



MARCH 2020 VOLUME 30 ISSUE 3

Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

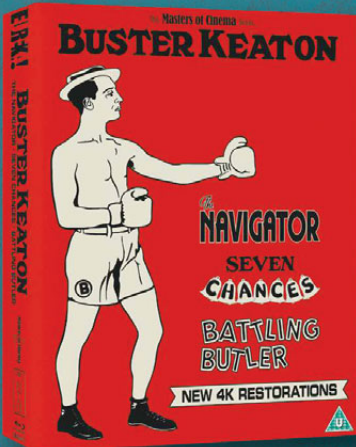
GUEST EDITED BY
BONG JOON HO
DIRECTOR OF
PARASITE

백지영

BONG JOON HO
TAKES OVER



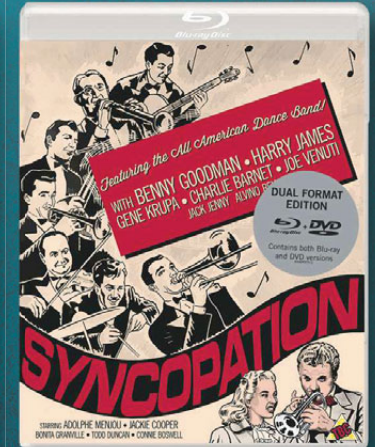
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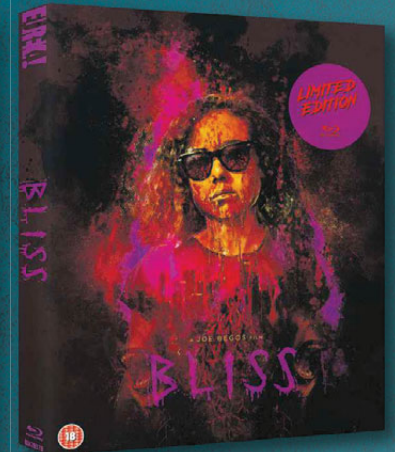
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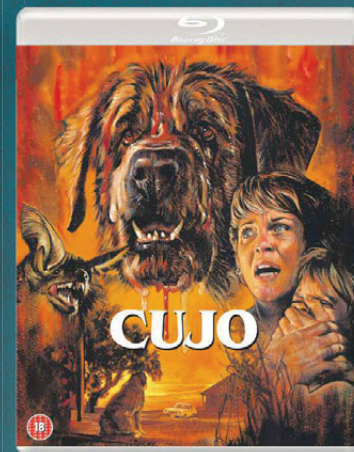
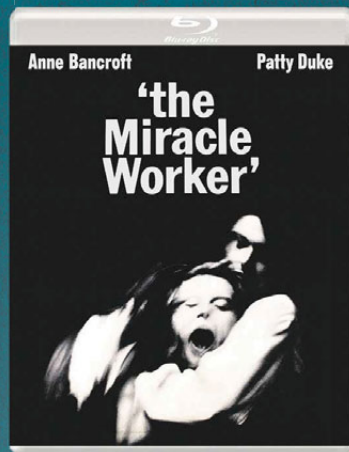


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Bong Joon Ho takes over

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No man's land

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Living memory

Drawing on the real-life experiences of its protagonist, Pedro Costa's luminous portrait of grief *Vitalina Varela* follows a woman from Cape Verde who arrives in Lisbon to search for her absent husband only to find he has just died.

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Looking for America:

The dramatic acts of Elia Kazan

In a handful of masterpieces in the 1950s and 60s the director Elia Kazan revolutionised Hollywood screen acting. As the BFI launches a major retrospective, we consider key aspects of his life and explore what his career meant for film, and for America. James Bell examines his groundbreaking work with actors, Christina Newland looks at the significance of immigration in his films, Philip Kemp revisits the controversies of Kazan's political life, and Kelli Weston digs in to the role of sexuality in his work



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PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY THE BFI

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Volume 30 Issue 3 (NS)

ISSN 0037-4806 USPS 496-040

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COVER

Photography by Dean Chalkley
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NEXT ISSUE

Digital edition available: 2 March
On UK newsstands: 5 March



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Catherine Breillat, filmmaker

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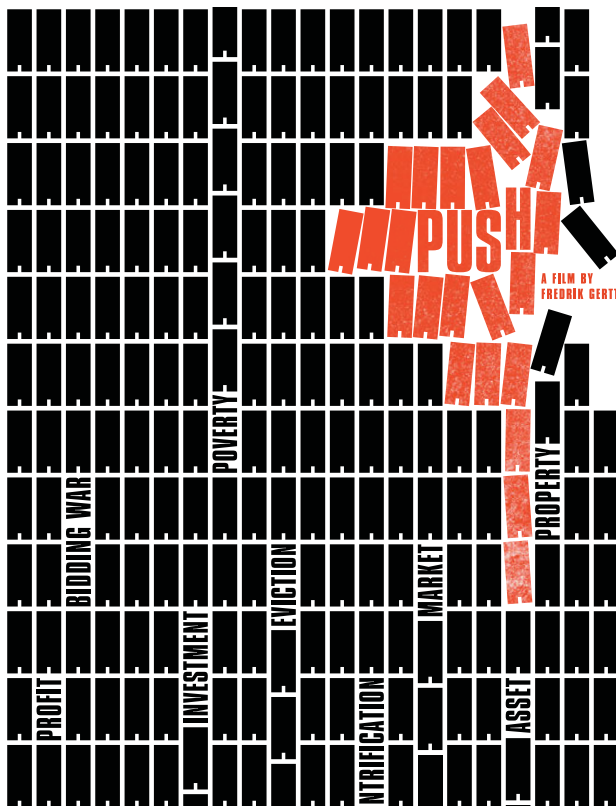
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Sight & Sound (ISSN 0037-4806) is published monthly by British Film Institute, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN and distributed in the USA by UKP Worldwide, 3390 Rand Road, South Plainfield, NJ 07080

Periodicals Postage Paid at South Plainfield, NJ

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sight & Sound c/o 3390 Rand Road, South Plainfield NJ 07080.

Subscription office:

For subscription queries and sales of back issues and binders contact:

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Annual subscription rates:

UK £50, Eire and ROW £75

15% discount for BFI members

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The BFI is a charity (registration number 287780), registered at 21 Stephen St, London, W1T 1LN



Editorial Mike Williams



BE OUR GUEST

Considering that my predecessor was in this role for a mighty 22 years, it might seem a little premature for me to be stepping aside after only four issues as editor. But when the person nudging you out of the hot seat (for one issue only, I should add) is one of the most creative visionaries in modern cinema – whose remarkable new film, *Parasite*, won the Palme d'Or and a Golden Globe and has received six Academy Award nominations – it's an honour to make way.

Of course, Bong Joon Ho, the first guest editor in *Sight & Sound's* almost nine-decade history, didn't arrive fully formed out of nowhere in the last year. We've followed his 20-year career ever since his first feature, *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (2000), marked him out as someone to keep an eye on. His second film, the superlative, satire-infused crime mystery *Memories of Murder*, which was released in 2003, made him a national celebrity in his native South Korea and put him firmly on our radar. Seven films in, he's the hottest director on Earth and a symbol for many of the immense cultural wealth that is often ignored by the English-speaking world – a world where differences in language, reference-points and experiences can be perceived as obstacles too daunting to overcome. As Bong put it himself in his recent Golden Globes acceptance speech: "Once you overcome the one-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films."

The UK feels like a very insular place right now. I'm sure America feels the same. In times like these, it's more important than ever to open ourselves up to wider



It might seem premature for me to step aside as editor after only four issues, but when the person nudging you out is one of the most creative visionaries in cinema, it's an honour to make way

cultural experiences, to see different perspectives and to engage with stories that remind us that there's a global commonality to the hopes, fears, struggles and successes that we all live through, day to day. So while Bong is by no means the only person worth spotlighting whose work might previously have been marginalised by the categories of 'foreign language' or 'world cinema', he's certainly worth celebrating. Over to the man himself... 📽

DEAR READERS OF SIGHT & SOUND,



This is Bong Joon Ho, director of *Parasite*. I'm elated to have been selected as the guest editor for this issue of *Sight & Sound*.

I feel strange and dumbfounded that this moment in my life has

come. I remember reading and studying *Sight & Sound* 30 years ago as a young college student aspiring to become a filmmaker. I was part of the cinema club, and we used to read the magazine, or a pirated copy, together at school. We would scour the articles and special features for information and later look up films mentioned in them. I have fond memories of seeing the illegal VHS copies of those films. (Note: piracy is bad).

Since then I've become a filmmaker, and this year

will be the 20th anniversary of my feature film debut. And I am guest-editing the March 2020 issue. The numbers have obviously aligned for this opportunity!

I hope venerable film publications like *Sight & Sound*, *Cahiers du cinéma*, *Film Comment*, Japan's *Kinema Junpo* and Korea's *Cine 21* will continue to persevere in the future, and I hope, as guest editor, I am able to contribute.

Thank you.

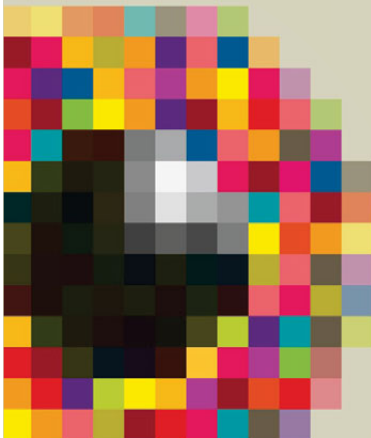
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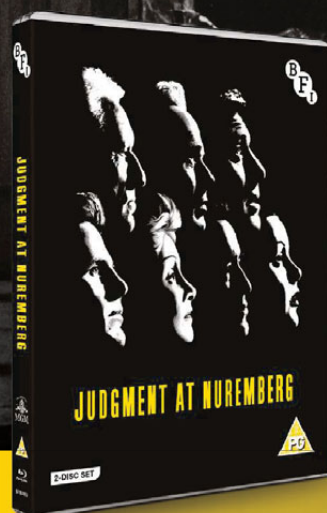
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Rushes

NEWS AND VIEWS



20/20 VISION

To mark 20 years as a director, our guest editor Bong Joon Ho has chosen 20 emerging directors whose work he believes will be pivotal to the next 20 years



the films they have already created (even though it may only be two or three films). But in the end, this inevitably concerns the future of cinema. Because, when we watched Wong Kar Wai's second film *Days of Being Wild* (1990), we might have already dreamed of *In the Mood for Love* (2000) in our minds. Or... when we watched *Blood*

The year is 2020, a number that belongs to a sci-fi film in itself. I do not wish to summon these 20 directors for the sake of discussing the future of cinema. I simply wish to discuss

Simple (1985) by the Coen brothers, we might have already been experiencing *No Country for Old Men* (2007), which would come two decades later.

So what can we expect to unfold over the next 20 years for the 20 directors listed here? The compulsive visuals of *Midsommar* (2019), the pitch-black ocean that meets the quiet gaze of *Asako 1 & II* (2018), the beauty of *The Lighthouse* (2019) emitting black-and-white light beyond that ocean, the children's endless chatter in Yoon Gaeun's films, the astonishing cinematic miracle that is *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018). What future do these films suggest for their directors? One thing remains certain: they will continue to shoot films.



1. Ali Abbasi

Age: 39

Nationality: Iranian

Selected directing credits: *Officer Relaxing After Duty* (2008, short), *M for Markus* (2011, short), *Shelley* (2016), *Border* (2018)

The story so far: Born in Iran, Abbasi abandoned his studies at Tehran Polytechnic University in 2002 and moved to Sweden, before enrolling at the National Film School of Denmark, where he studied directing. His Danish-language first feature, *Shelley*, premiered at the 2016 Berlinale. But it was his hugely inventive, barely categorisable Swedish-language second feature *Border* that really marked him out. Adapted by Abbasi and his co-writer Isabella Eklöf from a short story by John Ajvide Lindqvist, author of the novel that inspired Tomas Alfredson's *Let the Right One In* (2008), *Border* is a dark Nordic fable that weaves in Abbasi's fondness for Latin American magic realism, and rests on a gloriously singular premise that we wouldn't dream of ruining by giving away here. Bong says of Abbasi: "*Border* is a brilliantly unique movie. I love the way he has created his own small universe."

2. Ari Aster

Age: 33

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *The Strange Thing About the Johnsons* (2011, short), *Munchausen* (2013, short), *Hereditary* (2018), *Midsommar* (2019)

The story so far: "I met Ari Aster once in New York. He's a unique guy. I love his talent," says Bong Joon Ho, who didn't hesitate to nominate Aster as one of his 20 directors to watch. With his shorts – especially the astonishingly confident *The Strange Thing About the Johnsons* – and his two features to date, Aster has given horror cinema a shot in the arm just as jolting as Jordan Peele has. *Hereditary* was hailed as one of the most frightening films in years, with its wall-climbingly effective tale of horror in the family home, at the centre of which is Toni Collette's astonishing performance. His follow-up, *Midsommar*, confirmed that his debut was no one-off, with its inventive take on 'daylight horror', and once again with an outstanding performance, this time from Florence Pugh. Aster has said that he now plans to move into different genres. Who'd bet against Aster, like Bong, making those genres his own?

Ali Abbasi: 'Border is a brilliantly unique movie. I love the way he has created his own small universe,' says Bong Joon Ho



3. Bi Gan

Age: 30

Nationality: Chinese

Selected directing credits: *Kaili Blues* (2015), *Long Day's Journey into Night* (2018)

The story so far: Bi's two elliptical, woozy features are as haunted by their cinematic precedents as his protagonists are by their memories of past lovers. The ghosts of *film noir* and Wong Kar Wai's moody blues, *Vertigo* (1958) and Andrei Tarkovsky's caverns of time, Hou Hsiao-hsien's long encounters and Apichatpong Weerasethakul's mystic reveries are refracted in Bi's cinematic hall of mirrors. He calls both his films to date portraits of the "shadows" of his hometown, Kaili in the south-eastern province of Guizhou. He made *Kaili Blues* on a slender budget, with his uncle in one of the main roles. *Long Day's Journey into Night*, its second half a single, hour-long roving 3D take, is another order of production, testament to the first film's success and to an appetite for investment in China, where Bi – self-taught via the internet – is leading a new, self-consciously expressionist generation of filmmaking.

4. Jayro Bustamante

Age: 43

Nationality: Guatemalan

Selected directing credits: *Ixcánul* (*Volcano*, 2015), *Tremors* (*Temblores*, 2019), *La Llorona* (*The Weeping Woman*, 2019)

The story so far: After winning a Berlinale Silver Bear and providing his country's first-ever Oscar submission for his magic-realist Kaqchikel debut *Ixcánul* (*Volcano*), Mayan-heritage Guatemalan Bustamante returned last year with two new dramas, both hits at international festivals. *Ixcánul* put his background on screen, with its portrait of coffee farmers in the Guatemalan highlands and its 17-year-old protagonist's struggles to own her sexuality and pregnancy. *Tremors* dramatised repression among a well-to-do evangelical family in Guatemala City, with the coming-out of their beloved family head and their attempts to 'heal' him. *La Llorona* tackled the political scars of the country's 1980s genocidal civil war, and its continuing search for justice, through the genre of the ghost story. Founder of film production and distribution companies and an independent film theatre, he's a dynamo for Guatemalan cinema.

5. Mati Diop

Age: 37

Nationality: French

Selected directing credits: *Atlantiques* (2009, short), *Big in Vietnam* (2012, short), *A Thousand Suns* (2013, short), *Atlantics* (2019)

The story so far: Diop shot to attention playing the daughter in Claire Denis's *35 Shots of Rum* (2008) and has acted alongside directing ever since. Her films are docufiction hybrids, often concerned with migration and marked by a sense of ghostly longing. *Atlantiques*, which followed a young man crossing from West Africa to Europe, won the Tiger Award at Rotterdam. For *A Thousand Suns* she tracked down the lead actor from the landmark 1973 film *Touki Bouki* made by her uncle, the great Senegalese cinema pioneer Djibril Diop Mambéty. Her first fiction feature, the Cannes Grand Prix winner *Atlantics*, expanded on her first short, but flipped the focus to tell a fable of migration from the unusual perspective of the sisters, mothers and lovers left behind. Diop's inspired use of the supernatural to emphasise their sense of loss stood out even at a time when many directors are turning to genre.



Jayro Bustamante's *La Llorona* (2019)



Alma Har'el's *Honey Boy* (2019)

6. Robert Eggers

Age: 36

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *The Lighthouse* (2019), *The Witch* (2016)

The story so far: Robert Eggers has had the kind of career trajectory that filmmakers dream of: a breakout debut – the supernatural chiller *The Witch* – and a follow-up *The Lighthouse*, with Willem Dafoe and Robert Pattinson as two lighthouse-keepers in the 1890s, that was the talk of Cannes last year. While Eggers was getting his debut off the ground he worked as a production designer, and his meticulous attention to visual detail helps make his films so effective. At a time when folk horror is undergoing a resurgence, his heavily researched period gothic tales stand out with their singularly eerie atmospheres. In *The Witch*, Eggers plunged viewers into the harsh world of early English settlers in the New World in the 1630s. In *The Lighthouse*, he turned the assault up a notch with a near square aspect ratio, black-as-coal monochrome palette and full-on cacophonous soundtrack. To quote its gloriously bawdy and colourful script, it “sparkles like a sperm whale’s pecker”.

7. Rose Glass

Age: 30

Nationality: British

Selected directing credits: *Moths* (2010, short), *Storm House* (2011, short), *The Silken Strand* (2013, short), *Room 55* (2014, short), *Bath Time* (2015, short), *Saint Maud* (2019)

The story so far: One of the most exciting new British talents, Glass has made bold interventions to genre tropes, of a kind that Bong would surely approve. Inspired by visual effects master Ray Harryhausen, she began making home movies as a teenager, before attending the National Film and Television School in 2014. Her short films carved a distinct space for themselves in contemporary horror, often focusing on female protagonists: *Room 55* explored the sexual awakening of an English housewife in the 1950s, while *Bath Time* concerned a woman suffering from an anxiety disorder. Her highly original first feature *Saint Maud*, which premiered at festivals last year and is released in the UK in May, is a psychological gothic horror about a nurse (Morfydd Clark) who becomes dangerously obsessed with saving the soul of a hedonistic dancer suffering from cancer (Jennifer Ehle).

8. Hamaguchi Ryusuke

Age: 41

Nationality: Japanese

Selected directing credits: *Passion* (2008), *The Depths* (2010), *Touching the Skin of Eeriness* (2013), *Voices from the Waves* (2013), *Storytellers* (2013), *Happy Hour* (2015), *Asako I & II* (2018)

The story so far: Hamaguchi’s graduation film, *Passion*, was entered into competition at the Tokyo FILMeX festival in 2008, and he has been notably prolific since, but his international breakthrough came in 2015 with *Happy Hour*, a masterful epic – nearly five-and-a-half hours long – about four female friends. With its naturalistic pace and part-improvised scenes, the film drew comparisons to Jacques Rivette. The textures of



Ghostly encounters: Bi Gan’s *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (2019)

Happy Hour were given a more contained form in the two-hour *Asako I & II*, a doppelganger romance about memory and romantic delusion based on a novel by Shibusaki Tomoka. Asako is a woman who falls for a handsome, caddish man, only for him to leave as abruptly as he took up with her. Two years later, she meets a man who looks identical to her departed lover but is his opposite in personality. Always inventive, wrong-footing and surprising, Hamaguchi’s work constantly leaves you wondering where it will turn next, anxious to follow it wherever it goes.

9. Alma Har’el

Age: 44

Nationality: Israeli-American

Selected directing credits: *Bombay Beach* (2011), *LoveTrue* (2016), *Honey Boy* (2019)

The story so far: Har’el’s sensuous, exuberant

movie-making verve was apparent from her first music videos for the band Beirut and others, but it was her first feature, *Bombay Beach* – a documentary set on California’s backwater Salton Sea, in which her subjects performed their feelings in breakout dance numbers – that made clear this was not a filmmaker who was going to stay inside the lines. She’s since found common cause with Shia LaBeouf, who performed nude in her video for Sigur Rós’s ‘Fjöður Píano’, produced her second doc *LoveTrue* – another performative triptych, this time exploring modern conundrums of young love across the US – and wrote and starred (as his own abusive dad) in last year’s autobiographical traumatic-childhood drama *Honey Boy*. Har’el’s formal flamboyance, it turns out, is a sign of hunger for real feeling. She also made her mark in advertising, not only winning awards but pushing her #FreeTheBid campaign to open doors for female directors.

