tendency to stick too close to reality. Thanks to Gérard Brach, we really made it from documentary to fiction. At the beginning, we agreed to say 'we're telling a story of love, passion and lack of understanding. This story could happen anywhere, out in Beirut things are different because war and violence push things to extremes.' It's a love story after ten years of war. One has a tendency to consider any film made in Beirut as a war film. It's a film about a love story inside a city at war. It was different. Brach refused, as I did, the cliché war pictures.

Interview by Catherine Arnaud, Paris, April 1985 (production notes)