

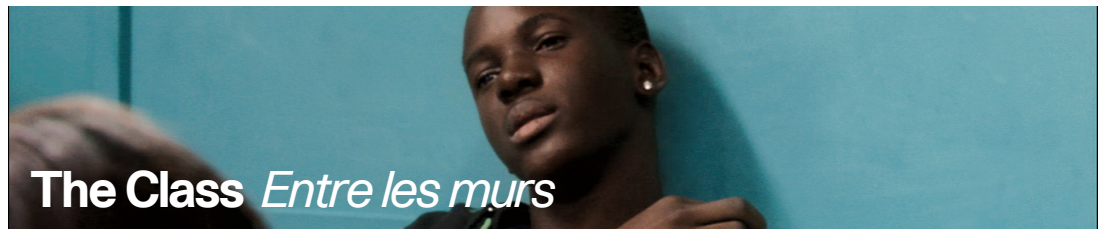


CINEMA FOR ALL

Director
Laurent Cantet

Certificate 15

France 2008, 2h8m,
French with subtitles



Winner of the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 2008, *The Class* is based on the novel-memoir of one year at a Parisian secondary school by François Bégaudeau. 'I always wanted to turn the novel into a film' claims Bégaudeau, who plays himself, 'I had three directors in mind: Maurice Pialat, Abdellatif Kechiche and Laurent Cantet.'

Born in 1961, Cantet attended the IDHEC film school in Paris between 1983 and 1986 during which time he not only made his own films but also worked as a technician on his fellow students' projects. His graduation film, *Les Chercheurs d'or* told of a group of young boys playing at Robinson Crusoe on a desert island. 'The idea of a group confronting itself with the outside world has always interested me' Cantet admitted in a recent interview with Cahiers du cinéma, 'and within such a group, I am always attracted to the character who appears out of place.'

The Class is Cantet's fourth feature, coming after *Ressources Humaines* (*Human Resources*, 1999), *L'Emploi du temps* (*Time Out*, 2001) and *Vers le sud* (*Heading South*, 2005) all compelling dramas of social mores, the latter starring Charlotte Rampling as a sex tourist in Haiti.

After completing *Heading South*, Cantet began to develop a film about education. 'What attracts me about the school environment is the fact that it is one of the last places in which there is a coming together of all social backgrounds [...] It is a place in which power and authority are exercised but also resistance to this authority - all is played out with great intensity.'

The schoolroom drama has a long, distinguished tradition in French cinema. From Jean Vigo's anarchic, surrealist-influenced *Zéro de conduite* (1933) to François Truffaut's *Les quatre-cent coups* (1958) to Louis Malle's wartime drama *Au revoir les enfants* (1987). However, both Cantet and Bégaudeau felt that the more recent handful of films on the subject such as Nicolas Philibert's *Être et Avoir* (2001) and Christophe Barratier's *Les Choristes* (2004) veered toward sentimentality. 'Laurent detested *Être et Avoir*' claims Bégaudeau, 'he thought the film was too nostalgic and wanted in some way to respond to it [...] There's little that would tell you that the film is set in the 21st century. I'm not saying that such schools do not exist but rather, why did Philibert decide to film such a school, a place where there is no violence, no ethnic tensions?'

The Class was made on a relatively modest budget of 2.3 million euros and saw Cantet using a multi-camera set-up for the first time in his career, deeming it necessary in maintaining a certain flexibility and fluidity. Three HD cameras were used: one fixed on Bégaudeau, the other two on the schoolchildren. The film was made with volunteer students from a neighbouring Paris arrondissement to the one in which Bégaudeau taught. The students all came from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

One of the clearest differences between Cantet's film and previous classroom dramas is that the teacher is shown to be anything but imperious and all-controlling. From the earliest scenes in which he haggles with the students over their timekeeping, nervously banging the table to grab their attention, Bégaudeau often finds himself outwitted and exposed. In one sequence, he is shown to completely lose his composure, cruelly and offensively lambasting two girls who challenge his authority.

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As Cantet admits, 'a grammar lesson which unfolds quietly without digressions was of no interest to me and I doubt it would have been of interest to the audience' What interests the director are those moments when the students put forward ideas and challenge their teacher.

Through his interviews, it becomes clear that Bégaudeau, who stopped teaching three years ago and is now a novelist, film critic and sports writer was perhaps not best suited to the classroom. He often speaks of the 'sadness', the 'betrayal' he felt at his students' actions. Cantet's adaptation of Bégaudeau's memoir - its eschewing of sentimentality, its refusal to condemn teacher or pupil - is a wonderful piece of humanist cinema.

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Written for GFT, March 09