



CONTROLLED STUDY OF PROVINCIAL MELANCHOLY

the first time she notices the hostile or at best, indifferent, responses of the local people when she tries to be friendly. Walking on the beach she realizes that she's been completely unaware of the existence of the pebble factory, let alone that it, rather than tourism, is the foundation of the town's economy. It is, of course, the reality of class difference that overwhelms Anne on this day and causes her to burst into tears on the beach and, later, to furiously heave the pot of shrimp her husband has been cooking into the sink. The husband is bewildered, but we understand exactly what she's going through. The clues are in the gestures, glances, and fragments of social interaction that have accumulated throughout the film.

Seaside is a delicately balanced ensemble piece, but three actors stand out: Mikaël, Fillières, and in particular Ogier, who gives the most affecting and eccentric performance of her career. Making a furtive dash for the entrance to the casino, she looks like a stubborn toddler in pursuit of forbidden candy; but in close-up, her face is so ravaged that viewers who remember Rivette's *L'Amour fou* as if it were yesterday may gasp when she first appears. What Ogier brings to Rose is precisely a lifetime of experience and the sense that the psyche and the body do not necessarily age in concert. Within Rose, the rebellious teenager cohabits with the ironic senior citizen. She's reckless, terrified, yearning, and resigned all at once. Having decided to swallow her pride and ask her former friend Odette for help, she dresses up in her best suit (from the way she touches it, we know she hasn't worn it in years), but when she gets to Odette's house her courage deserts her. She taps once on the window and flees.

Lopes-Curval remembers being worried that Ogier's nervous tap on the window wouldn't read on film. It was only when she removed her eye from the viewfinder that she under-

stood the power of what Ogier was doing, and that, projected on the screen, the gesture would appear as large and clear as it was to her naked eye. Lopes-Curval may have been learning on the job, but her direction is anything but tentative. After attending university in Paris, she began her career as an actress and a writer, working in theater and television. She wrote the script for *Seaside* in 1999 and then rewrote it when she found the particular beach town that appears in the movie. Alain Benguigui, her producer, was convinced that the script would be best served if she directed it but insisted that she cut her teeth making a short film (*Made-moiselle Butterfly*).

The relationships between mothers and sons are crucial to the structure of *Seaside*. Whether a man decides to remain in his hometown or move away has largely to do with his relationship with his mother, Lopes-Curval explains. As for the father/daughter relationship, she says that she was too shy to deal with it. Might fathers, who are conspicuously absent in *Seaside*, be more prominent in her next film? She doesn't know. What seems fairly certain, however, is that she will make a second feature. If only her counterparts in the U.S. could find their futures similarly assured. —AMY TAUBIN



Photo by Robin Holland