Mati Diop: Her inspired use of the supernatural to emphasise a sense of loss stood out even at a time when many directors are turning to genre



10. Kirsten Johnson

Age: 54

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *Cameraperson* (2016), *Dick Johnson Is Dead* (2020)

The story so far: Cinematographers who become great directors are few and far between, and Johnson – a go-to DP for documentarians including Michael Moore, Laura Poitras and more – has so far directed just one film on which we can judge her. (Her tantalising-sounding second, exploring ideas about death with her now-late father, was about to unspool at Sundance as we went to press). *Cameraperson* was one of the revelations of the decade, a weave of repurposed offcuts from her career filming the newsworthy and the vulnerable, mixed with diary footage of her own family, to create a lucid interrogation of the ethics of filming and watching, and an often very moving expression of solidarity across the lens and around the world. On film and in person, Johnson displays an acute filmmaking intelligence, and we hope she’ll keep on surprising and inspiring us.



11. Jennifer Kent

Age: 50

Nationality: Australian

Selected directing credits: *The Babadook* (2014), *The Nightingale* (2018)

The story so far: "I loved *The Babadook*—a great horror film," says Bong. Few would dispute that Kent's debut was one of the most impactful of the last decade. Rooted in a single mother's dysfunctional relationship with her turbulent son (Noah Wiseman, giving one of the most chillingly intense performances by a child-actor you're ever likely to see), the Freudian plot is set in motion by a simple reading of a children's storybook which unleashes the eponymous supernatural entity. Kent's ability to build claustrophobic tension carried over into her next film, *The Nightingale*, a violent anti-colonial revenge tale set in Australia in 1825 that centred on the relationship between a racist white woman and a Tasmanian Aboriginal man, pitched together by the murder of their respective family members.

12. Oliver Laxe

Age: 37

Nationality: French-Spanish

Selected directing credits: *You All Are Captains* (2010), *Mimosas* (2016), *Fire Will Come* (2019)

The story so far: Born in France but brought up in Spain, Laxe is a leading light in the formally inventive filmmaking scene in Galicia, alongside the likes of Eloy Enciso, Lois Patiño and Xacio Baño. His first two features were shot in Morocco. *You All Are Captains* is a poised meditation on the filmmaking process starring Laxe himself as a teacher in Tangier to pupils who become his collaborators and guides. His second film, *Mimosas*, was a cryptic, time-slipping tale set in the Atlas Mountains, where a dying sheikh is being transported to his final resting place. His latest, *Fire Will Come*, is arguably his most fully achieved work; it won the Jury prize in the Un Certain Regard section in Cannes last year and will be released in the UK soon. Laxe's films invite us to dwell on faith and mysticism through a constant blurring of the lines—between fiction and documentary, filmmaker and subject, landscape and figure, interior and exterior, and spiritual and material worlds.

13. Francis Lee

Age: 51

Nationality: British

Selected directing credits: *The Farmer's Wife* (2012, short), *Bradford Halifax London* (2013, short), *God's Own Country* (2017)



Francis Lee's *God's Own Country* (2017)



Turning over a new leaf: Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018)

The story so far: After years as an actor, Yorkshire-born Lee made one of the most exciting British feature debuts of the decade, *God's Own Country*, about a love affair between a Yorkshire farmer and his Romanian co-worker. Parallels with *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), were inevitably drawn, but in *God's Own Country* the farmers' sexuality was a welcome non-issue. Instead, Lee puts the spotlight on the issue of freedom of movement in Brexit Britain. As you might expect from an actor, Lee has a knack for drawing out raw and naturalistic performances (this was the film that announced the acting talents of both Josh O'Connor and Alec Secareanu) but he captures the Yorkshire landscape in all its severe beauty, too. His next feature, *Ammonite* (due this year), takes him away from the dales and to the sea; it will be fascinating to see where a queer period love story (starring Kate Winslet and Saoirse Ronan) takes him.

14. Pietro Marcello

Age: 43

Nationality: Italian

Selected directing credits: *The Mouth of the Wolf* (2009), *Lost and Beautiful* (2015), *Martin Eden* (2019)

The story so far: Marcello began his career with a series of hypnotic, unclassifiable films which collage documentary, fictional elements and archival inserts to create fragmented, stream-of-consciousness narratives. The most beguiling of these was *The Mouth of the Wolf*, about a prison inmate and his heroin-addict transsexual lover on the outside who share a dream of living together when the convict is released. Six years later, *Lost and Beautiful*, a state-of-Italy lament for a lost golden age, pushed docufiction even further, adding mythical dimensions and a *commedia dell'arte* character to potent effect. Marcello's most recent film *Martin Eden* is a bigger-budget affair and one of the best films of the last decade—a spellbinding adaptation of Jack London's 1909 novel about the formation of an impoverished writer, relocated to mid-century Naples, that complicates and deepens its ostensibly fictional register with uncanny insertions of archive footage. It'll be released later this year in the UK.

15. David Robert Mitchell

Age: 45

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *The Myth of the American Sleepover* (2010), *It Follows* (2014), *Under the Silver Lake* (2018)

The story so far: It's not easy to wring new ways of seeing out of a well-trodden genre such as the coming-of-age film, but Mitchell's debut, *The Myth of the American Sleepover*, managed just such a reinvigoration. It focuses on the last weekend of summer as experienced by Michigan teens grappling with their unruly desires as they do the rounds of parties and sleepovers. The film had charm in abundance, part of which was down to its gentleness, its off-kilter, low-key atmosphere and its casting of unknowns. Mitchell's follow-up was a surprise, a sidestep into horror that tapped into primal anxieties through its story of a curse

Jordan Peele: *The pioneering creator of 'The Twilight Zone', Rod Serling, would have recognised in Peele a kindred spirit*



that gets passed on through consensual sex: *It Follows* became an instant cult classic. *Under the Silver Lake* switched into yet another genre – this time a labyrinthine *film noir* which received a more mixed critical response. What genre Mitchell will turn his attention to next is anyone's guess, but we look forward to finding out.

16. Jordan Peele

Age: 40

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *Get Out* (2017), *Us* (2019)

The story so far: As one half of the comedy double act Key & Peele, Peele had already proved that he was capable of writing sketches that cut deep into issues of the day with an intelligence matched by their anger and their hilarity. Still, *Get Out* was something else – a brilliant “social thriller”, as Peele himself classed it, that addressed the pervasive racism in a supposedly more liberal era with a lacerating clarity. Last year's *Us* again spoke to our times as few other films have. With his company Monkeypaw Productions, Peele is also having a decisive influence on diversity in the industry – in cinema, with productions including Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* and Nia DaCosta's forthcoming *Candyman* remake, and on television, with the forthcoming *Lovecraft Country* and Peele's rebooting of *The Twilight Zone*. One imagines that the pioneering creator of *The Twilight Zone*, Rod Serling, would have recognised in Peele a kindred spirit.

17. Jennifer Reeder

Age: 49

Nationality: American

Selected directing credits: *Accidents at Home* and *How They Happen* (2008), *Signature Move* (2017), *Knives and Skin* (2019)

The story so far: A crossover artist and filmmaker who's been ploughing the furrow of post-punk riot grrrl feminism since the mid-90s, Reeder has 40-plus films to her credit, most of them shorts. Her 1995 *White Trash Girl* video series conjured her as a flushed-away orphan superhero who turned her toxic inheritance back on the patriarchy in her Ohio backyard. She's been reclaiming the world – stories, bodies, music – for non-cookie-cutter young women ever since. Her stylised but stark films began to land at festivals with increasing regularity over the past decade – *A Million Miles Away* (2014) and *Blood Below the Skin* (2015) were back-to-back winners at Encounters, the UK's foremost shorts festival. While she hasn't turned away from that



Yoon Gaeun's *The House of Us* (2019)

Yoon Gaeun: *One of the most exciting of a new generation of Korean female filmmakers, she draws wonderful performances from her child actors*



form (she's made another six since), she's also stepped into features, with the cross-cultural lesbian wrestling romance *Signature Move* and last year's *Knives and Skin*, a post-*Twin Peaks* teen murder mystery. She looks unstoppable.

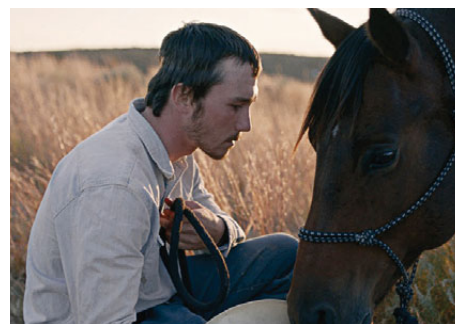
18. Alice Rohrwacher

Age: 38

Nationality: Italian

Selected directing credits: Various short documentaries, *Corpo Celeste* (2011), *The Wonders* (2014) and *Happy as Lazzaro* (2018)

The story so far: Rohrwacher's mysterious, dreamy coming-of-age tale *Corpo Celeste* contains the hallmarks of her cinema: a mix of magic realism and neorealism, innocent characters butting up against corrupt behemoths, and a mesmerising depiction of the everyday world in Hélène Louvart's 16mm cinematography. Her next two features felt even more like fairytales. *The Wonders* (which won the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes) stars her sister Alba Rohrwacher as the mother of an off-grid beekeeper family whose bonds start to splinter when one of the daughters stars on a reality TV show. *Happy as Lazzaro* further probes the rift between agrarian and modern life, and contains one of the most dazzling twists – and tracking shots – in recent memory.



Chloé Zhao's *The Rider* (2017)

19. Yoon Gaeun

Age: 37

Nationality: Korean

Selected directing credits: *Proof* (2010, short), *Guest* (2011, short), *Sprout* (2013, short), *The World of Us* (2016), *The House of Us* (2019)

The story so far: One of the most exciting of a new generation of female filmmakers in Korea, Yoon's work has been characterised by its intimate, insightful observations about the lives of children and adolescents – a subject Yoon has pursued outside her filmmaking too, as a lecturer at film clubs in schools in Seoul, and as an educator with the Korean Film Museum. International recognition came in 2011 when *Guest* became the first Asian film ever to win the Grand Prix at the Clermont-Ferrand short film festival; then in 2013 *Sprout* took the Best Short Film Award at Berlin. Her first feature, *The World of Us*, entered the world of a vulnerable, lonely 10-year-old girl, with great empathy. The follow-up last year, *The House of Us*, focused on three 12-year-old friends over one summer, drawing similarly wonderful performances from her child actors.

20. Chloé Zhao

Age: 37

Nationality: American/Chinese

Selected directing credits: *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* (2015), *The Rider* (2017)

The story so far: This will be the year that Chloé Zhao breaks out of the arthouse. With her Marvel movie *The Eternals* she joins Taika Waititi and Ryan Coogler in the ranks of indie directors who have made the leap to directing comic-book franchise films. This tale of immortal superheroes battling each other couldn't be more different from her work to date, about young people leading precarious lives in Trump's heartland, all shot with skeletal crews and non-professional actors. *Songs My Brothers Taught Me* is a melancholic study of life on a Native American reserve in South Dakota, but also an affecting portrait of a boy dreaming of escape but not wanting to abandon his sister. Her second feature, *The Rider*, about a rodeo rider named Brady (played by real-life horse wrangler Brady Jandreau) who suffers a debilitating head injury, took her back to the reservation. Authenticity and intimacy are the backbone of both films. Zhao's *Nomadland* will likely surface this year too – a story of the underbelly of the American West in the form of a road movie, starring Frances McDormand as a van-dwelling nomad who loses everything in the 2008 recession. 📺

WATCH THIS: BONG'S TOP DIRECTORS ON BFI PLAYER

A selection of films by Bong Joon Ho's 20 directors to watch are available to stream on BFI Player, including Bi Gan's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, Jennifer Kent's *The Nightingale*, Hamaguchi Ryusuke's *Happy Hour*, Francis Lee's *God's Own Country*, Alice Rohrwacher's *Happy as Lazzaro* and Chloé Zhao's *The Rider*.

FLOWER POWER



Significant mother: Kit Connor as Joe, with Emily Beecham as Alice, in Jessica Hausner's *Little Joe*

Jessica Hausner discusses her floral take on Frankenstein *Little Joe*, motherhood and why she only likes the first half of horror films

By Kate Muir

The Austrian director Jessica Hausner could be best described as a precision engineer of the imagination, employing meticulous preparation and precise production design to bring her visions to life. Combining formal dialogue and contrarian use of music with a confounding love of ambiguity and wit, her five features to date – *Lovely Rita* (2001), *Hotel* (2004), *Lourdes* (2009), *Amour fou* (2014) and her latest *Little Joe* – are careful to allow space for the audience to exercise its intelligence.

Little Joe, which premiered in Cannes last year, is an intentionally perverse take on parenthood, following a scientist torn between mothering her new creation – a genetically engineered Frank-flower which releases pollen that brings comfort and joy to those nearby – and looking after her 13-year-old son Joe. Emily Beecham's eerie, icy performance as Alice Woodard won her the Best Actress award at Cannes, but some reviewers were thrown by the film's message and 'genre fluidity', as it slipped between sci-fi, horror and art.

When I meet the 47-year-old filmmaker to talk about *Little Joe* during the BFI London Film Festival, she explains that male and female critics have reacted very differently to the film: "Men respond more to the virus and science side of the film whereas the female audience is more interested in Alice's feelings of guilt

about motherhood – the more paranoid and psychological part of the story. I always try to find that gap in the storytelling that opens a film up to the audience making up their own minds."

Little Joe is Hausner's first film in English, and the dialogue is intentionally stiff between Alice and her fellow scientist Chris, played by Ben Whishaw. "The sound designer kept saying, 'Why not say, "c'mon", "hello", "hi", "yes", "um".' But I hate those fill words," Hausner says. "I already reduce my dialogue when I write, and speak it out loud, so I know if it has a perfect rhythm. This is what I care about."

This desire to unsettle the audience is something Hausner shares – albeit at a lower pitch – with her fellow Austrian directors Michael Haneke and Ulrich Seidl, both of whom favour

discomfort over joy. "For me, happiness is a nightmare," Hausner says. "I don't like films that make you happy. It feels like untruthfulness." In *Little Joe*, Hausner creates a sense of discord through the way camera shots deliberately exclude the protagonists, and through the music, by the Japanese composer Ito Teiji (1935-82), which fights against the visuals rather than complementing them. "I am not interested in naturalism," she says. "I like dissonance."

'For me, happiness is a nightmare. I don't like films that make you happy. It feels like untruthfulness'

AT A GLANCE JESSICA HAUSNER

Jessica Hausner was born in Vienna in 1972, and turned out to be a film wunderkind, with her first two features – *Lovely Rita* (2001) and *Hotel* (2004) – landing in the Un Certain Regard strand at Cannes. Her next film, *Lourdes* (2009), followed a female wheelchair user searching for a miracle cure, and 2014's *Amour fou* was a true-life period drama about a suicidal poet and his lover. In 2019, she was elevated to the Competition in Cannes with *Little Joe*, for which Emily Beecham won the Best Actress award. Her 2006 video installation *Toast* lasts 47 minutes, during which a woman repetitively makes toasted sandwiches.



Hausner brings a Kubrickian attention to production design in her films – *Amour fou* was a *tableau vivant*, with a 'romantic' 19th-century suicide pact in the foreground. The plant nursery in *Little Joe* is a minimalist white laboratory with the red, leafless flowers in perfect ranks – antidepressants waiting to go into battle to enforce conformity. And, like the French painter Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Hausner likes a key note of red in all her films: a hat in *Lourdes*, silk dresses in *Amour fou*, a receptionist's uniform in *Hotel*. "My father was a painter," Hausner says. "We talked about art at every dinner, and every single holiday was spent in a museum, not the beach."

Hausner is fond of David Cronenberg's work, as well as schlockier horror movies, often watching them only halfway through to enjoy the encroaching terror rather than the deflating denouement. The influence of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in particular, can be seen in *Little Joe*, in which humans are replaced by emotionless imposters. "I've always been interested in that film, from the 1950s to the remakes. It's a very existential questioning of identity. I'd like to make a film like that, just the first half. That's how I perceive life – it's a riddle or puzzle. Pieces get lost and you cannot fill in all those gaps."

Hausner also admires the riddles in the work of the New York surrealist filmmaker Maya Deren – her shadowy 1943 short *Mesches of the Afternoon* begins with a flower found in the street, ends in death and features an Ito Teiji score – and finds an enduring resonance in *Alien* (1979). "All those *Alien* ideas come from having a foreign body in your own body. It's a female thing, an archaic thing. After all, *Frankenstein* was written by a woman: Mary Shelley."

Returning to *Little Joe*, with its feminised and feminist horror, it could be that the creepy plants are emitting oxytocin, the 'love hormone' that encourages bonding, particularly after childbirth. "This duality of a woman, that she can love a child and a profession at once, that's what got me started," says Hausner, who is flying back to see her partner and nine-year-old son the same evening. "I was fascinated how the outside perception of me changed when I became a mother. I was judged differently, and it's a role which is very difficult. That expectation of perfection, and that feeling of guilt if you do not take care of your child. We need to allow a new image of women to exist." Eager to continue exploring themes of parenthood, Hausner adds that her next film will be "a Pied Piper story in which a teacher manipulates children neglected by their parents".

Hausner's career has moved into a higher gear since becoming a parent, but at festivals people still see "a slim, blonde woman and ask me: 'Is this your first film?'" In Cannes last year, she enjoyed finally being part of "that exclusive club of acknowledged international filmmakers". But she adds, laughing, "It would still be really interesting to get Michael Haneke to a festival, and say, 'How did you deal with your childcare situation, Michael?'"

Little Joe is released in UK cinemas on 21 February. A retrospective, 'The Cinema of Jessica Hausner', screens at BFI Southbank, London, from 21-29 February

DREAM PALACES RAGTAG CINEMA, COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

Zhu Shengze's *Present.Perfect.* explores live streaming in China, but going to the movies was a formative experience for the director, as she explains



I feel a bit sad that there's no cinema in China that I can talk about properly for this column. Now there are arthouse theatres – they aren't completely independent – but

when I grew up in the mid-90s, it was all commercial theatres that were semi-state-owned. The films they showed rarely intrigued me. The most vivid movie-going memory I have was when I was in primary school and they would take all the students to the local movie theatre – the Wuchang People's Cinema. This cinema would have been built after the Cultural Revolution, in the 1980s. It's a shopping centre now. Going there was a really exciting event for me. The school didn't take us to see big commercial films – I remember we all wanted to see *Titanic* [1997] but they would never allow that. We were taken to old propaganda films about heroic soldiers – films like *Tunnel War* [1965], set during the Second Sino-Japanese War. There were around 1,000 students. We would stand in line and you walked into a huge auditorium one by one, class by class.

After 2000, there were more commercially run cinemas in China and sometimes I did go with my friends, but most of the time we would buy pirate DVDs from small shops outside the cinema and watch the films at home. This was the only way of accessing arthouse and foreign films. They were tiny shops with no decoration. Every shelf was filled with boxes of DVDs. All generations went there. It wasn't just young people. At the front they put the TV series and commercial films that couldn't be distributed in China because of censorship. The shops just had to deal with the local bureau of commerce, not those in charge of censorship. My mum would be in the front, and I would be in the back where you could find more unusual films.

It was here I encountered Edward Yang's *A One and a Two* [Yi Yi, 2000] and Wong Kar Wai's films.

I moved to America in 2010 to study journalism in Columbia, Missouri. I didn't realise it was a very small town. My hometown Wuhan is the biggest city in central China. I had never been alone in a foreign country before. It was so different and it wasn't the America I had imagined. I was swallowed up by loneliness. I missed my home and family. One day I was walking in the so-called downtown – it was just three or so streets – and I saw a film theatre called Ragtag. It's very small. Just one storey. There were two screens. One is more of a traditional cinema, but the other one is smaller and had lots of sofas. It was a very community-based theatre – now it hosts the True/False Film Festival. Back then, I'd never seen a theatre like this before. In China cinemas are huge and fancy and normally part of a shopping mall.

Ragtag showed a mixture of Hollywood and independent films. I saw *The Tree of Life* [2011] by Terrence Malick, *Amour* [2012] by Michael Haneke and *Certified Copy* [2010] by Abbas Kiarostami. In China I would never have had the opportunity to watch these films on the big screen. Also, I was surprised that half of the audience were senior citizens. In China people of my grandparent's generation rarely go to the theatre. It's just not part of their experience.

I went to Ragtag every week. I sometimes didn't understand what was happening on screen but the theatre was an oasis in a town where there was nothing to do besides online shopping. When I go to the theatre now and I'm surrounded by Americans, I still feel lonely, as often I'm the only Chinese person. But when you watch a film with strangers you do have a shared experience with them. You both laugh and cry together even if you don't know each other.

Zhu Shengze was talking to Isabel Stevens. *Present.Perfect.* is out now in UK cinemas and was reviewed in our last issue



FANTASTIC BEATS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

The eclectic programme of films at London's Doc'n Roll Festival celebrates the music of the overlooked and the underground

By Leonie Cooper

Crafting a film is always a labour of love, but the peculiarly obsessive nature of music fandom can mean that filmmakers are more likely to take high-stakes risks when making documentaries about their heroes. "People remortgage their houses and sell their cars to make these films," says Colm Forde, who founded the London-based Doc'n Roll Festival in 2014, an event where you're just as likely to discover your new favourite band as you are an exciting new filmmaker. Alongside fellow programmer Vanessa Lobon, Forde aims to champion niche musical movements (think 1970s krautrock, 1980s no wave and 2000s synthwave), cult figures and the anti Ed Sheerans of this world, as well as the work of first-time directors, who were behind over half of the features shown at Doc'n Roll in November.

Taking place across eight London cinemas and with 34 features in the mix – pruned from an impressive 126 global submissions – as well as a host of shorts, Q&As and drum'n'bass-powered afterparties, the sixth annual event encompassed everything from the first days of disco (*Disco Confessions: John Morales, a Life in the Mix*) and the inner demons of one of the 20th century's greatest rock photographers (*Show Me The Picture: The Story of Jim Marshall*, reviewed in *S&S*, February), to entrepreneurial young rap stars seizing the opportunities of online self-promotion (*It's Yours: Hip Hop & the Internet*) and an elderly couple who've been to far more gigs than you ever will (*Dennis and Lois*).

As usual, the focus was on the complex, fascinating tales of leftfield bands, musicians and industry figures only certified music geeks are likely to have heard of. One result of this, however, is that as great as many of these movies are, they're rarely screened elsewhere. "A lot of film programmers don't have a clue who these people are," explains Forde of the recently rediscovered ambient 1980s bedroom beatmaker Beverly Glenn-Copeland, Cuban composer Marietta Veulens and post-punk maker of some of the most brutal sounds ever laid to tape, Swans' Michael Gira – all of whom were the subjects of films at the festival. "If it's not about Bruce Springsteen or The Rolling Stones they don't have time to answer the emails," adds Forde of the commercial approach taken by mainstream bookers. "But we take chances and give breaks. Our programme is laced with films we only expect 60 people to come and see, as well as films that will sell out a 400-capacity room and everything in-between."

Like many of the works shown at Doc'n Roll, Chris Cassidy's charming *Dennis and Lois* was crowdfunded, using a network of grassroots support to raise more than \$45,000 on Kickstarter. It tells the story of a pair of rock 'n' roll superfans who befriended The Ramones during the heyday of punk and have been running merch tables for everyone from Manchester icons Happy Mondays – who wrote the 1990 song 'Dennis and Lois' after



High energy: *Disco Confessions: John Morales, a Life in the Mix*

As usual, the focus was on the fascinating tales of leftfield bands and musicians only certified music geeks are likely to have heard of

the pair scored them some weed in Los Angeles – to The Vaccines and Badly Drawn Boy ever since. Similarly, it was an Indiegogo campaign which helped director and journalist Gio Arlotta fund post-production on his debut feature *WITCH: We Intend to Cause Havoc*, an exploration of the 1970s Zambian psych-rock band and their leader Jagari, who now works as a gemstone miner.

"The filmmakers use that to keep going," explains Forde of the vital backing from fans who want to see their favourite artists immortalised on screen. "It's that community-based spirit we admire and want to encourage." Forde is convinced the festival wouldn't be viable without this financial support for the filmmakers as the docs themselves simply wouldn't exist. And it's not just the filmmakers who benefit from such a strong, supportive community – it's also crucial for the small team who run the festival

and ensure it returns every year to a clutch of the capital's best independent cinemas, including the Barbican and ICA, Dalston's Rio, Brixton's Ritzy, Mile End's Genesis and Soho's Curzon. "We have a lot of affinity with them because of our own struggle to get above the noise of London," says Forde of the capital's crowded scene. "It's the same as them trying to get above the noise of all the other filmmakers out there."

Doc'n Roll will be making far more noise in 2020 thanks to the newly launched Doc'n Roll TV, as well as occasional regional screenings. The world's first streaming service dedicated to music documentaries, the platform highlights the best films shown at the festival since its inception. "So many people came to us and said, 'You showed this film two years ago but I can't find it: where can I see it?'," says Forde of why they're now offering an online alternative to their main event. So now you can learn about trailblazers like Sun Ra, Bad Brains or Sleaford Mods from the comfort of your own sofa – and maybe have a little dance around your living room, too. Well, it is rock and roll, after all. 🎸

A selection of films from the festival tours venues across the UK from March-July

DOC'N ROLL TV HIGHLIGHTS

Sun Ra: A Joyful Noise

Dir. Robert Mugge (1980)

See jazz outsider – and self-proclaimed interplanetary traveller – Sun Ra play with his sequin-spangled collective in this colourful extravaganza.

Finding Joseph I

Dir. James Lathos (2016)

A sympathetic portrait of the life and struggles of the eccentric Paul 'H.R.' Hudson, aka Joseph I

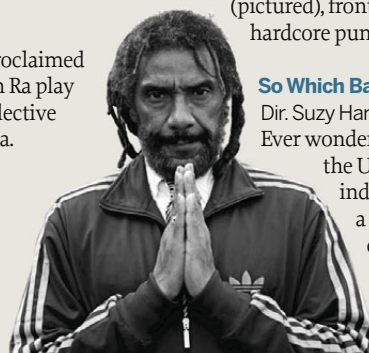
(pictured), frontman of legendary 1980s hardcore punk act Bad Brains.

So Which Band Is Your Boyfriend In?

Dir. Suzy Harrison (2019)

Ever wondered what it's like to be in the UK's underground and DIY indie music scene and not be a bloke? This eye-opening doc will tell you everything you need to know.

Visit www.docnrollfestival.com/docn-roll-tv/



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BUCK HENRY, 1930-2020

Screenwriter of a clutch of classic films, Oscar nominee as both writer and director, and an admired character actor

By Hannah McGill

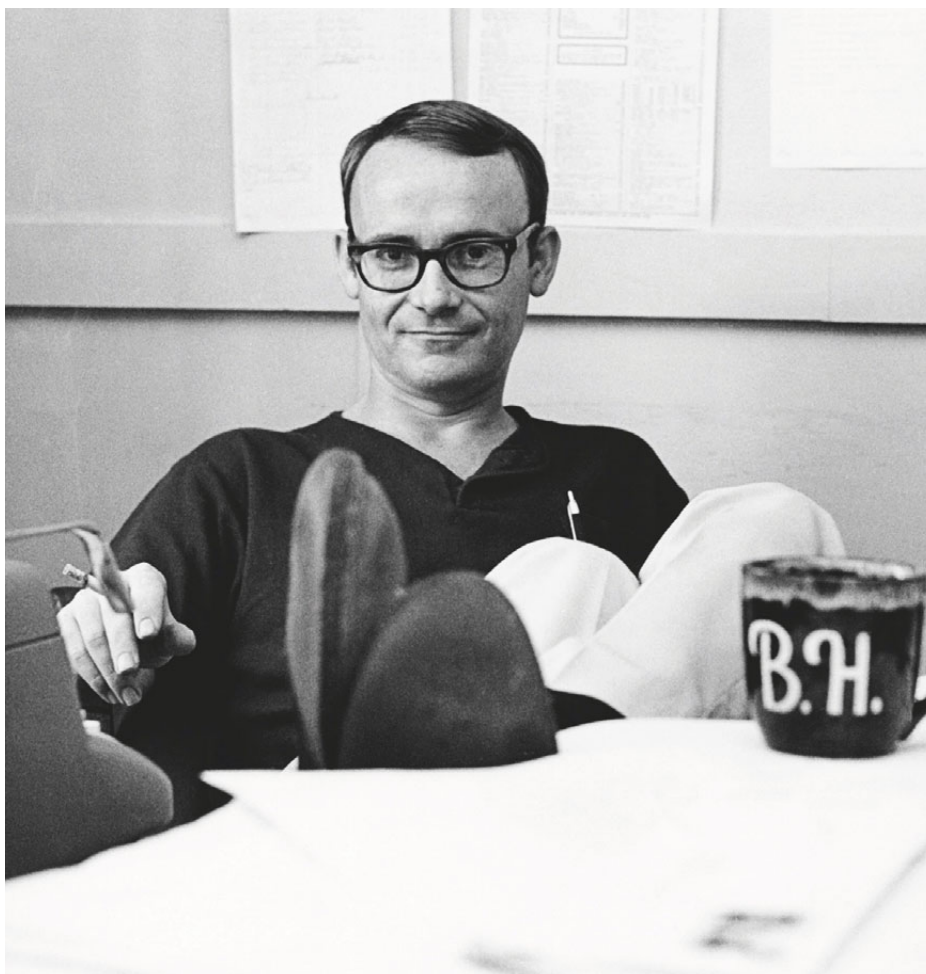
Buck Henry, who died on 8 January, made his sharp but sensitive presence felt over six decades, across both television and film. He was much beloved: a wit and raconteur who adored movie culture and yet maintained a healthy irreverence towards Hollywood and its demands.

Born Henry Zuckerman in New York City on 9 December 1930, he was nicknamed Buck from childhood. Showbiz passed through the maternal line: his father Paul Steinberg Zuckerman was an air force general and stockbroker, while his mother Ruth Taylor was a silent movie actor and performer with the Ziegfeld Follies.

Henry first acted professionally in his teens, and wrote and performed comedy throughout his literature studies at Dartmouth College and army service in the Korean war. "I always knew I wanted to do it," he once said of writing. "It was just a question of people not letting me." By the dawn of the 1960s, they were letting him contribute to TV series such as *The Steve Allen Show* and *The Garry Moore Show*. The spoof spy sitcom *Get Smart*, which he created with Mel Brooks, ran for five seasons from 1965. Soon after, Henry became the fourth writer tasked with forging a script from Charles Webb's novel *The Graduate*, gaining a megahit and an Oscar nomination (shared with earlier scribe Calder Willingham) for his trouble. Subsequent writing credits included *Candy* (1968), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (1970), *Catch-22* (1970) and *What's Up, Doc?* (1972). Another shared Oscar nomination came for co-directing *Heaven Can Wait* (1978) with Warren Beatty.

If many acclaimed screenwriters remain faceless, Henry's acting career ensured that he also became a celebrity, with a stock-in-trade of appealing but morally flexible nebbishes. The subtle moral balancing act that distinguishes *The Graduate* – its capacity to acknowledge both Benjamin's blind privilege and his real pain – was also a keynote of his screen persona. His portrayal of a father seeking a teenage runaway in Milos Forman's *Taking Off* (1971) beautifully blends the poignant with the preposterous, embodying a generation whose authority is hampered at least as much by its own appetites and weaknesses as by the corruption of its kids.

Henry would portray further establishment figures diverted into strangeness, for further iconic directors. He played the shady patent attorney who teams up with David Bowie's alien in Nicolas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), despite claiming not to understand the script; and in John Cassavetes's *Gloria* (1980), he's surprising and touching as the double-crossing mob accountant whose execution abandons his little son to the care of Gena Rowlands's eponymous 'broad'. He cropped up as himself, pitching a sequel to *The Graduate*, in Robert Altman's *The Player* (1992), and joined the ill-omened fishing trip in the same



'He lived in many realms, observed everything, missed nothing': Buck Henry

Henry's work combined the rigour and sophistication of the studio system with the bohemian spirit of the New Hollywood

director's *Short Cuts* a year later. He would maintain a steady drip of guest appearances in both movies and TV, including a recurring role as Dick Lemon, father of Tina Fey's Liz

Lemon, in *30 Rock* (2006-13). He also continued to write and contribute to significant scripts, in 1995 adapting Joyce Maynard's novel *To Die For* into the Gus Van Sant-directed film that helped make a megastar of Nicole Kidman.

In Henry's work, several strains of American entertainment history crossed and combined: the surreal, cerebral traditions of revue comedy with the discipline of the sitcom format; the rigour and sophistication of the studio system with the bohemian spirit of the New Hollywood. "He lived in many realms, observed everything, missed nothing," commented Mark Harris, who interviewed him for his 2008 book *Pictures at a Revolution*, on the news of his death. Others who met him were similarly warm. He visited the Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1997 at the invitation of then-artistic director Lizzie Francke, and was interviewed on stage by Mark Cousins, who remained a friend. "Again and again, I saw movie stars on their best behaviour with him," Cousins wrote on *Indie Wire*. "He'd skewered stardom too often, and hubris too." During my own stint directing Edinburgh, when I put together an Anita Loos retrospective, Henry rolled up his sleeves to try to find me a copy of the lost silent version of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1928) in which his mother had starred. The effort was sadly unsuccessful – but the generosity, modesty and enthusiasm were rare and real. ●

BUCK HENRY ON SCREENWRITING

"I don't like to write with people, because if they aren't as funny as me I hate them and if they are funnier than me I hate them."

"It's possibly easier to write comedy about dark and difficult subjects than light and fluffy ones. Although you can get condemned for it, at least you know you're doing something that has more protein."

"The best secret – and it's not a secret – is just when you get stuck in a scene, write nonsense."

AWARDS SEASON 2020

The usual January glut of films has given cinemas a strong start to 2020 – with *Little Women* and *1917* causing particular joy

By Charles Gant

In January 2019, UK box office suffered a notable decline compared with the first month of 2018: down 18 per cent. A number of factors contributed to that: one was that awards season didn't throw up anything as potent as *La La Land* (from 2017) or *Darkest Hour* (2018). *The Favourite* performed heroically, grossing £17 million, but overall this crucial period for arthouse and independent cinemas left many operators disappointed.

The reason for the concentration of titles in January is simple: films must be released before the Bafta Film Awards ceremony to be eligible. This year, operators have been pretty delighted by the commercial success of the films on offer. Greta Gerwig's *Little Women*, released on Boxing Day, has scored a nifty £16.4 million in its first 25 days – ahead of the pace of *The Favourite* last year. Backer Sony must now surely have £20 million in its sights for this film.

Disney chose 1 January to launch *Jojo Rabbit* – nicely sandwiched between *Little Women* and Sam Mendes's *1917* (pictured). Taika Waititi's Hitler-themed comedy has delivered a decent £5.48 million at UK cinemas after 19 days, and should go on to match past awards-season hits such as *The Shape of Water* (£7.7 million), conceivably pushing towards *Green Book* (£10.1 million).

But it's *1917* that is really exciting the UK's exhibition sector with a sensational £18.4 million in its first ten days. Even fast-burning Hollywood franchise films usually achieve three times their opening number, and awards-season fare usually does much better than that. *Dunkirk* achieved 5.6 times its opening number, and *Darkest Hour* 5.9 times. Based on those numbers, look for *1917* to crash through the £40 million barrier at UK cinemas.

The success of these titles and Netflix's *Uncut Gems* helped Nottingham indie venue the Broadway Cinema to get its strongest audiences for more than a year in the second weekend of January, according to programme director Caroline Hannigan, with audiences "across the age spectrum". She notes that *Little Women* has skewed female, but also crossed the generations, with 29 per cent of the audience

27%
Year-on-year increase at the
UK box office for first two
weeks of January 2020



under 25. "Never underestimate the power of a weepy," she advises. *Jojo Rabbit* "worked well with family audiences", *1917* "skewed male and older", while *Uncut Gems* "has been the hipster choice of the month", with 31 per cent under 25.

As usual, the sheer number of releases in January is worrisome. On 17 January Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life*, Jay Roach's *Bombshell*, Daniel Cretton's *Just Mercy* and Trey Edward Shults's *Waves* all landed in cinemas still doing great business with *1917*, *Little Women*, *Jojo Rabbit* and *Uncut Gems*. Later in January came *A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood*, *Queen & Slim*, *Richard Jewell* and *The Lighthouse*. With all these films competing for the same screens, casualties are to be expected.

Foreign-language cinema

The films competing for the foreign-language category of the Oscars – now called International Film – and Baftas offer unusual collective commercial clout. Nominated for both are Bong Joon Ho's *Parasite* and Pedro Almodóvar's *Pain and Glory*. *Parasite* (released in the UK on 3 February) has already grossed \$28.5 million in the US, \$73.6 million in South Korea, and \$143 million worldwide. *Pain and Glory* has grossed \$36.3 million worldwide. Bafta-nominated *The Farewell* and *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* have respectively grossed \$19.6 million and \$4.9 million worldwide. 📌

MAJOR 2020 AWARDS CONTENDERS AT THE US AND UK BOX OFFICE

Film	US	UK
Joker*	\$334m	£58.0m
Once upon a Time... in Hollywood*	\$141m	£21.3m
1917*	\$76.6m	£18.4m
Little Women*	\$84.9m	£16.4m
Judy	\$24.1m	£8.10m
Le Mans '66 (aka Ford v Ferrari)*	\$113m	£6.16m
Jojo Rabbit*	\$23.6m	£5.48m
Bombshell	\$29.3m	£742,000
Uncut Gems	\$46.2m	N/A
Parasite*	\$27.7m	Released 3 Feb

Excludes Netflix releases; grosses to January 19; *Best Picture Oscar nominees; Source: Comscore

IN PRODUCTION: BONGHIVE SPECIAL

★ Working in the spirit of director Bong Joon Ho's internationalism, British filmmaker Edgar Wright has assembled a cast and crew that cross national boundaries. Wright's latest film, *Last Night in Soho*, is his first chiller and is being shot by pre-eminent Korean cinematographer Chung Chung-hoon, responsible for the painterly gore of Park Chan-wook's films, including *Old Boy* (2003).

★ Bong Joon Ho's last two films are being reimagined as TV series: the train-set dystopia *Snowpiercer*, airing in May, stars Jennifer

Connelly and covers much the same ground as the film and the graphic novel it's based on but will delve more deeply into the tale's class-struggle politics. Meanwhile, HBO is adapting *Parasite* as a limited series, with Bong and *Vice* director Adam McKay in talks to executive produce.

★ Director Bong's regular co-conspirator Tilda Swinton (pictured) will receive a BFI



fellowship for her great contribution to film culture, from Derek Jarman's films to *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*. The fellowship coincides with a particularly busy period for even the prolific Swinton. Films likely to surface this year include Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's first English-language film *Memoria* and Joanna Hogg's *The Souvenir II*, while production will soon start on George Miller's *Three Thousand Years of Longing*. 📌



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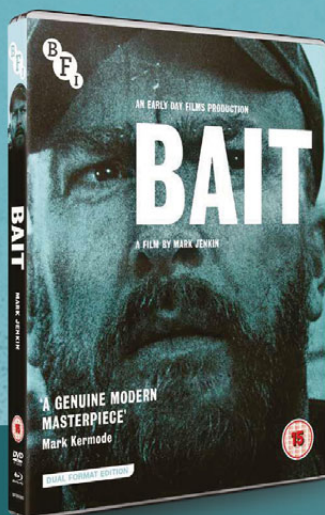
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Dinner demons: Katherine Perry and Matt Moore as the young marrieds who hold a disastrous dinner-party in *The First Year*

PRIMAL SCREEN

AFTER THE HONEYMOON

A newly restored dinner-party farce by Frank Borzage turns out to be as much in love with love as any of his straight-out romances

By Pamela Hutchinson

Frank Borzage was one of the greatest Hollywood directors of young love. When we remember his silent work in particular, a very distinctive kind of romantic melodrama comes to the fore: a passionate tale in which two youthful lovers confront unbearable adversity and yet are finally saved by the redemptive, mystical power of true love. Most famously, this path from darkness into light was trodden by Janet Gaynor and Charles Farrell in a trio of celebrated Borzage films from the end of the silent era: *7th Heaven* (1927), *Street Angel* (1928) and *Lucky Star* (1929).

Not all Borzage films are melodramas, of course. Early in his directorial career he was assigned westerns and comedies, and an out-and-out farce he made shortly before he started producing his hit romances has just been restored, with funding from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association. As this bright character-led comedy, *The First Year* (1926), shows, Borzage could tell a moving story of young people saved by love even amid pratfalls and roughhousing. It's not really surprising that Fox remade this comedy in 1932 with Borzage's dream lovers, Gaynor and Farrell, in the lead roles.

The First Year is a newly-wed comedy based on a play of the same name by Frank Craven. Borzage's version stars Irish actor Matt Moore

(*Traffic in Souls*, *The Unholy Three*) and Katherine Perry (who was married to Owen Moore, Mary Pickford's first husband and Matt's brother). They play Tom and Grace Tucker, who are barely 12 months into their marriage and already considering chucking it in. Money is tight in the Tucker household, and Grace is tired of what she considers domestic drudgery, while Tom is pinning his hopes, and solvency, on selling a plot of land to the railroad company. Their future happiness seems to hinge on a dinner party, hastily cobbled together to impress a railroad official (J. Farrell MacDonald), who brings along his wife, a former showgirl – a remarkably sweet comic turn from Margaret Livingston (the vamp in FW. Murnau's *Sunrise* the following year).

It's a classic sit for a sitcom: the kitchen catastrophes pile on top of each other to create a delectably disastrous dinner while the Tuckers attempt to put on graces beyond their humble means, the sort of thing more recently skewered by Mike Leigh. Despite Grace's protestation that she "didn't do one little thing extra!", it's an aspirational spread scrounged on the cheap, and plagued by mishaps from the start. Even the shopping trip goes awry, leaving Grace stranded in the rain, accidentally abandoned by her hubby – a scene that's genuinely moving




ILLUSTRATION BY MICK BROWNFIELD WWW.MICKBROWNFIELD.COM

rather than farcical, thanks to Borzage's emotional sensitivity. And the table hardly groans with goodness, as Grace judiciously serves fresh melon to her guests and mouldy fruit to Tom, accompanied by a pitcher of a throat-stripping cocktail mixed from rank bathtub gin.

Grace's assistant in the kitchen and at the table is hired maid Hattie, an 11th-hour replacement who makes it perfectly clear she'd rather be anywhere else. There's no doubting that this character is an offensive

Frank Borzage could tell a moving story of young people saved by love even amid pratfalls and roughhousing

stereotype – the slothful African American maid – but as played by Carolynne Snowden, Hattie gains a little more gravitas and threatens to steal the whole film. What may have been written as laziness is performed as disdain, and the feeling persists that Hattie is the only person present who can see right through the Tuckers' sycophantic charade. Snowden was a dancer, actress and activist, known as 'California's Josephine Baker', who broke many barriers for women of colour in the entertainment business. She appeared in 14 features, mostly playing maids, as she does here, though she was at least granted a screen romance with co-star Stepin Fetchit in *In Old Kentucky* (1927). In *The First Year* she proves her mettle as a silent comic, with a gangly, deadpan slapstick that's far more distinctive than any of the film's other performances.

By the time *The First Year* wraps up, the Tuckers have seen off financial ruin and a vengeful ex-boyfriend, as well as weathering the storms of embarrassment and physical injury. As a wiser soul comments, they have merely been suffering from "matrimonial measles", a disease that it is safest to encounter in one's youth. Heartbreak, tragedy or merely cold feet and a spoiled dinner: Borzage offers true love as the cure. 

AT A GLANCE FRANK BORZAGE

Director and actor

Born Utah, 1894, died California 1962.

Frank Borzage won the first Academy Award for Best Director in 1929 for *7th Heaven*. His greatest period as a director is regarded as being the late silent/early sound era, when he forged his signature style of lush romanticism and tended to focus on the plight of young lovers.

Key films

7th Heaven (1927)
Bad Girl (1931)
The Mortal Storm (1940)
Moonrise (1948)

MOMENTS IN LOVE



Smoking hot: Stephen Dwoskin's intense *Moment* (1970)

In 1970, an evening of avant-garde films in Soho tested the line between art and porn – and half a century on, nothing's resolved

By Henry K. Miller

On the evening of Friday 20 November 1970, a small audience gathered – as it had every Friday evening that autumn – at the Sapphire Theatre in Wardour Street, Soho, to see a programme titled 'Acts of Love'. Some of the four films on show have become canonical, but at the time all verged on unshowable. Prints of Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950), blurbied as "a silent film on homosexual love in prison", had initially been sold as art objects and shown privately; it had had a few semi-public screenings in London since 1966, but Jonas Mekas's attempt to show it in New York, in March 1964, earned him a night in the cells.

Mekas had hailed Iimura Takahiko's *Ai/Love* (1962) as "a poetic and sensuous exploration of the body" but, as its maker explained, "that exploration was realised out of fear of censorship. Japanese censors were so strict on

nudity, and on pubic hair in particular, that I shot the whole film in extreme close-up in 8mm: in such a tiny image nobody could tell what they were seeing!" Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1967) presented fewer obstacles to perception, even though its images are thoroughly treated: thus it had left an intellectual ICA audience "stony, rigid, as if commonly subject to deadly paralysis", she recalled.

Stephen Dwoskin's *Moment* (1970) was the least explicit film on the bill, but in some ways the most intense. In the programme of the most recent Edinburgh International Film Festival, held in August, it was described simply as "A beautiful study of the face of a girl before, during and after orgasm". That screening had not, however, gone to plan; city magistrates had banned what was to have been the premiere of Dwoskin's first feature, the more explicit *Times For*, in which Schneemann was a featured player.

Both Schneemann and Dwoskin had come to London from New York. On the night Mekas was arrested for showing *Un chant d'amour*, one of Dwoskin's early films, playing on the same bill, had been confiscated by the NYPD, never to be seen again. Dwoskin had arrived in London six months later; Schneemann had



Jean Genet's *Un chant d'amour* (1950)



Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses* (1967)

come in 1969, with few prospects in sight. "One of the only ways that I could get any income at all was due to the curiosity around *Fuses*. Derek Hill, a courageous independent distributor, kept getting me little showings for it." 'Acts of Love' had started life, without *Moment*, at the New Arts Lab in Camden, but was soon taken over by Hill's more commercially oriented New Cinema Club. Established in 1967 to show American independent films and European films that the established arthouse cinemas would not touch, the New Cinema Club was open to members only – though temporary memberships were sold by the evening – enabling it to show films that the censor would not pass. By 1970 it was putting on three shows a week, at a variety of venues.

'Acts of Love' would continue weekly into 1971, and periodically into the following year, most often at the Sapphire, a venue normally used for

To an extent unthinkable a few years before, the smut industry's X-rated products were being shown in high-street cinemas

preview screenings. The Soho location was at the heart of the burgeoning British smut industry, a short walk from many less high-minded film clubs; but to an extent unthinkable a few years before, this industry's X-rated products were being shown in suburban high-street cinemas. In July, Verina Glaessner, film editor of *Time Out*, sought to anatomise the phenomenon, distinguishing Soho sexploitation from higher-budget titles like Oswalt Kolle's *Sexual Partnership* (1968), which "tend to merge indistinguishably with the art-sex films" – films such as *I Am Curious (Yellow)* (1967) – and these in turn from the "purely voyeuristic 'blue' movies, where the object is to watch bodies perform acts".

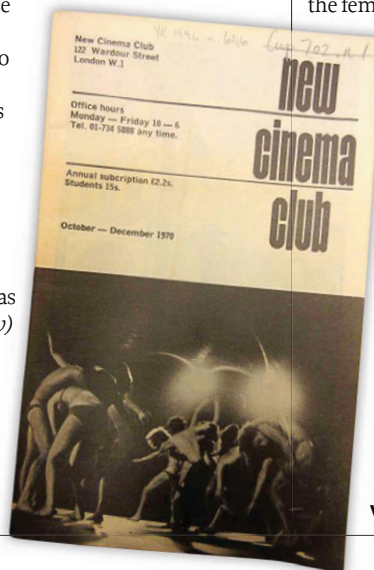
Questions of representation broke into the open. Friday 20 November 1970 was also the night women's liberation activists demonstrated against the Miss World competition across town at the Albert Hall. Laura Mulvey, who took part in the protest, called it "my initiation into the politics of woman as spectacle"; the movement had come into being only very recently. The ambiguous relationship of the erotic underground films shown by the New Cinema Club to the prevailing culture was brought into sharp focus less than a week later, at the Wet Dream Film Festival in Amsterdam. This had been arranged by the editors of *Suck*, the "First European Sexpaper", who included counter-culture impresario Jim Haynes, poet and playwright Heathcote Williams, and Germaine Greer, who had published *The Female Eunuch* just a few weeks earlier.

As the film scholar Elena Gorfinkel has written, the Wet Dream Film Festival, the first of a handful of its kind, "was an event devoted to the exhibition of pornographic films and to the more expansive goal of sexual freedom". Colin MacInnes, who reviewed the festival for *New Society* magazine, characterised its audience as "cultured-sexy-middle class". *Un chant d'amour* was shown on the first evening, Thursday 26th; *Fuses* on the Friday – it was shown the same evening at the Sapphire; and *Moment*, with an earlier Dwoskin film, *Take Me* (1969), on the Saturday. Dwoskin and Schneemann both attended, and were awarded One Night Stand awards; Genet won the Blast from the Past award. But there was also plenty of what MacInnes called "unadulterated porn".

Greer was disillusioned by the experience. "It didn't seem to be working to make us more loving and more tolerant with each other: we got rather fractious and immensely bored with pornography," she told Radio 4 listeners shortly afterwards. "We now understand the wisdom of the Scandinavians in taking off the curbs, because you'd be amazed how soon unlimited access to pornography leads to total dissociation." In *Suck* she dismissed the underground films as "narcissistic", and claimed to have seen "only one film which would have liberated me to drink the sperm of every man and sip the juice of every woman in the room, Genet's *Un chant d'amour*".

Not all critics were so harsh. "The presence of the female form as spectacle is one of the cinema's key pleasures," Mulvey wrote later. "Dwoskin's films stripped away the safety that normally sweetens this semi-secret voyeurism to show up the disturbing power relationship that lies behind it and draw attention to its origins in sexual inequality in society as a whole." The counter-culture is no more; what's left is pornography, and it might be that unlimited access to it has indeed led to a kind of dissociation, and a retreat from the limits reached by the 'Acts of Love' quartet 50 years ago. 📍

'Acts of Love (Reconstructed)' will be staged by the Dwoskin Project at Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, London, on 14 February. Details at blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bimi or via @DwoskinProject on Twitter



MUSIC AND SILENCE

The near absence of music from most of his films might suggest Hong Sangsoo isn't interested. But perhaps the opposite is true

By Sam Davies

If you've seen many – or even just a few – of the nearly two dozen films Korean writer-director Hong Sangsoo has made since 1996, then you'll notice something unusual about *Grass* (2018): it's full of music. The scenarios are typical Hong: actors between jobs, would-be screenwriters and film professors mingle in a Seoul café, bickering, confessing and flirting awkwardly. In the background play Wagner, Schubert, Pachelbel, the can-can from Offenbach's *Orpheus in the Underworld*. It's so unlike Hong that two of his characters even draw attention to it, commenting on the music policy of the (never-seen) café-owner, who also casts a blind eye over the *soju* one table smuggles in, the Korean spirit that flows copiously through so many of Hong's scenes.

As a rule, Hong's approach to sound and music is strictly naturalistic. His films are soundtracked by in-scene minutiae: the clink of *soju* glasses, the scratch of cigarette lighters, the crunch of hiking-boots on snow or gravel, the slurp of bean sprout soup. Music is heard only at intervals, whether inside the frame of the story or as part of its editing. Many of Hong's films feature short cues by the composer Jeong Yongjin, less as themes than as a couple of bars that provide connective tissue between one sequence and another: as if Hong wants just enough musical presence for the audience not to notice the absence. One exception is *Oki's Movie* (2010), in which the geometry of a love triangle between an older film professor, and two younger student directors is teased out in a triptych of nested films. Each film-within-a-film begins with a blast of Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance* March No. 1, the tune for 'Land of Hope and Glory', a choice which works as an ironic piece of romantic commentary and, for British viewers, a slightly surreal act of musical relocation.



Prodigal Sony: Jung Eunhae and Lee Sunkyun (with Walkman) in *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (2013)

Perhaps Hong's extemporised technique, in which the day's pages are often written only the night before or the morning of a shoot, entails a subliminal resistance to music as a score, as something composed and preconceived. One of the funniest moments in *In Another Country* (2012) comes when a lifeguard (Yoo Junsang), infatuated with a Western tourist played by Isabelle Huppert, suddenly devotes an acoustic love ballad to her – a moment of *Toni Erdmann*-like farce heightened

It seems music may be for Hong a force to be handled with caution, capable of taking over whatever frame it is introduced into

by the fact that we remain outside the tent in which they're sheltering from the rain, and have to picture the close-quarters awkwardness.

It could be that for Hong, music simply isn't so important. But I think Hong's ambivalence about music, and his restraint in using it, signals not a lack of interest but the opposite. The art critic Brian Sewell once insisted he couldn't listen to classical music on the radio because if something he liked came on, he was transfixed and unable to function until it had finished. Reading between the (improvised, circular) lines of his filmography, it seems music may be something similar for Hong – a force to be handled with caution, capable of taking over whatever frame it is introduced into. In *Tale of Cinema* (2005), for instance, Uhm Jiwon's actress is reduced to tears when struggling director Kim Sangkyung deliberately picks a song for her at karaoke which he knows has personal significance: the number is disposable, but its power to move derails the evening for both of them. In *Grass*, the lush romanticism of the 19th century fills in the gaps and smooths the characteristic bumps of Hong's dialogue, softening its effects. And in *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (2013), one symptom of film lecturer Lee Sunkyun's mid-life crisis, along with an affair with a student, is his fixation on an arrangement (by Jeong Yongjin) of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony. He listens to it obsessively on the tiny, tinny speaker of a Walkman, the medium itself making it seem even more of a crutch or fetish. Late in the film he sits sobbing alone, Walkman in hand; it would be easy to read him as pathetic. But playing one of many Hong characters whose occupation marks him as a none too subtle stand-in for their creator, it's clear that if the film is pointing a finger at anyone, it's Hong himself; it's a confession as much as an accusation. 📻

AT A GLANCE HONG SANGSOO

South Korean film director
Born Seoul, 1960.

Hong Sangsoo studied filmmaking in the United States before making his directorial debut at the age of 35 with *The Day a Pig Fell into the Well* (1996). His directing style places great value on spontaneity; he prefers not to prepare a script in advance, but writes his scenes each morning before shooting starts.

Key films

Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors (2000)
Woman Is the Future of Man (2004)
The Day He Arrives (2011)
The Day After (2017)



Kim Minhee in *Grass* (2018)



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CLASS ACT

*'Parasite', the thrilling new film by Bong Joon Ho, has taken the Korean director's distinctive dark humour and meticulously crafted suspense to new heights – captivating critics and audiences around the world with its tale of a poor family who inveigle their way into the lives of a wealthy household. As Bong takes over as S&S's first ever guest editor, **Tony Rayns** – Asian cinema expert, and champion of Bong's work since the beginning – looks back over Bong's career, while Bong himself talks us through some of the obsessions and influences that ignited his own love of cinema*

Photography by Dean Chalkey



Talent aside, Bong Joon Ho owes much of his success to the fact that he's a Hitchcockian director. He's not given to slavish homages (he's not a Brian De Palma) and he's not obsessed with the psychology of suspense or the transference of guilt. But he does follow Hitchcock's policy of meticulously pre-planning his films by fully storyboarding them, which leads him into intricately dovetailed plotting and gives him a keen sense of the way that suspense engages an audience. Plus he's acquired Hitchcock's skill at playing with audience sympathies, often encouraging the viewer to identify with characters who behave badly or trip over moral dilemmas. He has a darkish sense of humour that matches Hitchcock's, and perhaps also shares his penchant for the odd visual shock. (*Psycho* made a big impression on him.) Above all, he learned Hitchcock's knack of disguising serious intent as entertainment. When he first visited London in 2000 – for the London Film Festival screening of his debut feature *Barking Dogs Never Bite* and to share the stage with Jia Zhangke at the ICA for a 'new directors' talkshow – I remember how pleased he was to spot a Hitchcock mug-

shot peeping over the canopy of the Criterion Theatre on Piccadilly Circus.

Of course films are not the same as storyboards, and Bong has quite often been forced by adverse circumstances to change his pre-production plans. This was particularly true in the early years: *Barking Dogs Never Bite* (*Flanders eui Gae*, 2000) was nearly cancelled when its intended star pulled out at the last minute and its producer drastically cut the budget; Bong had to change some scenes and improvise others during production as he struggled to cope. He's spoken frankly about this in a long interview with Jung Jiyoun, published in her 2008 book *Bong Joon-ho*. The same interview goes into detail about the many changes he had to make in *The Host* (*Gwoimul*, 2006) to keep the

Bong has acquired Hitchcock's skill at playing with audience sympathies, often encouraging the viewer to identify with characters who behave badly




CGI work down to affordable limits. Even *Snowpiercer* (*Seolgyungnyeolcha*, 2013) was almost derailed when the key production finance suddenly vanished while he was already prepping to shoot in Prague – and that was long before Harvey Weinstein told Bong that he wanted the film recut. (In Bong's recollection, he was greeted in the Weinstein Company office in New York by Weinstein himself with a bear hug and the words "Director Bong, you are a genius!" before he was ushered into a side-room and shown the hatchet job the then-mogul had in mind.)

THE FACTS OF LIFE

It's obviously more interesting to look at the films as released than to chronicle their sometimes fraught production histories, but we should first establish exactly who Bong Joon Ho is. He was born in the city of Daegu in 1969, the youngest of four children of graphic designer and college teacher Bong Sanggyun and his wife, a former elementary-school teacher who suffered politically and economically for being the daughter of the distinguished 1930s novelist Park Taewon. (He defected to North Korea during the Korean War, and the anti-communist authori-

ties in the South routinely punished relatives of such figures.) By his own account, Bong was a solitary and rather introverted boy who got good grades at school and spent much of his spare time drawing cartoons and comics.

He became a film fan in secondary school, watching whatever censored movies were shown on domestic TV and tuning to the American Forces Network – technically illegal, but even hotels did it – and started thinking about a career in filmmaking. His family was Catholic and he learned about the iniquities of South Korea's military dictatorships and the 1980 massacre of unarmed civilians in Gwangju both at home and in Bible classes. He read Sociology at Yonsei University in Seoul – the fake diploma made for the son Kiwoo in *Parasite* is headed "Yonsei University" – and, like most students of his generation, was an anti-government, pro-democracy activist. He was locked up for a month for joining an "illegal" Teachers Union demo and shared a cell with various "petty criminals" who later became prototypes for characters in *The Host* and other films. He was eventually given a suspended sentence on condition that he went straight into his mandatory military service, 

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL
Bong Joon Ho's Palme d'Or-winning *Parasite* (below), a caustic, blackly comic tale of class conflict in modern Korea, marks a return to the small-scale dramas of the director's earlier career after a run of big-budget monster movies and sci-fi films




MEMORIES OF... OBSESSION



Kim Kiyoung's films, for instance. At that time I was focused on American genre movies of the 1970s and 80s, and some European films. I saw them all on TV. At that time anything we saw was on TV, because we didn't have cinemathèques or VHS. There were these slots in the schedules that showed European films – I remember seeing Fellini films, and some Truffaut. But any films I enjoyed then were aired on the weekends on the American Forces Korea Network channel. I remember seeing Sam Peckinpah, Brian De Palma, Sidney Lumet, John Schlesinger, Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford...

The AFK Network was accessible to the Korean public, but on Friday nights, at midnight, they would play things you'd not otherwise see on Korean TV. Films filled with sex and violence – things you'd watch in secret when your parents were in bed. I remember staying up to watch films by John Carpenter and Brian De Palma, and many B movies.

When I was at high school, I had no idea about the classics of Korean cinema. I didn't know

When I was a teenager I was kind of by myself with my film obsessions. I would collect materials, create my own top ten lists... It was only when I went to college that I found people who shared similar interests. I created a cinema club, and soon found all these other kids who had enjoyed watching films on their own. We all came together to share our obsessions, search for rare VHS tapes, things like that. We would find rare films and then share them between us. 

Bong's top ten in the *Sight & Sound* Greatest Films of All Time poll in 2012

A City of Sadness
Hou Hsiao-hsien, 1989
Cure
Kurosawa Kiyoshi, 1997
Fargo
Joel & Ethan Coen, 1996
The Housemaid
Kim Kiyoung, 1960
Psycho
Alfred Hitchcock, 1960
Raging Bull
Martin Scorsese, 1980
Touch of Evil
Orson Welles, 1958
Vengeance Is Mine
Imamura Shohei, 1979
The Wages of Fear
Henri-Georges Clouzot, 1953
Zodiac
David Fincher, 2007

Bong's films have always reflected his generation's deep misgivings about the way their country is run. Paramount is the sense of social inequality



ONE FOR THE MONEY
After an uphill struggle meeting the CGI needs of *The Host* (2006, below) on a budget, Bong was gratified to be given sufficient funds to visualise *Okja* (2017, below left) as he wanted



MEMORIES OF... NOSTALGIA



It's become so easy to watch films now. When I'm at home I turn on my projector, go on to the Criterion

Channel... When I was younger I would be digging through boxes at markets. Now not only is the work itself so available, there's also interviews, content regarding the filmmakers and the films... it's all there on the streaming services. It's exciting, but at the same time it can feel a little empty. I used to be so desperate to have access to these things, but now they are so easily within my reach, it's almost like when you're less interested in the pastries and cookies that are easily available to you.

Now I've been making films for 20 years, I find myself reaching for even older classic films. I don't really watch so many new films or TV series. I've

been watching a lot of early films by John Ford, the early years of *film noir*... I've found myself thinking about what the essence of cinema is, and about visual storytelling – where did it all begin? My family sometimes ask me why I watch so many films from the 1930s and 40s, when Hollywood was in the process of inventing many of the forms of genre filmmaking. So I think I still do have a passion for discovery, it's just that the films are getting older.

I tend now to watch films that are newly released on Blu-ray, so my watching is a bit dictated by that. Recently I watched Jean Renoir's *The Crime of Monsieur Lange* (1936) – that was really memorable. And I also saw Samuel Fuller's *Underworld U.S.A.* (1961), a late *noir* film, for the first time, and that was really good. I also recently watched Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* [1946] – that was very impressive. And so was the British director Carol Reed's film *The Fallen Idol* (1948). 🍷

so he didn't graduate from Yonsei until 1993. By then he had made his first short *White Man* (*Baek-saek-in*, 1993; it's about a middle-class yuppie who finds a worker's severed finger and pockets it) in a university film club where he also met his future wife.

From there he entered the Korean Academy of Film Arts (KAFA) for a couple of years, graduating with the remarkable short *Incoherence* (*Jimimyeolryeol*, 1994), which anticipates the themes, the sardonic humour and some of the visuals of his later features, including *Parasite*. It's in three parts and an epilogue: the three parts show episodes of adult delinquency and the epilogue reveals that the three perpetrators are all supposed pillars of conservative society, discussing social morality on a TV talkshow. Festival screenings at home and abroad soon made this the most noted KAFA student film ever. Bong and two of his classmates were snapped up as assistant directors by Park Kiyong, an earlier KAFA graduate, for his feature *Motel Cactus* (*Motel Seoninjang*, 1997), on which Bong also gets co-writer credit. During filming, Bong had special responsibility for keeping an eye on the often wayward cinematographer Chris Doyle. That job left him employed by Cha Seungjae's company Uno Films (later renamed Sidus), for which he also co-wrote Min Byungchun's *Phantom, the Submarine* (*Yuryeong*, 1999) and then directed his first two features.

What's missing from this sketch of the early career is a sense of the social and political context. The struggle against authoritarian military rule – with all its martial-law provisions, its censorship, its economic controls and its violent suppression of dissent – dominated the 1970s

CRIMINAL JUSTICE
Bong's *Memories of Murder* (below, 2003) offers direct echoes of the social realities experienced by Koreans in the 1980s, such as the police's incompetence and propensity for violence



MEMORIES OF... DISCOVERY



In the late 1980s in Korea a book called *Understanding Movies* by Louis D. Giannetti was published

in a translation [it was originally published in the US in 1972]. It was the first time a proper book on cinema was published, or translated, in Korea. That was really a big event, because at the time people didn't think of cinema as something that could be studied, or that you could write books about. It was a big moment for me, and I know it was for a lot of other Korean filmmakers of my generation. My brother studied English literature, and he got a job translating half of that book, so I would watch him translate that at home – I was in high school – and I remember being very surprised to discover a book like that.

There were monthly magazines on

film in Korea when I was growing up, but they were mostly very bad, they weren't serious magazines like *Sight & Sound* or [Japanese film magazine] *Kinema Junpo*. They would have these editorials on Brooke Shields and people – very pop-culture oriented. But hidden at the back over the last ten pages of those magazines was a section that would deal seriously with film analysis, and feature auteurs like Bergman and Sam Peckinpah. I devoured and collected those.

I loved films growing up, and had always been curious to know just what happens behind the camera, but there seemed no way of finding out until *Understanding Movies* came out, other than the short critique sections in those magazines.

Then when I studied cinema around 30 years ago, I used to read *Sight & Sound* a lot. I read it with my Film Society members. Sometimes, we even got illegally copied issues and read them. 📺

and 1980s, producing an entire generation of 'woke' activists. Some of the restrictions were lifted in 1988, as Seoul hosted the Olympics and began turning Gangnam (the large area on the southern bank of the Han River) from farmland into a modern metropolis, but there was still plenty of tear gas on the streets of the city for the following five years as anti-government activism continued.

Palpable changes in the ways ordinary people spoke and behaved didn't come until the civilian Kim Youngsam was elected president in 1993, but his regime's cronyism and corruption guaranteed that cynicism and pessimism returned all too quickly. And two man-made disasters in Seoul in the mid-1990s consolidated the widespread feeling that something was seriously wrong at the heart of Korean society and politics. In 1994, a section of the Seongsu Bridge suddenly plunged into the Han River during the morning rush-hour, killing 32 commuters and schoolkids in the vehicles that were crossing it at the time. Only one year later the five-storey Sampoong Department Store collapsed equally suddenly, killing more than 500 people. Both catastrophes were blamed on shoddy workmanship and materials and traced back to lax governmental supervision; there was much speculation about bribery and corruption. Nearly two decades later the same public outrage reappeared, redoubled, when the Sewol ferry capsized and sank, killing hundreds of children on board, again apparently due to the cronyism which had allowed the disgraced owner to build a top-heavy vessel; there were also difficult questions about the training and responses of the captain and crew.

Bong's films up to and including *Parasite* (*Gisaengchung*, 2019) have always reflected both the Korea he grew up in and his generation's deep misgivings about the way their country is run. Paramount is the sense of social inequality – class division – which is obviously not confined to Korea. More culturally specific are the direct echoes of social realities, such as the incompetence and propensity for violence of the police in *Memories of Murder* (*Salin eui Chueok*, 2003 – see Endings, page 96), which evoke the 1980s in the minds of Korean viewers as vividly as memories of the real-life unsolved crimes do. Or the mass evacuation of working-class civilians to holding camps in *The Host* when the authorities and a suspiciously compliant media spread the fake news that a contagious virus is more of a threat than the monster in the Han River – which finds a not-so-distant echo in *Parasite* when the Kim family is forced out of its basement home by floods and overflowing sewage. The two educated children in the Park family in *The Host* are both clear products of a student-activist background: the daughter Namju deploys her archery skills like a third-world guerrilla (you can imagine that she had a Che Guevara poster on the walls of her student digs) and the younger son Namil makes and throws Molotov cocktails with the ease of one who fought in the pitched battles around Seoul's City Hall.

Sometimes Bong's inspirations are directly personal. He has described *Barking Dogs Never Bite* – which he wanted to call 'A Higher Animal'; he was overruled by a sales agent – as "my most personal film" and says, "I think my goal was to maintain and reveal my personal character." The film is not literally autobiographical, but the protagonist Yunju, a university lecturer who spends a summer bumming around in his modest apartment, hoping to be offered tenure while his

Bong is happy to give his films generic identities, but even happier when he crashes the gears by making hairpin narrative turns or giving a dramatic scene a black-comic twist



🔍 wife is out earning their keep, is a metaphorical self-portrait of Bong in his late twenties as he tries to negotiate a role for himself in the film industry. The apartment is, in fact, identical to the one Bong and his wife lived in at the time. As played by Lee Sungjae, the character Yunju has a mild, placid exterior but is so irritated by the yapping of a small dog somewhere in the apartment building that he finds himself capable of monstrous acts: throwing a dog off the roof of the block and – a moral equivalent? – bribing the university dean to give him the job he wants.

Setting a pattern which stretches all the way through to *Parasite*, Bong spends more than half the film cross-cutting between two polar-opposite characters. Upstairs is Yunju, essentially doing nothing and allowing a minor irritation to become a major obsession. Downstairs in the estate management office is Hyunnam (played by Bae Doona, a TV star on the brink of her breakthrough in Korean and Japanese movies), a poorly educated but ethical and driven young woman with no career prospects who is unfailingly kind and considerate. Bong's smartest idea is to bring these two disparates together over the issue of lost or stolen dogs – which in turn leads him down to the lowest tier of the social pyramid, the basement where a dog-stewing security guard hangs out and the sub-basement where a hungry, homeless man is squatting. This, too, was anticipated in the short *Incoherence*, where a security guard's rice-cooker is vandalised (I'm carefully avoiding spoilers here) in a most unusual way. The most striking thing about this narrative structure is the way it refuses to conform to any generic norm. *Barking Dogs* fits no established conventions, not even the politically correct assumptions of 2000, which is probably why it took so long for Korean critics and audiences to notice it. CJ E&M didn't publish the Korean Blu-ray edition until 2013.

Bong's favourite genre is the crime thriller, but most of the crimes in his films go conspicuously unsolved. Indeed, *Mother* (2009) is the only one of his movies with that kind of narrative closure: a powerless but indomitable old woman goes into battle with the police and assorted low-lives to exonerate her falsely accused son, and wins – although even there the pay-off is handled quite unexpectedly. The serial killings in *Memories of*

BONG JOON HO FILMOGRAPHY



BARKING DOGS NEVER BITE (2000)

As writer-director:

White Man
(1993) (short)
Memories in My Frame
(1994) (short)
Incoherence
(1994) (short)
Barking Dogs Never Bite
(2000)
Memories of Murder
(2003)
Sink & Rise
(2003) (short)

Influenza
(2004) (short)
The Host
(2006)
Shaking Tokyo
(2008) (short)
Mother
(2009)
Snowpiercer
(2013)
Okja
(2017)
Parasite
(2019)

As co-writer:

Motel Cactus
(1997, Park Kiyong director)
Phantom, the Submarine
(1999, Min Byungchun director)
Antarctic Journal
(2005, Yim Pilsung director)
Sea Fog
(2014, Shim Sungbo director)



A BIGGER SPLASH
Following Bong's critically acclaimed small-scale Korean project *Mother* (2009, above), he expanded his range with the sci-fi spectacle *Snowpiercer* (2013, above right)



Murder cannot be pinned to any of the three main suspects because the real-life crimes in the 1980s had not been solved when Bong made the film. (Last year, DNA forensics at last linked someone to the crimes.) The unresolved nature of the threat is an essential part of the way the film works. The class rebels in *Snowpiercer* and the eco-activists in *Okja* (2017) are more heroes than criminals, but both films stress how limited their victories are. Actually, Bong's instinctive retreat from orthodox generic endings and narrative closures is one symptom of his general ambivalence about genre. He's happy enough to give his films generic identities, but even happier when he crashes the gears by making hairpin narrative turns or giving a dramatic scene a black-comic twist.

MONSTER SUCCESS

Since Bong's most critically acclaimed movies – *Memories of Murder*, *Mother* and now *Parasite* – are all relatively small-scale Korean projects, many have wondered what draws him to bigger and brasher spectacles (mostly in English) like *Snowpiercer* and *Okja*. This time it's the cultural context which is crucial, although personal factors must play a part too. The prime impulse is no doubt to crack bigger markets than the population (just under 52 million) of South Korea. Bong's peers Park Chanwook and Kim Jeewoon had well-documented struggles to make English-language films in Hollywood, with *Stoker* (2013) and *The Last Stand* (2013) respectively, both seen as flops. *Snowpiercer*, inspired by Bong's interest in a French graphic novel, was clearly an attempt to follow in their footsteps but without going through the tiresome and frustrating process of negotiating with a Hollywood major. And then *Okja* came along in response to a non-studio funder's carte blanche invitation (Netflix coughed up the entire budget without imposing conditions or making any changes), but at the cost of Bong's preferred model of theatrical distribution. As ever, Bong was looking for a level of success on his own terms.

We can only speculate about the personal factors. Bong had pitched the idea for *The Host* to a producer (essentially, the Loch Ness monster in the Han River) before he began *Memories of Murder*, but faced a series of small humiliations as he visited one far-flung visual effects company after another in his search for CGI on a

MEMORIES OF... BRITISH CINEMA



I love horror films from the Hammer studio. I have to confess I've never actually seen any films from Ealing Studios though! Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's films I love, particularly

Black Narcissus (1947) – seeing that on the big screen, the extravagance, is amazing. 🍿

budget. *Snowpiercer* and *Okja* exorcised those unhappy experiences by giving him uncompromised access to the visual effects he wanted. The Orson Welles dictum about a director having control of the full resources of a studio being like giving a boy the biggest train-set in the world may have played a part, too. And Bong's cinephile awareness that – a couple of weak imitations of Japanese Godzilla movies aside – Korea had never produced a monster movie was another likely spur.

In 1960, Alfred Hitchcock, already well-known to audiences from his film cameos and TV intros, placed himself in a trailer and press ads to ask audiences not to give away the ending of *Psycho*. (This was in the days of continuous performances, of course.) In 2019, Bong prefaced the Cannes presskit for *Parasite* with "A Word of Pleading", which included these words: "*Parasite* is not a film that depends on one big twist at the end. It's clearly different from, for example, a certain Hollywood movie that sent waiting audiences into a frenzy of dismay and anger when someone who'd just seen it screamed out in the lobby 'Bruce Willis is a ghost!'" He went on to "implore" the critics to refrain from spoilers. Subversively, he'd already slipped in a 'spoiler' of his own when he okayed the film's main title design, which replaces the circles that are part of the Korean *hangul* script with spirals. That was his way of subtly hinting at the structure of the film's plot. We'll say no more.

***Parasite* is released in UK cinemas on 7 February**

'Parasite'
reviewed on
page 58

‘Without thinking about camera movements and placement – like these storyboards – it’s impossible for me to come up with a story’

“Kurosawa [Akira]’s *High and Low* [1963] was an influence on how I imagined the two spaces in *Parasite*. In *High and Low* you see the rich man’s house literally high on the hill, and you see the hellish slums that the perpetrator is in below. To show class difference through such locations was a big influence on *Parasite*.” 📌



surprises, and best gone into as cold as possible.

The film is unusual in Bong's work for the way the action is almost entirely contained within two locations – the Kims' small flat, and the gleamingly modern Park family house. Nevertheless, Bong's working approach remained the same, as he explains: "Because the story takes place mostly in only two spaces, the rich house and the poor house, I initially thought it could work as a theatre production. But when I started writing, from the first line, I realised that would be impossible, because without going through the filter of thinking about camera movements, placement and frame size – like the storyboards you see here – it's impossible for me to come up with a story. So I gave up on the theatre idea right away – my brain is just optimised for cinema." 📺

James Bell



A CUCKOO IN THE NEST

In this scene Kiwoo makes his first visit to the Park family's lavish house, offering his services as an English tutor. He is met by the Parks' housekeeper, Moongwang. The house is a built set, designed by Bong with production designer Lee Hajun and set designer Cho Wonwoo.

Bong says: "With films like *Mother* where it was mostly all locations, I would go to them myself and take photos, and then it was about absorbing those locations into my thinking. But because 90 per cent of *Parasite* takes place in the two houses and they're both sets, the production designer and I talked constantly. There are very advanced computer-graphic tools now, to recreate the spaces as a 3D model!" 📺





KEEP YOUR (CLASS) ENEMIES CLOSER

Following her brother Kiwoo's lead, Kijung presents herself to the Parks as 'Jessica', an art therapist who will nurture the talent of their son Dasong. The job brings her into the heart of the family home, and will enable her to push out the Parks' current housekeeper, Moongwang. **Bong says:** "There has always been a gap between rich and poor. Inevitably, though, paths cross. In *Parasite* rich and poor come so close they can smell one another. Jobs like tutoring, housekeeping and driving bring the poor family into the rich family's private realm, and that's where the comedy and tragedy begin. The film deals with situations where they come so close that it's risky – they can be three inches from one another, they're constantly walking on thin ice. It's through those situations that the film can express the class disparity cinematically."



THE FAMILY WHO STRAY TOGETHER

Having each used their smarts to con their way into the Park family's lives, the four Kims take advantage of their employers' absence from the house on a weekend break to relax in their new, more comfortable surroundings, and indulge in a family drinking session. **Bong says:** "It's not as though the poor family are lazy – quite the opposite – it's just that there aren't the jobs for them. That's at the root of what this film wants to say. There's a line in the film about 500 graduates going for one security job position – that was taken from a real article that was published in Korea, it's not an exaggeration. Of the 499 people that didn't get the job, it's not as if they weren't capable of being a security guard, it's just that there was only one position."

'KIM KIYOUNG IS TRULY A MASTER': BONG JOON HO ON THE HOUSEMAID



Law of desire: Kim Kiyoung's 1960 classic *The Housemaid* presents a working-class female lead character who is much stronger than the master of the house

'Parasite' owes a major debt to Kim Kiyoung's shocking 1960 study of class and desire, *The Housemaid*. Here **Bong Joon Ho** explains how he first discovered what is now widely regarded as Korea's greatest ever film



A film that was a big influence on *Parasite* is Kim Kiyoung's *The Housemaid* (1960). It's about a middle-class family who want to become upper-middle class,

and it shows the fears they face when they accept a housemaid into their home.

I discovered Kim's films in the 1990s. In Korea it was only after military rule ended at the end of the 1980s that a proper film archive was established, and it became possible to see older films again. That coincided with an explosion of cinephile culture in Korea, and it was at that point that Kim re-emerged as a very significant figure in Korean cinema. In 1997 the Busan film festival held a retrospective of his films, which introduced many international critics to his works – and many young cinephiles in Korea too. I became a huge fan. I was working as an assistant director at the time.

I remember rummaging through various video stores trying to find his rare films.

Kim's death in a fire at his home in 1998 was shocking, but – and this may sound crass – it was also fitting that even his death was dramatic and cinematic.

After his death, interest in his films exploded. There was a retrospective at the Berlin film festival in 1998, and another at the Cinémathèque française in Paris in 2006, where I was a part of the panel. From the late 1990s through the 2000s Kim really took on an immortal standing in Korean cinema.

What he gave to us Korean filmmakers was the originality of his visual style, and this uniquely raw attitude – a need to portray human desires honestly. Those, and the uncanny ways he dealt with cinematic space. These things were all shocking to me – especially the fact that he was able to create such works during the military regime. Of course, there had been similar filmmakers in other countries – like Luis Buñuel and Imamura Shohei, other masters of dealing with desire. I used to devour their

What Kim Kiyoung gave to us Korean filmmakers was this uniquely raw attitude – a need to portray human desires honestly

films, but I was very surprised to learn that there was a filmmaker like that in Korea.

Kim's film *Goryeojang* (1963) is very similar to Imamura's *The Ballad of Narayama* (1983) – it's about similar traditions. Kim and Imamura are really inseparable in the way they deal with desire and female characters. Women in Kim's films are not your femme fatale archetypes, though they are always stronger than the men – the maid in *The Housemaid*, for instance, is a very powerful working-class character. His male characters tend to be pathetic, pretentious and idiotic, and that's an influence you can see in my films as well. I think the way he depicts male characters is tied to his own life.

In *S&S* you do your poll every ten years to find the best films of all time. A bit like in the 2012 *S&S* poll, where the top film changed from *Citizen Kane* to *Vertigo*, in Korea for many decades the number one film in national polls was always *The Aimless Bullet* (1960), a social realist film by another master director, Yoo Hyunmuk. But after the mid-2000s, after all the Kim retrospectives, that changed, and it's now *The Housemaid* that usually sits at the top.

The Korean Film Archive is restoring Kim's films, and has released Blu-ray versions. My hope is that a company like Arrow or Indicator or Criterion or the BFI will release a Blu-ray box-set. Kim Kiyoung is someone I always recommend to filmmakers I meet; he's truly a master. 

THE ECCENTRICITIES OF KIM KIYOUNG

Rediscovered within Korea after the fall of the military regime in the 1990s and long celebrated by Bong Joon Ho, Kim is now regarded as one of the country's cinematic masters. Here **Tony Rayns** explains why it's time the rest of the world caught up with the grotesque excess and brutal power of the director's works



Mid-century modern: Kim Kiyoung (centre) made his finest work in the 1960s and 70s

In his heyday, Kim Kiyoung (1919-98) was a perfect paradox: a man absolutely of his time but also a one-man counter-current. He flourished from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, the years when the South Korean film industry struggled to reinvent itself after the Korean War, latterly fighting the military government's censorship and production policies; he won awards and made several big hits but kept a distance from the mainstream. He responded to social issues but also worried away at his own idiosyncratic obsessions. Those included weak men emasculated by their own desires and strong women driven dangerously crazy when their machinations go wrong, so it's fair to call him a maverick. His tastes ran to the grotesque and grand guignol; many of his films feature pesky rats. Korean newspaper critics regularly denounced his excesses – in terms very much like those the British press deployed to abuse Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* in 1960.

I was introduced to his work soon after I first visited Seoul in 1988. One friend took me to the Korean Film Archive (then a moribund branch of the military government's civil service) to show me Kim's nightmare fantasia *The Housemaid* (*Ha-nyeo*, 1960). Not long after, Bong Joon Ho thanked me for helping to

subtitle his film-school graduation film by giving me a subtitled VHS of Kim's *Woman of Fire* (*Hwa-nyeo*, 1971), which turned out to be an updated colour remake of *The Housemaid*. So when the second Busan International Film Festival in 1997 kicked off its mission to reclaim Korean cinema history by organising a Kim Kiyoung tribute, I had some idea what to expect. But no one predicted the results. Dozens of indie filmmakers at the festival – plus quite a few of the foreign guests – cheered Kim as a master. A French film promoter asked him if he thought of himself as a surrealist. Cinematheques around the world clamoured to mount retrospectives.

Kim sadly died with his wife in a housefire just a few months after the festival, so it fell to the Korean Film Archive to pick up the baton. After the country's shift to civilian government in 1993, the KFA began evolving into a motivated and competent organisation. It started by publishing DVDs of five surviving films by Kim, derived from scratched and blotchy ex-distribution prints. Then Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation stepped in to supervise the restoration of *The Housemaid* (a process which entailed digitally erasing the hideous original subtitles) and the Kim Kiyoung rediscovery

gathered speed. In 2019 the KFA published excellent Blu-ray restorations of *Goryeojang* (1963, a revamped remake of Kinoshita Keisuke's *The Ballad of Narayama* from 1958) and the masterly *Ieo-do* (1977; the replica of the original script included in the package reveals that Kim's envisaged English title was 'Blue Fish Island'). More titles are due to follow. The extraordinary *Insect Woman* (*Chung-nyeo*, 1973, seemingly inspired by the Imamura Shohei film of the same name but nothing like it) and *Promise of the Flesh* (*Yukchae eui Yaksok*, 1975) ought to be priorities.

Too many of Kim Kiyoung's films are lost, but it's clear enough that his career fell into three phases. After studying medicine and working in theatre he got his start in filmmaking with the United States Information Service during the Korean War. His earliest surviving film is the unsigned short *I Am a Truck* (*Naneun Truck Ida*, c. 1952; it's an extra on the *Goryeojang* Blu-ray), a poetic documentary about recycling metal parts which equals anything that Western war-effort film units came up with. The earliest feature which survives more or less intact is his second, *Yangsan Province* (*Yangsan-do*, 1955), a traditional tragic melodrama set in the late Chosun Dynasty in which the spoilt son of a village chief tries to snatch a young woman from the farmer she was betrothed to. Kim virtually eliminates the sentimental aspects, dials the cruelty and sadism up a notch or two and stresses the dirt and squalor of rural life. Judging by these examples, this first phase was marked by his innate grasp of orthodox film language and his slight tendency towards the *outré*.

The second phase, his greatest, began with *The Housemaid* in 1960 and lasted a good 17 years. These are the films in which Kim prefers stylised plots and visuals over 'realism' and reaches for an understanding of human perversity through tales of escalating hysteria. *The Housemaid* set the pattern: a married man who teaches music to factory workers hires a country girl as housemaid and – fatally attracted – gets her pregnant. She induces a miscarriage by deliberately falling down the stairs (two-storey homes were a novelty at the time, and a status symbol) but then brazenly torments him in front of his wife (a home seamstress), his daughter (a polio

In the films from the 1960s and 70s Kim reaches for an understanding of human perversity through tales of escalating hysteria



Insect Woman (1973)



Woman of Fire (1971)

AT A GLANCE KIM KIYOUNG

Born 1919, Gyo-dong, Seoul

Died 1998, Seoul

Selected filmography

I Am a Truck (1952) (short)

Yangsan Province (1955)

The Housemaid (1960)

The Sea Knows (1961)

Goryeojang (1963)

Len's Sonata (1969)

Woman of Fire (1971)

Insect Woman (1973)

Promise of the Flesh (1975)

leo-do (1977)

Woman After a Killer Butterfly (1978)

Woman of Fire '82 (1982)

Carnivorous Animal (1984)



Appointment with death: Kim Kiyong's highly stylised *Goryeojang* (1963)

survivor) and his young son (a nice kid with a dark streak). Kim's *mise en scène* expertly stages the action in confined spaces and uses recurrent motifs (sliding doors, a sewing-machine treadle, high and low angles, rat poison) to build the hysteria until the film arrives at a punchline worthy of Pasolini's *Pigsty* (*Porcile*, 1969). Kim liked this plot so much he used it again and again, and not only in his own remakes *Woman of Fire* and *Woman of Fire '82* (*Hwa-nyeo '82*, 1982).

Two other standouts from this phase are the titles recently restored and published on Blu-ray by the KFA: *Goryeojang* and *leo-do*. Kim hadn't seen Kinoshita's *Narayama*

when he made *Goryeojang*; Japanese films were banned in Korea until the late 1990s and he likely read the published script. His version of the legend (villagers are carried up the mountain to die when they reach 70, to make way for the next generation) replaces the original's kabuki references with a belief system rooted in shamanist predictions and adds storylines about village vendettas and ten delinquent brothers. The highly stylised, studio-shot film is vastly more brutal and alarming than Kinoshita's. *leo-do* adapts (and apparently transforms) a Korean novel by Lee Chungjoon into a shamanist fable about a legendary island of

women divers near Jeju and adds protests against environmental pollution. Both films are manifestos for Kim's eccentric ideas about propagation of the race by any means necessary, the post-Freudian ideas which led him to sex-war themes and new definitions of the death-drive. The Blu-ray of *leo-do* restores the censor cuts from 1977, notably the staggering climax involving the shamanist recalling of the corpse of a man drowned at sea and then the stiffening of his flaccid penis to permit an act of posthumous coitus.

The final phase of Kim's career saw him floundering to make ultra-low-budget quickies to meet government-imposed quotas for Korean production, tied in with the right to import lucrative foreign films. He dismissed most of the results, though they did include the fan-favourite *Woman After a Killer Butterfly* (*Salin-nabireul Jjotneun Yeoja*, 1978), a Mario Bava-esque three-episode story about a student haunted by menacing and/or lustful ghosts. Kim's eccentricities carry through, but the underlying seriousness is gone. Bong Joon Ho has been championing Kim Kiyong by recording commentary tracks for three of the KFA discs. Those discs are now making it possible for the rest of the world to see what it's been missing. 📺

MARTIN SCORSESE ON THE HOUSEMAID

The Housemaid is a remarkable picture, which I can safely say is unlike anything I have ever seen. I was startled the first time I saw it, by its mood of upset, its bold expressionism, its sense of the potential danger in all human interaction, and its intense and passionately realised sense of claustrophobia. I don't think it's an easy

film, but it is a rich and rewarding one, and it's easy to understand the profound effect it has had on so many filmmakers in Korea, including Park Chanwook, Im Sangsoo and Bong Joon Ho. Kim Kiyong's pictures have become much better known and more available in the West, and I hope that trend continues. [Speaking in 2014] 📺



TRUE ROMANCE
Noémie Merlant's painter Marianne (right) falls for the unhappily betrothed noblewoman Héroïse, played by Adèle Haenel, when she is tasked with painting her portrait, in Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*



In *'Portrait of a Lady on Fire'*, Céline Sciamma's exquisite love story set in pre-Revolutionary France, the director presents a female-centred vision of equality, solidarity, romance and sex. Here she explains to **Isabel Stevens** why she was determined to up-end the clichés and assumptions of traditional cinema

NO MAN'S LAND

Céline Sciamma's fourth feature, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, a sensual, slow-burning tale of desire set in pre-Revolutionary France, torches a number of storytelling conventions: the painter who falls for his muse, the heritage romance obsessed with who the ladies will marry, the lesbian love story that ends in tragedy... but Sciamma's most radical stroke is to remove men from the picture. They appear at the start, dropping the painter Marianne (Noémie Merlant) off on a wind-swept Breton beach near the isolated home of unhappily betrothed noblewoman Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), and they reappear at the end, as the film and its characters rejoin wider society. In between, there's a gasp of utopia.

Haenel has described her character's journey as one "from object to subject". As the film starts, she is already on a path of solitary resistance, refusing to have her portrait painted. It will be sent to her husband, whom she has never met, and presumably after he has approved her beauty it will hang on the wall of his Milanese home. Marianne must pose as her walking companion, studying her furtively in order to paint her alone at night. When she confesses what she's been doing and unveils her first attempt at the portrait, Héloïse consents to sit for her and they collaborate on a new painting as equals.

With no chaperon present (Héloïse's mother is away arranging the wedding), furtive glances and heated debates between the two women gradually turn into a romance which Sciamma endows with a sensual (but never lecherous or objectifying) eroticism. It's as much a meeting of minds as a swell of passion. And with not just a woman but her own lover painting Héloïse's portrait, the image acquires a subversive charge. The couple's egalitarian friendship with servant Sophie and the trio's fervent discussions of art, music and Greek mythology (in one delicious scene they even get high) complete this halcyon vision of the past.

I talked to Sciamma at the BFI London Film Festival, where between screenings of the film she assumed the role of raconteur, reeling off anecdotes about the film (how she turned down a substantial Netflix offer for it) and railing against French conserva-



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ism (“Why don’t we have a novelist like Sarah Waters?”). She’s a firebrand on and off screen: co-director of the French Society of Film Directors, she was one of the organisers of the 2018 Cannes protest, when 82 women gathered on the red carpet to draw attention to the festival’s record of ignoring female directors. She is now advocating for 50:50:2020, the campaign for gender parity in the film industry – focused, she notes, not on equal funding but on “equal representation in the room where the decisions are taken”. The politics of representation animate *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, but are always wrapped into the love story rather than a lecture. After such a restrained study of love and the power of looking comes the devastating ambush of the film’s ending – but, appropriately, it’s one that simultaneously revels in the rhapsody of art.

IS: This film is a departure for you, in that it’s your first period drama and your first adult romance.

Céline Sciamma: I directed three coming-of-age stories, and now I’m a 40-year-old woman I felt it was time not to tell the story of self-discovery but of grown women. I wanted to craft a love story and tell the story of women artists. I wanted it to be a mix of a creative story and a romance. I decided to go for a painter because it’s more cinematic. So it’s not just about the artist expressing themselves. Painting allows you to see them at work – you see the layers and the concentration. I found out there was an amazing moment in art history in the second part of the 18th century, just before the French Revolution, when there was a rise of a female artistic scene, because of the fashion for portraits. There were hundreds of women painters at that time. There’s a hypothesis that women actually invented self-portrait because...

IS: They didn’t have anyone else to paint.

CS: Exactly. That shows us how the female gaze is so inventive; it’s finding solutions to problems. I did so much research – not just into this period but the last 250 years. I even came to London, as in Paris it was so hard to find books. We are very universalist regarding our classification; there aren’t feminist sections. The beautiful thing about the research was that it didn’t feel cold or scholarly. I was moved all the time. I discovered this woman named Judith Leyster: she’s Dutch, she was a 17th-century painter. All of her work was attributed to her husband. I put an image of one of her paintings at

the end of my script when I sent it out to get financed. It’s a self-portrait. She’s in front of the canvas and she has a brush in hand and she’s looking at us and she’s smiling so much you can see her teeth. I never saw a smile like that.

IS: So it became a very personal project?

CS: I saw the intimate connection between this film and myself as a creative person. The film’s really, really intimate. It’s a love story. It stars Adèle [Haenel, formerly Sciamma’s partner and the star of her debut feature *Water Lilies*]. This is a given. But the thing that was surprising was this emotional part about the women artists. I didn’t anticipate this. Each time I found a new woman painter, I would go to see her work or find images in books. I had a real urge to tell their stories when I discovered these women, who had been forgotten by art history. It wasn’t about me doing a period piece or doing a particular genre. These stories hadn’t been told so they belonged to today. And a period piece always comes with such conventions. I am always obsessed with the contemporary. That was my compass: to make the most contemporary film I could.

IS: You could have picked one of these artists to emulate, but instead you chose a contemporary painter, Hélène Delmaire, to paint the portraits in the film. Why?

CS: It just felt right to go to a young female artist today, to see how she works and to make it truthful. I found her on Instagram. She had no interest in cinema. She didn’t know my films. Noémie [Merlant] and I looked at her painting, but I was observing how she thinks. Together we crafted the character.

IS: Have you ever sat for a portrait yourself?

CS: No. Never.

IS: Would you want to?

CS: Yes. I get photographed a lot and I see now it’s a matter of trust.

IS: Was it important for you to have two actors – Haenel and Merlant – who haven’t appeared in films together before and who people don’t associate together?

CS: Adèle was part of the project since I started writing, but I wanted someone opposite her who I hadn’t worked with. I love the dynamic of collaborating with someone for the first time. I really wanted to create an iconic couple who you would strongly believe in. When we did the casting process, I was always in the room, whereas normally I wouldn’t be there for the first read. I wanted every actress who goes through the process of casting to have read the script because they should be proposing something that’s related to the film. It’s not just about how good they are in one scene, it’s about how they interpreted the film. When we talk about being collaborative, we’re not just paying lip-service.

I met Noémie during the casting. I was the model, she was the painter, so we traded places. I don’t rehearse. It is very much about the present moment on set for me, but it was striking how beautiful Adèle and Noémie were together. They had this strong sense of chemistry but also equality – that was so important to the film. We are trying to build a love story out of equality. They have the same age and height – that is so important in cinema! My heart was racing when I saw them in the film and that’s what you want, because it’s contagious.

IS: Their romance evolves ever so gradually. What do you like about the slow burn?

CS: I wanted to film desire and then the burst of love, and have the audience go through the same

PLEASURE AND PAINT
Céline Sciamma (opposite) undertook substantial research about pre-Revolutionary female painters when creating Noémie Merlant’s character in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (below), but insists it is very much a story for today



PORTRAIT BY CLAIRE MATHON

'Adèle and Noémie had this strong sense of chemistry but also equality – that was so important. My heart was racing when I saw them in the film and that's what you want, because it's contagious'



TIMELINE: CELINE SCIAMMA



WATER LILIES (2007)



GIRLHOOD (2014)

- Céline Sciamma is born in Pontoise, a suburb of Paris, in 1978.
- She studies French literature before enrolling at Paris's famous film school La Fémis.
- While at La Fémis, she writes her first script, *Water Lilies*, a coming-of-age tale about a 15-year-old girl and her growing attraction to the star of the local synchronised swimming team. She is encouraged by filmmaker Xavier Beauvois to direct it.
- *Water Lilies* (2007), starring Adèle Haenel, premieres in the Un Certain Regard sidebar at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival.
- She directs *Pauline* (2010) for a government-sponsored collection of five short films dealing with homophobia.
- Sciamma's second feature, *Tomboy* (2011), focuses on a ten-year-old girl who moves to a new neighbourhood and presents herself as a boy. Sciamma

TOMBOY (2011)

writes and shoots the film on a small budget in just three months.

- The last film in her coming-of-age trilogy, *Girlhood* (2014), premieres at Cannes. "*Water Lilies* was about the beginning of teenage-hood; *Tomboy*, the end of childhood; and this one is about the end of teenage-hood," she told *S&S* about her *banlieue*-set story about a black teenager who joins an all-girl gang. Sciamma shoots it in CinemaScope, finding her cast on the streets.

- Sciamma writes scripts for André Téchiné's *Being 17* (2016) and the French/Swiss stop-motion animation *My Life as a Courgette* (2016).

- In 2015 she becomes co-president of the French Society of Film Directors, and in 2018 is one of the organisers of the women's protest against inequality at the Cannes Film Festival.

- Her fourth feature *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* wins the Best Screenplay award at Cannes 2019. 🏆



stages as the characters. But not like in conventional cinema where it's love at first sight, and then the love story is all about conflict. That's the way we're told to tell stories: in writing classes, a good scene is about conflict. When you remember how you fell in love, you remember the steps that led to the first kiss. The kiss itself? That's quite common and if it works out there will be many more of them, but the moments before the first kiss are unique.

IS: *Portrait* imagines a friendship that breaks class lines – the upper-class Héloïse, middle-class painter Marianne and the servant girl Sophie all briefly live in a utopia. Were you rebelling against more traditional upstairs/downstairs period dramas like *Downton Abbey*?

CS: In *Downton Abbey*, when the sister died during childbirth, I was like, "Oh, this is great TV." But no, I just think sometimes when you decide to go for a specific genre in cinema, it feels like you want to belong in a way. And I really don't feel like that. But really I'm being honest when I say I don't watch films while making films because you know it's contagious. There's too much authority in what has been made before. I think you should invent the language of the film you're making and feel strongly about your ideas and not look at the past in a way. I'm not romantic in the process of working. I'm really not.

IS: The film foregrounds how women lived in the late 18th century – and, quite radically given the lack of them in even contemporary-set films, you even show an abortion.

CS: It shows how abortion is an everyday occurrence in women's lives. At that time women were in charge of their own health. Obstetrics are now in the hands of men. Setting it in the past offers us a view of another dynamic of power that is sometimes more equal – and that is interesting for today. We wanted to share the intimacy of these women and their experiences. They haven't been represented. I haven't seen very many abortion scenes, even in contemporary films. When an image is missing from the past, it definitely belongs to now.

IS: There's very little music in *Portrait* but when you do use it, it's for very emotional and overwhelming moments. It reminds me of that sublime scene in your film *Girlhood*, when all the girls dance to Rihanna's 'Diamonds'.

CS: In those moments, I like to embody what it feels like to join a group. You can interpret most of my films as a path to joining a group. This is also very intimate. Is it about my position in life? And maybe even in the industry? I don't know. The plot of *Water Lilies* is basically somebody who wanted to join a synchronised swimming team. Really, she wants to belong. Part of her epiphany is seeing girls and groupings being strong together. In *Tomboy*, she's going to join the group because you know she's new, she wants to make friends. But she has to lie to join the group. And *Girlhood* was a film about how sorority and friendship can make you more alive and strong. And that scene definitely just wants to show how's she touched by the group – she finds she's brave enough to join and then she has a voice within the group.

IS: You're working in quite a different context in *Portrait* – a period drama about cloistered women. But there's a similar scene to that one in *Girlhood* when, halfway through the film, the women go to a nocturnal gathering by the beach and witness a chorus of women singing a folk-song.

CS: In *Portrait* I wanted a similar scene but it was a challenge to work out how I could craft a communal scene



when the whole point of the film is actually isolation. And then also, how to make it feel like a real moment? We had so little time to actually embody the sense of sorority. And so music is always handy for moments like this. The fact that they are singing together, it's the first time in the film, so that gave it an extra emphasis. It's important for the music to be within the film and the fact that they are using their own voices – it's like their anthem.

IS: It's also a moment when you most clearly draw our attention to fire.

CS: There's a flame – whether it's physically there or you hear it – in almost every frame, except when they're outside during the day. I thought it was so rich because it's the fire between the two women. It's the fire within them. It's anger and it's destruction. Plus, in English *Portrait of a Lady* evokes Henry James. And I love James by the way. I'm not setting fire to him. He is a writer who wrote so well about women. I feel so connected to his characters.

IS: This is a film all about the female gaze. How important was it for you to have a female director of photography, in this case, Claire Mathon?

CS: This was my first film with Claire Mathon. I have always worked with female DPs. I know nothing else. It's more a question for the actors as they've worked on different sets. Cinema has a strong hierarchy. And that's the same even on my sets. I'm in charge; I get to create the world I want to live in for two months. You have power. The question is: what are you going to do with that power? I'm not saying there's no hierarchy on my sets, but I tried to create a more horizontal way of working that is very collaborative. The film is all about that. It's all about how there is no muse. The model and the artist are co-creators. I find it strange that people want to work differently. We should be asking this question to male directors. They seem to enjoy their own company very much.

IS: Even though it's a spoiler, I have to ask about the ending, because, after the slow-burn of the romance up to that point, it opens up such a flood of emotions. Could you explain how you arrived at the moment Marianne goes to the gallery and sees a portrait of Héloïse with the secret 'page 28' reference

– the page in the book where Héloïse had asked Marianne to draw herself.

CS: It took me a long time to figure out. I wanted Marianne to see Héloïse in a painting and that there would be a secret within the painting. But what kind of secret? The obvious one in art history is the open door of a birdcage. When a birdcage is open or closed in a painting it tells us about the girl's virginity. When there are animals, it's sexual metaphors. If I were to submit to a convention like this, it would have worked pretty well and people with that knowledge would have enjoyed the little wink. But that's the thing. You want to find something new and think of something that's going to really belong to the film.

And so this book idea finally came up. And suddenly I knew it was the right idea because there's several elements to it. The fact that there will be a finger in the book, and that this will be sexy. The fact that a number is a common language: everybody will get it, even those who don't speak French. And there's the mystery also because this number didn't mean anything before the film, but it will suddenly: it's that language that you now speak and a world you become part of. It belongs to the film but will live beyond the film. I want people to get 'page 28' tattoos. I wonder if anyone will hide notes at that page. I know that now when I want to hide something in a book, I'll put it on page 28.

IS: You could have ended the film there, but you keep going...

CS: The final scene at the theatre [when Marianne sees Héloïse at a concert] was actually the first scene I had in mind. It was inspired by a poem by Mary Oliver, which says that a broken heart is an open heart to the rest of the world. I wanted a story relevant to today. There was no book to adapt, no painting out there. This is our imaginary, and a tribute to the other imaginaries out there that don't exist. There's nothing worse than realising your imaginaries don't exist – you can go your whole life without seeing things. We're activists for cinema today. We hope you experience something, that we give you the urge to go to the cinema or make some cinema. 📍

Portrait of a Lady on Fire is released in UK cinemas on 28 February, with some advance screenings on Valentine's Day

'There was no book to adapt for this film. There's nothing worse than realising your imaginaries don't exist – you can go your whole life without seeing things'

LAND AND FREEDOM
Portrait of a Lady on Fire imagines a friendship that crosses class lines, between (above, from left) servant girl Sophie, upper-class Héloïse and the middle-class painter Marianne

LIVING MEMORY

Drawing from the real-life experiences of its lead protagonist, Pedro Costa's luminous portrait of grief 'Vitalina Varela' follows a woman from Cape Verde who arrives in Lisbon to search for her absent husband only to find he has just died. Christopher Small talks to the director

When Catherine Breillat, president of the jury at last August's edition of the Locarno Film Festival, announced that Pedro Costa's *Vitalina Varela* had taken the top prize, she stressed her humility in the face of a masterpiece. The jury was unanimous in their praise for a film, she said, "that will enter the heritage of world cinema".

About a Cape Verdean peasant who arrives in Lisbon to search for her absent husband only to find that he died days before her arrival, *Vitalina Varela* belongs in the lineage of the epic western narratives of John Ford, in which a lonely figure returns to a hollowed-out homestead and is confronted by living reminders of their previous failed attempts at forming a life of stability and peace.

Much of what has been written about the movie since has been as ecstatic as Breillat. References to Vermeer, Caravaggio and Rembrandt have been on everybody's lips, comparisons as sincere as they are vague.

Curiously, however, Costa himself acts like a man obsessed with practicalities. To hear him speak about his work – which morphed in the early 2000s from budgeted productions with union crews into a far more intense and solitary practice drawing much more on the stories and talents of dispossessed Cape

Verdeans living in the slums of Lisbon in films such as *In Vanda's Room* (2000), *Colossal Youth* (2006) and *Horse Money* (2014) – is to see his movies in a new light. He appears to have devised a psychological framework for himself, his cast and his crew that emulates an ideal of the classical Hollywood era, one in which filmmaking is *making* first and foremost.

Vitalina Varela is, like all of Costa's work this millennium, an incantation. It is the latest attempt by both filmmaker and participants – including Varela herself – to conjure the past partly through half-mumbled traces of memory and partly through their own reliving of it under the amplifying effect of Costa's style. Yet this is far from the mysticism that his work invites from many good-natured admirers; the *made-ness* of *Vitalina Varela* only stresses further the quality of the work, the complexity of ostensibly simple images, or the enormity of gestures belonging more to the titanic cinema of silent-era giants than to virtually anything else produced in the last 20 or 30 years. ➡



'There are no artistic secrets. It is only work, work, work. Luck too, of course. But luck comes from being there and not forgetting. Being very aware and concentrated'



Christopher Small: A good place to start would be with Vitalina herself.

Pedro Costa: The first time I saw her, she opened the door of her house – the one we shot in, with the blue door that you see two or three times in the film. She opened the door because she felt my presence. I didn't knock. I was searching for a house to shoot an interior for *Horse Money*. Somebody suggested that there was a very small, very Cape Verdean house in the neighbourhood. It used to belong to a man, a strange guy, who died in strange circumstances. The house was empty. "Maybe we could break in," we thought. The door opened. She came out and stood on the doorstep. She was in black. This was less than six months after she arrived and – as she says in the film – less than six months after the funeral of her husband. She was more or less living in hiding, like a nun in a convent. I asked if I could shoot a little piece and she was very kind. She said, "Yes, of course." At first she thought I was a person from immigration. Or police. There are a lot of raids there. She was a bit afraid, but we became more or less friends and she took this part in the film.

I already had the desire to make a film with her. Not because of the mystery or the dark reality behind her husband – his death, her mourning. It was just her, her pure, simple presence. I felt – more than the desire – the will, the necessity of doing something. Not only for the money [for Vitalina], since as always we don't have much money to offer. That's not the reason to do the films. But she could be occupied with something interesting perhaps. Or even a sort of therapy for her. Why not? Sometimes it works.

CS: How do you explain your ideas?

PC: I don't. Everything must come from these people's memories, their real lives. Then there's a kind of work that they are not used to. Sometimes it is strange for the newcomers. One month or less after they start working – for Vitalina, Ventura [the aged and enigmatic central presence in Costa's *Colossal Youth* and *Horse Money*] – the mechanics become simple. Long hours of repetition, rehearsal, talking. Rehearsing just a simple gesture or some kind of movement around the house, around the neighbourhood. The simplicity of it, of the basics of the thing we are working on, imposes itself quite quickly. It's not hard. Or, maybe, I'm lucky with the people I choose –

they are very professional. These are people for whom it is natural to work. Their whole lives they were never not working. Vitalina was a peasant. That's what she did in Cape Verde, since she was five or six years old. She took care of the cows, the ox, the goat. She worked the land. All her life, until she came to Portugal. At ten she built their house. Hard work, long hours, stress, effort – it's something she is used to. Ventura too. I'm not saying that professional actors aren't used to this, but it's different.

CS: You've said that you have an American way of working...

PC: Yes. [Laughs]

CS: ...maybe even an American silent film way of working.

PC: It's a dreamy thing. I'm not sure if [Erich von] Stroheim worked this way. I have the feeling those people were not lazy. And not afraid, that's the main thing. Today, the young guys – even myself – are more vague. Afraid, late. Nothing like they were. You cannot conceive the idea that Ozu was ever late for something. Or couldn't get to a shot on time. Of course, I'm always, always afraid of failing and failing again. These silent guys are those who created this form and who I still return to. Especially the Americans. And a lot of the B-movie guys. They had the same kind of budget I have. Our work is 'budgeted' in the sense that we do what we can with five bottles and a shack. Like Joseph H. Lewis or somebody like that.

CS: But von Stroheim had all the resources at his disposal. And yet your low-budget *bairro* [neighbourhood] film seemed a lot like [Stroheim's 1924 epic] *Greed* to me. This way of introducing characters – Vitalina coming down the stairs, one step at a time. Monumental stuff.

PC: With Stroheim, it's all about the eyes. When I say any of these things, I'm not comparing myself, of course. Only trying to dream about the way they used to do it. The mystery. Knowing very well that there are no artistic secrets. It is only work, work, work. Luck too, of course. But luck comes from being there and not forgetting. Being very aware and concentrated.

CS: Like that old sporting idea that the harder you practise, the luckier you get.

PC: It's also patience. As Ventura says in the film, Vitalina is a mirror of patience. He says, "Pray for us, mirror of patience." What I felt during the shoot was that Vitalina was patient enough not only to work with us, [but] to

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PEDRO COSTA: 'I'M ALWAYS AFRAID OF FAILING'




IN VANDA'S ROOM (2000)

- Pedro Costa is born in Lisbon in 1958.
- His debut feature *Blood* (*O sangue*, 1989), concerns two brothers living with their ailing father on the outskirts of Lisbon.
- *Casa de Lava* (1994) follows a nurse (Inês de Medeiros) who accompanies a comatose immigrant worker (Isaach de Bankolé) back to Cape Verde. The film is influenced by Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943).
- Working in Cape Verde leads to *Ossos* (*Bones*, 1997), set in Lisbon's Fontainhas slums, home to many Cape Verdean immigrants.
- One of the actors in *Ossos*, heroin addict Vanda Duarte, criticises the film for what she sees as its inauthenticity. She invites Costa to

spend time with her in Fontainhas, and out of this emerges *In Vanda's Room* (2000), which radically changes Costa's approach, linking it closely to the memories of those on screen.

● While making *In Vanda's Room*, Costa meets Ventura, who will be the central figure in his next two features, *Colossal Youth* (2006) and *Horse Money* (2014), as well as four short films.

● Vitalina Varela takes the Golden Leopard prize at Locarno in 2019.

● Costa has also made two films about artistic creation: *Where Does Your Hidden Smile Lie?* (2001), about filmmakers Straub-Huillet, and *Ne Change Rien* (2009), about French singer Jeanne Balibar. 



bear what she had to bear – remembering, putting herself on the line, exposing herself. She's also a mirror of an army of women like her, Cape Verdeans – and not only Cape Verdeans, women in general. It's a classic thing – a woman who waits. At this moment, I raise my bottle to Mikio Naruse. He was probably the one [filmmaker] – Mizoguchi as well, of course – who went the furthest with this kind of work with women.

CS: It makes me think of the scene in Naruse's 1952 film *Lightning* where Hideko Takamine's character watches her husband with disgust as he indifferently scratches his leg. This kind of gesture is something I see in your films all the time. Amplified movements. Do you ever go so far as to screen films for your team, for your cast?

PC: I once showed some little bits of Chaplin. I don't remember what. Not to Ventura or Vanda [who performed as herself in every scene of *In Vanda's Room*] or any of those guys, but trying to create a kind of videotheque in the neighbourhood – the old neighbourhood, I mean. Mostly for the kids. Then grown-ups came. But it was not the right moment. Or the place. Or the conditions. It crossed my mind to show two or three things to Ventura, but I realised then that he didn't need it.

CS: Does he or Vitalina have a relationship to the cinema?

PC: No. Nothing. In Ventura's house there are – as in all Cape Verdean homes – three or four big LCD screens. One in the bedroom, one in the living room, at least. And he never spends more than three seconds watching a screen. He doesn't like TV. But when we make the films and he watches them on a DVD, he watches each scene very carefully – watches the film attentively, from beginning to end, and more than once. He likes what he sees of himself – or the work, at least. The way it has been pointed towards him, the way he does some things very well. He's bigger than in life, or nicer, or stranger. He's very aware of that.

CS: Ventura has the most amazing screen presence – in this film, when he's behind the altar, invoking and chanting about the Lamb of God...

PC: He's like that in real life. He's that kind of presence. Not only the real one, but the mythical one. He climbs that stair, that mythical stair. For me he's a very Hollywoodian actor. Like Robert Ryan. One of those very intense guys. The pure presence, the fascination.

CS: With Vitalina, was there a process to get her to the point she's at in the film?

PC: I tried to be gentle. Not only because I thought this would be a dark and painful experience. The work is

always intense but this would be different: more painful. A bit more like with Vanda. Ventura is more detached, analytical. He can play a priest, as here. I'm not sure if the others could do it. Vitalina and Vanda are more 'surface of the skin'. Everything is more emotional. I thought that we should be careful – I should be careful. I thought: "Let's start with movements. Walking around. 'Easy' shots." Then we went into the depths of the room, the house. We started collecting things: memories, phrases, words. While my partners – we were five: sound, image, two guys on production and me – were preparing the lights, the sound recordist was collecting sounds for the editing. Preparation was already mingled. We started rehearsal shooting at the same time. I use Chaplin's method: rehearsal on film.

CS: You mean simply rolling the camera for rehearsals?

PC: Yeah. We start everything – sound, light – from the word go. Everything can shift two centimetres to one hundred centimetres. The light can change completely. The sound recordist is trying to hear and correct things. From take one, rehearsal one, to the real take, it's a world of work. The kind of work they did before. Or that [French filmmaker Jean-Marie] Straub does for one year to get to this place. Doing everything at the same time – Straub does it for one year and then he shoots three or four weeks. I shoot for six months.

CS: Monday to Friday?

PC: Monday to Saturday. That's very important. You don't need much money. You just have to have your mathematics correct. See if you can pay the people for six months, plus a little bit extra. You have to own your means – your camera, your sound, your lights. If you have that budget, you can think about the film with time. That's the secret. It's all about time. Vitalina needs time. See how she moves, see how she talks – she needs time to get there. I need time to see the shot, to see the whole structure of the film. When I think I have the means to do it, we start. Then there is no turning back. I won't go into co-productions or all that kind of thing. I don't have that many friends in that world. I know why. My films are not commercially successful. And they are not exotic enough. Sometimes too they are a bit dense.

CS: You just need to keep watching it.

PC: Yesterday, Vitalina said to me, "I would stay all night in the cinema." I said, "No, they are going to close the place." "No, no. Leave the film running, with me talking up there, and I will sleep." ☺

Vitalina Varela is released in UK cinemas on 6 March

MYSTERIES OF LISBON
Ventura, who was the enigmatic central presence in two earlier features by Pedro Costa (above), *Colossal Youth* (2006) and *Horse Money* (2014), reappears as a priest in the director's *Vitalina Varela* (above left), a portrait of a Cape Verdean widow (previous page)

'You don't need much money to make a film. See if you can pay people for six months, plus a bit extra. If you have that budget, you can think about the film with time. That's the secret'

LOOKING FOR AMERICA

THE DRAMATIC ACTS OF ELIA KAZAN

In a handful of masterpieces in the 1950s and 60s the director Elia Kazan (1909-2003) revolutionised Hollywood screen acting. As the BFI launches a major retrospective, we consider some dimensions of his life and what his career meant for film, and for America. Introduction by James Bell

The case can be made that Elia Kazan was the most influential American film director of the second half of the 20th century, such was his impact on the country's cinema – on the subjects it could tackle, on the way films were acted and by whom, on the independent spirit that shot through his work and helped to inspire the New Hollywood that followed, on the controversy that his movies (and Kazan as an individual) aroused.


Born Elias Kazantzoglou to Greek parents in Istanbul in 1909, Kazan moved with his family to New York in 1913. He would describe himself as a man between two cultures – part American, part Anatolian. But he would also say that like many immigrants, his feelings of being an outsider gave him a greater appreciation of the opportunities America held than many who were born and bred there. Kazan was a patriot, he would always insist, and it was because he was a patriot that he was so alert to the problems that beset mid-century American society and the American psyche, and which also led him to lasting notoriety when he named names during the McCarthy witch-hunts – willingly, as he corrected those who felt he must have been coerced into doing so.

Kazan's father had expected his son to follow him into the family business, but he had a bohemian instinct and a rebellious nature that kicked against his father's wishes (always highly self-reflective, as his own novels and autobiography attest, Kazan would say that it was no accident that his films featured so many men locked in difficult relationships with their father). Instead, Kazan intended to become an actor. He fell in with the Group Theatre in the early 1930s (and through them the Communist Party, of which he was a member from 1934-36), but came to the realisation that it was really directing that fascinated him, and where his exceptional talents lay. By the mid-

1940s he had established himself as the leading director of new work on Broadway – by playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Thornton Wilder, William Inge, Arthur Miller; all similarly alert interrogators of American life.

Kazan's success on Broadway lured Hollywood to his door, and he made his first film *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, in 1945. By one measure, his early films were characteristic in the way they tackled social 'issues' – such as anti-Semitism in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947) and racism in *Pinky* (1949). But they were also often let down by sentimentality, and stage-bound in their style.

It was on the New Orleans-set thriller *Panic in the Streets* (1950) that Kazan said he became a real filmmaker. Influenced by the greats of Soviet cinema, he started to think more visually. He came to appreciate, he said, that the camera didn't simply record the drama in front of it, as though it were a passive audience member at a play – it was a microscope that looked deep into people.

And it was that probing of the ambivalent truths of human behaviour that became his forte – something that only deepened in his work after his testimony at the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings in 1952. Building on the work being done at the Actors Studio he had co-founded in New York in 1947, from his film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) onwards, the films he made in the 1950s and early 60s, with their Method-influenced performances by Marlon Brando, James Dean, Julie Harris, Eli Wallach, Carroll Baker, Karl Malden and others, rewrote the rules of screen acting. Together, they also formed a sustained inquiry into the anxieties and problems below the surface of American life – corruption, media manipulation, stifling puritanism and more – that are unmatched, and that transformed American cinema. 



1

By James Bell

In his 1994 autobiography, Marlon Brando said of Kazan that he was “the best actors’ director by far of any I’ve worked for”. Brando wasn’t alone; Carroll Baker, who acted for Kazan in *Baby Doll* (1956), called him “the best director with actors”, and similar sentiments have been shared by almost all the performers who worked with him.

To understand what Brando, Baker and others meant is first to understand how Kazan’s work revolutionised screen acting. Where the virtues of classical Hollywood acting were enunciated and resided in a star’s charisma, in Kazan’s work acting was about process – a way to access and explore the complex truths of human behaviour, which in the final analysis was Kazan’s true fascination.

That approach had its roots in the work Konstantin Stanislavski had done with the Moscow Art Theatre in the early 20th century, where he developed his ‘system’ of exercises to help the actor behave in a more true-to-life way. Stanislavski in turn inspired the co-founding of New York’s Group Theatre by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg and Cheryl Crawford in 1931. A year later, Kazan – then two years into a course at the Yale School of Drama, and with ambitions to be a stage actor himself – fell into the Group’s orbit. As Kazan later told the French critic Michel Ciment, the Group’s socially conscious work was inspirational because it was “a reaction against the narcissism of the old theatre, where actors would just show themselves off. For the first time it brought dignity to the feelings and fears of the common man.”

Though he got good reviews for his performance in the Group Theatre’s production of Clifford Odets’s *Waiting for Lefty*, Kazan would recall that Strasberg and Clurman told him: “You may have talent for something, but it’s certainly not acting.” So in the mid-1930s he switched to directing, and went on to win great acclaim in the 1940s, culminating in the 1947 Broadway production of *A Streetcar Named Desire* with which Marlon Brando exploded into public awareness. Kazan’s own acting ambitions may have faded, but exploring the possibilities of acting remained central to his approach; he founded the Actors Studio in New York in 1947, which Lee Strasberg took over in 1951, developing the ‘Method’ approach, in which the actor looks to analogous personal memories in the search for emotional honesty.

METHOD MAN KAZAN AND ACTING



Budding genius: Marlon Brando with Kazan on the set of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951)

Kazan’s transformational impact was to bring that theatre acting tradition into the cinema. Though traces are there in Kazan’s early films, the real sea-change began when Kazan adapted *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the screen in 1951, with Brando, Kim Hunter and the Method-trained Karl Malden reprising their roles from the stage production. Brando had been a semi-regular attendee at the Actors Studio, but wasn’t a Method devotee like Malden. Kazan would say that Brando was the only actor he would describe as a genius – someone who drew from the Method training, but who could access such deep reserves of feeling that he was beyond classification. Kazan would often cite the example of a scene in *On the Waterfront*, in which Eva Marie Saint’s Edie is walking with Brando’s longshoreman Terry Malloy. During filming, Saint dropped her glove accidentally, but rather than stop the scene, or hand it back to her, Brando picks it up, then – with its obvious sexual connotations – puts it on his own hand. The excitement of the Method, Kazan would say, was that as with a person in life, you could never be quite sure what an actor would do next.

The word that recurs again and again when Kazan talked about acting is ‘ambivalence’. For him, interest lay in the complex, the contradictory. Brando had that conflicting mixture of brute force and tenderness Kazan thought essential to depicting human behaviour. The crucial thing, Kazan would say, is that somewhere within themselves, the actor must have their character. When casting, Kazan wouldn’t do line readings; instead, he had to find out if the person

In Kazan’s work acting was about process – a way to access and explore the complex truths of human behaviour, which was his true fascination

was capable of expressing the feelings of the character – so he would get to know them, go for walks or dinner.

Kazan knew quickly on first meeting James Dean, for instance, that the then-unknown actor had the part of *East of Eden*’s troubled Cal in him. Dean had a fraught relationship with his own father, which made him perfect (Kazan has said that, although Dean was great within his range, he didn’t feel he had wide potential as an actor, unlike Brando.)

Kazan’s articulate dedication to their craft drew actors to him. Robert De Niro, who starred in Kazan’s *The Last Tycoon* (1976), reflected that Kazan “gives tremendous breakdowns of character... you’re seduced by how good it sounds – it’s almost too good. Then you have to go and work it out for yourself.”

De Niro was one of the generation of actors whose inspiration had come from watching Brando, Dean, Baker, Malden and others in Kazan’s films of the 1950s. It’s certain that without Kazan’s pioneering example, the likes of De Niro or Al Pacino would not have been stars. As Kazan told Ciment for a 1982 documentary, while standing in the Actors Studio: “The whole thing changed because of us – because of this place.”



The outsiders: Elia Kazan's masterpiece on the immigrant experience *America, America* (1963)

2

By Christina Newland

Elia Kazan knew what it was like to feel pushed to the margins. The bookish child born of Greek immigrants in Constantinople travelled to America at the age of four from Turkey, where the Greek minority population had been badly persecuted for generations. As a young man, Kazan proved to be a consistent disappointment to his father, who expected his son to join him in his business as a rug merchant. And when he ended up studying theatre at Yale, he was the poor foreign kid among wealthy Americans, cementing his feeling of alienation. Yet the grandiose, fragile dream of what America could offer the immigrant would remain spiritually – and sometimes literally – present through much of Kazan's work.

His very first film, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945), was set at the turn of the century, and focused on the resilience of a family living in the poverty of city tenements. Flavours of Kazan's own cultural heritage would crop up in unexpected places – the Greek restaurant full of immigrant faces in *Panic in the Streets* (1950), the xenophobia directed at Greeks and Armenians in that film.

Kazan's films are invested deeply in the outsider figure; the stranger in a strange land, even if this figure is not a literal foreigner. From *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) to *A Face in the Crowd* (1957) and *Wild River* (1960), Kazan's depth of feeling for the ostracised is clear. Whether it's a deluded Southern belle in the big city, an idealistic government worker in the Tennessee sticks, or a drifter moving through the rural Midwest, these misfits

don't have to be immigrants to seem outside of society. Yet these figures are rarely romanticised; their outsiderdom makes them sympathetic, but also gives them a tendency toward fantasy, myopia or downright selfishness. Kazan could relate to this; he spoke often about his personal ability to dissemble, the chip on his shoulder that made him a constant womaniser, and his clawing ambition – all traits that he felt came as a result of a particular sense of injustice and foreignness. In *East of Eden* (1955), love-starved loner Cal (James Dean) is affecting but also petulant, cruel and self-destructive.

Kazan's outsiders are sympathetic but have a tendency towards myopia. Not only did he capture the feeling of unbelonging in American life; he knew how it lacerated the soul



A Tree Grows in Brooklyn (1945)

AMERICA AMERICA KAZAN THE IMMIGRANT

Not only did Kazan capture the feeling of unbelonging in American life; he understood how it lacerated the soul.

Undoubtedly, the culmination of these interests came with *America, America* (1963), Kazan's epic masterpiece on the immigrant experience, with a story based on his uncle. Kazan himself narrates the film, in which Stathis Giallelis stars as Stavros, a young man determined to make his way to the States in the late 1890s, regardless of the cost. The conceit is essentially romantic and displays a near reverence toward America as an ideal; Stavros will be humiliated, starved, beaten and robbed. Anything is bearable in comparison to a life as a second-class citizen, as a Greek under the yoke of the oppressive Turks. Kazan combines a love for the immigrant dream with a sense that ruthless self-preservation is a fundamentally American trait; the kind any immigrant would be wise to adopt.

The film was shot mostly on location in Greece and Turkey, with a striking eye for a texture of realism hitherto largely unseen in American films. Kazan's interest in the weathered faces of the oppressed inhabitants of the old country remain haunting, shot in stark black and white. *America, America* is a beautiful ode to the promise of starting over, to the insuppressible determination of the poor and the oppressed to rise to freedom, to the optimism of the first generation of new Americans.

Yet the insidious reality is there too; it's worth noting what Stavros's grandmother tells him when she gives him a dagger for his journey: "A sheep never saved itself by bleating." It's a knowing nod to the necessary ruthlessness Stavros has to muster in order to be free. It's a ruthlessness which serves him, but doesn't leave him unscathed. Kazan – with his own chequered past in American public life – may have understood this better than anyone. 📌



Wild River (1960)

FAULT LINES KAZAN AND POLITICS



The informant: Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront* (1954)

3 By Philip Kemp
Well before he touched a movie camera, Kazan put down creative roots in the political ferment of 1930s left-wing protest theatre. In 1932 he quit Yale Drama School, alienated by his upper-class fellow students, before joining New York's radical Group Theatre ("The Theatre is a weapon in the class struggle," according to the original joint manifesto) of Harold Clurman and Lee Strasberg. The next year he joined the Communist Party, where several of his theatre colleagues were already members, though his own membership lasted only 18 months. Later he claimed that the party planned to take over the Group Theatre.

Kazan's acting career, whether for stage or screen, was undistinguished, though he garnered good notices for his portrayal of a New York cab-driver in Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), the most famous example of ultra-left proletarian drama of the decade; it ends with the cast giving the communist salute and shouting, "Strike! Strike! Strike!" In 1937 he was assistant director on an 18-minute documentary set in the Tennessee mining area, *People of the Cumberland*, supporting the labour union movement. Soon afterwards he began directing for the Group Theatre and the New Theatre League, where his true gift emerged: his astoundingly intense, intimate skill as a director of actors. The acclaim and awards he received for his theatrical productions

attracted the attention of Hollywood, and he was invited by Twentieth Century-Fox to direct his first feature, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945).

The films Kazan directed over the next few years often focused on fault lines in American society – flaws in the justice system (*Boomerang!*, 1947), anti-Semitism (*Gentleman's Agreement*, 1947), racism (*Pinky*, 1949), urban deprivation

His films in the later 40s and early 50s focused on fault lines in society from a left-wing viewpoint that grew increasingly cautious as the anti-communist witch-hunt closed in



A Face in the Crowd (1957)

(*Panic in the Streets*, 1950) – from a viewpoint that, while basically left-wing, grew increasingly cautious as fear of the anti-communist witch-hunt closed in on Hollywood. His anodyne *Reader's Digest* treatment of the Mexican Revolution in *Viva Zapata!* (1952) – implying that all revolutions end up betraying democracy – infuriated the Mexican government.

That same year came the crisis point. Summoned before the House Un-American Activities Committee and questioned about his political affiliations, Kazan – to the amazement and anger of many of his associates – turned 'friendly witness', repenting his membership of the CP and naming eight Group Theatre colleagues who had also joined the party, including Odets and Paula Strasberg, Lee's wife. It saved his filmmaking career; he was never blacklisted. For this, many in Hollywood never forgave him – not least because neither then nor later did he express regret over what he'd done; the nearest he came to it was the chilling comment: "There's a normal sadness about hurting friends, but I would rather hurt them a little than hurt myself a lot." He even claimed giving evidence had improved the quality of his work. "I did [it] out of my true self. Everything before was seventeen years of posturing," he wrote in his 1988 autobiography, *A Life*. "The only genuinely good and original films I've made, I made after my testimony."

There is some truth in this. Passing over *Man on a Tightrope* (1953), a facile slice of anti-commie propaganda, with Fredric March as a Czech circus-owner escaping with his family to the West, the films Kazan made in the years after appearing before the Committee include most of his strongest work. True, *On the Waterfront* (1954) can be – and was – read as self-exculpation for informing, but that doesn't detract from its dramatic power. (And Kazan did resist Columbia head Harry Cohn's demand that the villains be changed from "union mob" to "Communist mob".) From *East of Eden* (1955) to *America America* (1963), he created a body of work, and nurtured a gallery of performances, that few other directors can rival. These films, often grounded in everyday political concerns, include *A Face in the Crowd* (1957), a warning of how modern media can elevate a brash populist to a position of perilous influence that rings all too true in the age of Trump.

The honorary Oscar that Kazan received in 1999 was much reviled. But it can be argued that it was awarded to the director and his work, not to the man. 🍷

4

By Kelli Weston

Elia Kazan was one of the great ethnographers of working-class America.

His portraits of 'middle' Americans' dreams, their rage, and, most vividly, their hunger, are almost without peer, especially in his greatest period in the 1950s and 60s.

Kazan's entire project could be described as a mapping of this hunger, articulated in the sexual dynamism that permeates his films. Kazan largely operated during a period in which sex – consensual or otherwise – could not be depicted explicitly on screen, so instead he made sure to accentuate the palpable sensual energy of his actors. He often cast actresses based on his own attraction to them, but he also made stars of Warren Beatty, James Dean, with his sombre beauty, and Marlon Brando, whose raw, sultry magnetism secured his celebrity.

Each parable of the destructiveness of sexual energy captures the era's nervous repression, and the consequences – on an intimate, human level – of a nation stifled by an inordinate fear of female desire, of the racialised Other, of its own shame. Nothing cripples desire quite like the sneaking suspicion that you are unworthy and will go on unrewarded. Out of this denial frequently springs madness. In *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), Natalie Wood's Deanie, at the direction of her mother, resists having sex with her boyfriend Bud (Beatty); her passion and free will subsumed by others, Deanie's depression spirals into a breakdown.

By contrast, the virginal titular character played by Carroll Baker in *Baby Doll* (1956) is highly instinctive and deeply in touch with her desires. The tow-headed Baker bears all the trappings of girlhood: hair ribbons and the infamous nightgown credited with originating the babydoll dress; she sleeps in the nursery, in a crib no less, and possesses a childlike reverence for her deceased 'daddy'. Though inexperienced, Baby Doll is certainly curious about sex: she flirts with the handsome young dentist at the doctor's office and confidently receives the attentions of her husband's Sicilian rival Silva Vacarro. Unlike Deanie, her virginity is an act of will, a sign of her refusal to submit to her boorish, racist husband, and evidence of all the agency she can summon.

Sex is often represented in this way in Kazan's films: in its presence or absence, sex is desperation, a frequently disastrous fumbling for power (rather than intimacy), and so a volatile expression of

NAMED DESIRE KAZAN AND SEXUALITY

powerlessness. Although successful and far from working class, Kirk Douglas's suicidal advertising executive in *The Arrangement* (1969) seems to exert little control over his life; the only time he comes alive is in a febrile affair with a co-worker, played by Faye Dunaway.

Even in a film as sterile as *Pinky* (1949), the central romance between the titular white-passing black woman (played by white actor Jeanne Crain) and a white doctor allows Kazan to articulate something about human nature – in this case, Pinky's racial frustrations.

It should be noted that Kazan himself had a famously chaotic sex life, carrying on numerous affairs (counting Marilyn Monroe and Barbara Loden – later his wife – among his lovers), and since his death in 2003 he has been accused of sexual assault by the actor turned author Carol Drinkwater.

In creating his intricate mosaic of American anxiety, Kazan invested himself heavily in his films, drawn as he was to immigrants and outsiders and miserably insecure men. Unsurprisingly, given their shared thematic concerns, the era's leading American writers became his collaborators: John Steinbeck, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Kazan directed the Broadway production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, and the stage and screen versions of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The film is a tale of violence from which sex cannot be disentangled. For Brando's



Splendor in the Grass (1961)

Kazan's films capture the era's nervous repression, and the consequences of a nation stifled by an inordinate fear of female desire and the racialised Other

Stanley Kowalski sex and violence are bitterly married. Such is the cost, Kazan's oeuvre suggests, of wild, relentless fear. ☹

The 'Elia Kazan: The Actors' Director' retrospective runs at BFI Southbank, London, to the end of March. *A Streetcar Named Desire* is rereleased in UK cinemas and on BFI Player from 7 February



Baby love: Eli Wallach and Carroll Baker in Baby Doll (1956)

"Oh to be young, intense, romantic and profoundly cinephilic – Civeyrac's drama captures it all, in a story of a filmmaker's years of apprenticeship."

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Reviews



62 **Color out of Space**

The conflicting impulses of pulp commercial genre and transcendental terror thrum through the oeuvres of many outsider artists, and Richard Stanley is far from the first to turn to H.P. Lovecraft as a high priest of this twisting pathway



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Parasite

South Korea 2019

Director: Bong Joon Ho

Certificate 15 132m 9s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

In South Korean society, stratified between extremes of wealth and poverty, educational attainment is highly prized because it is seen as the key to social mobility. Those who fail the university entrance exam and don't make the cut are left to contemplate a future of narrow horizons, coping with emotions from resentment to self-loathing.

At the heart of Bong Joon Ho's latest, a seriocomic microcosm of South Korean attitudes and mores that also delivers a globally resonant portrait of social anxieties in the era of late capitalism, errant son Kiwoo is squaring up to his desperation head-on. Not for him the quotidian uncertainties of the gig economy, which has his younger sister and parents in its grip. There is a way out of their cluttered, seedy, semi-basement apartment, with its view of drunks pissing in the street above. It just takes a little honest dishonesty.

Posing as a university student, Choi Woosik's geeky protagonist insinuates himself into the super-wealthy Park household, taking over from his student pal as handsomely rewarded English tutor to the family's teenage daughter. It's a task he performs with such grace that he has soon wangled jobs there for his folks too. Not that his bosses, flush with cash from Mr Park's tech company Another Buck (!), have twigged that their new staff are actually related, even if the young son thinks they all smell weirdly alike...

Like the assorted team of robbers in some heist movie or, say, the fugitive Janet Leigh in *Psycho*'s opening reel, this clever, ambitious, deserving clan have us rooting for them, even though we're seized by an ominous worry that all may not

end well. The film's first half blends pacy caper flick with a sharp satirical skewering of the lives of super-chic high earners, who need all these flunkies to tend their kids, carry their shopping, drive them around, keep their laundry fresh and their fridge heaving with bottles of Voss mineral water. Are they the parasites living off their staff's hard work, or are Kiwoo and family the actual dependants, like flies swarming around a hippo?

Bong allows the film to have it both ways, in part because the Parks, for all their airy sense of entitlement, don't come across as blatantly evil in the way that the ruling classes at the luxury end of the train in *Snowpiercer* (2013) do, or the pig-slaughtering industrialists in *Okja* (2017).

Given that much of the action unfolds in the confines of the Parks' designer mansion, the film's chamber scale would seem at first glance to be a smaller canvas for Bong, yet somehow it accesses a broader span of human understanding, as its consistently surprising narrative flirts with myriad genre expectations to deftly beguiling effect.

One key dialogue exchange stands out, as Kiwoo and his folks grab the run of the house while their employers are away, turning the posh Marie Kondo minimalism of the living room into a chaotic fresco of snacks and booze bottles. Kiwoo's dad Kitaek, the chauffeur (played by Song Kangho, South Korean cinema's edgy everyman), is woozy with satisfaction, noting that the Parks are "rich but nice". His mother Chungsook (a nonsense Chang Hyeajin), the housekeeper who has ousted the place's previous matronly retainer, is having none of it: "They're nice because they're rich!" she snaps. Minutes later, it all escalates; hubby has his wife by the throat, threatening to

It's a sure sign of Bong's mastery that he somehow knows it's those moments when he lets go of the controls that give the film its heart and soul

punch her face in. Has his patriarchal authority truly been so impugned? Is this for real, or in jest? The actors are so brilliant it's hard to tell.

We will eventually realise that such moments cannily foreshadow future developments, yet they also leave the audience unsure how to react. Elsewhere too the class tensions reveal seemingly exposed nerves, whether it's Mr Park (a suave Lee Sunkyun) musing on how poor people smell like old radishes, or Kitaek crossing the servant-master line by suggesting his boss is in thrall to his wife's penchant for displays of wealth. How to react? Your mileage may vary, but it's a sure sign of Bong's evident mastery that, in a film so rigorously plotted and designed, he somehow knows it's those moments when he lets go of the controls that give the film its heart and soul.

Maybe it's this extra level of accomplishment in *Parasite* that made Bong his nation's first Palme d'Or winner and bagged him a shelf's worth of critics' awards – plus boffo box office, let's not forget. He has always been attuned to the possibilities of hybrid story forms, whether it's turning police procedural or monster movie into social study (*Memories of Murder*, *The Host*) or shaping contemporary effects-driven spectacle to ask tough questions about societal cohesion or environmental disquiet (*Snowpiercer*, *Okja*). