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## Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

### Jacques Nolot

21 Apr 2009

**What do gigolos do for a living once everything starts to sag and the stiff parts of their bodies are relegated to their knee joints and not their cocks?**

French writer-director Jacques Nolot tries to answer the question with *Before I Forget*, much of which is based on his own life. The final part of a trilogy of films that succeeds 1998's *Hinterland* and 2002's *Porn Theatre*, *Before I Forget* is a meditative piece on the aging of a former gigolo with HIV.

Nolot captures Pierre as he spends his days between his therapist, visiting old colleagues to discuss money acquired or lost from various wealthy benefactors and taking the pleasures of young rent boys.

There aren't that many films about male prostitution out there, let alone ones focusing on retired gigolos well past their prime, so Rachael Scott met Nolot and his alter ego Pierre just before they both dashed back to Paris on Eurostar.

As Nolot sucked on a fake cigarette in the mock French brasserie at King's Cross St. Pancras where we met it was hard to know where the aging gigolo began and the film's rather dapper writer and director ended.

**It's rare to see a film where the aging body is on display so much. What were you trying to say about the way we, and cinema, view older bodies?**

It's not just about seeing an older body. It's the fact that 40 years before Pierre had a good body, he was in the prime of his life, a gigolo. Now he's a lot older and diseased. The way that it was filmed is that the camera was put at a lower angle so that everything was magnified, everything that has dropped.

**Why do you think the film industry has such a problem showing sex between older people?**

In France, there isn't an issue with showing sex on screen. The problem I had with *Before I Forget* was the fact that the character was gay and I wanted to show gay sex on screen. As a result of that, it was very difficult to get funding. The producer was told that it's not because of the sex or anything like that or the fact that there's an elderly gentleman in it, it was because it has gay sex scenes and they're not romantic sex scenes, but cold.

**How do you feel about your own aging?**

It's like a boomerang effect. It's the third film in a trilogy, so Pierre was a young gigolo who went through middle age and now he's an older gentleman on the downward slope. He is the person I see me being in the future. He is someone I could become. I was paid in my younger years as a gigolo and in my older years I have to pay for it. So it's just a boomerang effect.

A straight man who goes to a female prostitute will have no issue with paying women for sex throughout their life. No matter what age they'll keep paying for it. It's different with gay men because they're so self aware of their own image when they're doing it with someone of their own sex. They are with someone they could have been when they were younger and there's a lot more insecurity. They compare themselves to that person, but when it's the opposite sex there's never that issue.

I'm not a big fan of homosexuality because there's a lot of self-regard. Younger gay men think they'll be young forever, almost.

**"There's a very clear difference between someone who is a slut and someone who is a gigolo...For me, a gigolo can be many, many different people."**

**If you're not a fan of homosexuality, does that mean you also sleep with women?**

It's not a question of sexuality, it's more about someone who has confidence in their own skin. The issue is with people who choose the path of homosexuality later in life and then use money as an excuse to justify that if they weren't out already. For example, there was a scene in the film with a young boy and a psychologist who goes home to his wife to have an argument. He's using money to justify his homosexuality. It's not an issue of gay or straight, it's more an issue of using money to justify their sexuality.

There's a very clear difference between someone who is a slut and someone who is a gigolo. Someone who is a slut is a one off, you do it for free and you never see them again – a one-night stand. For someone who is a gigolo it's not as clear-cut as you think. For me, a gigolo can be many, many different people. You could be a secretary, an actor, work in radio. For example, if your boss taps you on the shoulder, or on the bum, or if there's a little bit of intimacy there, you're still being paid by that person and giving them bit of brief, instant pleasure. For me, that is similar to being a gigolo. There's a much larger spectrum being a gigolo than being a slut.

If, for example, using the office setting, an older man did that to you, you'd say that was abuse, but between men it's not about whether they can make that complaint. It's about whether they would. The whole psychology of being a gigolo – man between man – means there's less of a likelihood that you will feel threatened. The man would never make a complaint for fear that everyone would think he was gay as a result.

**How long were you a gigolo?**

I don't know and it's not important.

**Was there ever any question of someone else apart from you playing Pierre?**



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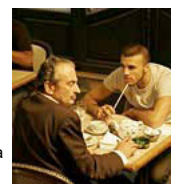


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There were people who wanted to play Pierre but across the three films it was always in my mind to play him. Also, it was almost impossible to find an actor who was willing to do the things Pierre did in the film – to show himself completely naked and do those sorts of sexual acts.

If I'd wanted to make a film like *La Cage aux Folles*, I could easily have found the funds to make it or any sort of film where there's a clear line between homosexuality and heterosexuality. If the homosexuality is camp or over the top, it's not a problem. Many French actors wouldn't have an issue with playing that sort of character because it's so far removed from heterosexuality.

*Before I Forget* is very cold and the lines are blurred somewhat and that's why actors are apprehensive about doing a film like that and how they would be portrayed. I like *La Cage aux Folles*, but I have no interest in doing a film like that.

**"I'm not a big fan of homosexuality because there's a lot of self-regard. Younger gay men think they'll be young forever, almost."**

**Is finding a wealthy benefactor the main way a gigolo will provide for his retirement?**

The film is about a group of gigolos, so obviously they all have different ways of receiving money. Like in life, some are more calculating and will extract as much money as they can from their benefactor and they use that to set up a business, which will support them in the future. Whereas the character of Pierre has taken very little and hasn't thought about the future, so he suffers as a result at the end of it. He inherits just enough to get by and keep his apartment, but that's it.

**There's a sense in the film that Pierre wishes he were more educated. The scene in the car when he is listening to a commentator criticise stupidity and when he talks to his therapist about never having read the Bible. Is that the case?**

Because Pierre started out as a gigolo he wasn't educated, but he came into an environment surrounded by cultivated people and, to keep himself in that environment, he wants to assure himself that he is intelligent by listening to intellectual things on the radio.

**Pierre says he doesn't believe in happiness. What are his regrets in life?**

I work better in an environment where I feel bad about myself as opposed to one I feel good in. That's just how I work.



**Why?**

In France, there are a lot of comedies, films that make you feel good about yourself. I think it's a detriment to art that there are so many films that tell you how you should feel. It's just my nature to portray myself in that way. In order to write, I prefer to delve into my darker side. That's how I work - by being introspective. That's an honest way of filmmaking.

**Can you explain what the first two films in the trilogy, *Hinterland* and *Porn Theatre*, are about and how they link together?**

They are all about the life of Jacques and Pierre and span my whole lifetime. The first one was looking back on my life as a youth and the last one is looking forward to what I could be. I didn't choose this, it's just the moment in my life when I made them. The first one was made 10 years ago and I was reflecting. The moment that I'm in in my life reflects the place Pierre is in. There was no plan in making the films. Of course, not everything you see on screen is my life, it has to be driven forward by fiction for the cinema.

**I understand that John Waters championed *Before I Forget* in the US. Are you a fan of his work?**

I don't like his films. I can't relate to his work because a lot of the characters are very camp.

**As you're not a fan of camp, can you explain why Pierre dresses up as a woman at the end of the film then?**

When I dress up as a woman, I'm not being a caricature. Pierre is liberating himself by becoming this person, it's the last option. But it's a happy death. It's a fantasy for men to become a woman so they can have full access to straight men. A lot of men sleep with transsexuals or transvestites on the pretext that they're a woman, but they've made a mistake.

**"My previous films were easier on the eye for a gay audience because I gave them what they wanted to see, but *Before I Forget* gave them what they didn't want to see and they found it repulsive."**

**How did the gay community in France receive the film?**

Not very well. The critics liked it, but the gay community rejected it. My previous films were easier on the eye for a gay audience because I gave them what they wanted to see, but *Before I Forget* gave them what they didn't want to see and they found it repulsive. They didn't want to go to the cinema to see what is going to happen to them.

**Do you have a favourite out of the three films?**

All three have the same appeal. I like them all as separate pieces of work and they are representative of a time that I was in in my life and a particular period of writing. They're all very similar in certain ways. They all start and end the same, they're quite slow and there's no music. They all have the same rigour.

**You've worked with Claire Denis in the past. What was that like?**

I love Claire Denis, she is my best friend, but we're not here to talk about her.

**What about your experience of working with François Ozon?**

I don't work very much and have turned down a lot of projects, but I'm in a community of artists, writers and directors. I'm a pawn for them, so I'll work with them on their terms if they need me. But it's a good relationship.



**If there's a similarity in the roles that he's played as an actor, can you tell me what it is?**

They are only little roles. I don't like acting and I do it as a favour, really. Acting isn't important and I do it if they ask me to. I think actors are stupid. They always want to know everything.

**Like journalists. You were acting a long time before you were a director, so why did it take so long before you started to make your own films?**

I was always writing, but it was because of certain upsets in my life that I started to write a script.

**Do you have more writing that can be made into a film?**

I'm too happy at the moment to write.

**Why are you happy?**

If it's not urgent or necessary, I don't have the will to write. A future project I'm thinking about is concerned with gerontophilia, which is about youngsters who like to sleep with elderly men, so you can see how that could be a fourth feature.

[Read Our Review Of \*Before I Forget\* »](#)

Click to read our review of Jacques Nolot's thought-provoking film.

[Read Our Interview With François Ozon »](#)

Click to read the director reveal all about the fluid sexuality of his characters and his most personal film to date, *Time To Leave*.

*Before I Forget* is showing at the ICA from 17-30 April 2009.

Interested in queer cinema? Then get *Blood Moon's Guide to Gay and Lesbian Film* by Darwin Porter and Danforth Prince. Buy it online and save some money to out towards *The Queer Encyclopaedia of Film and Television*.

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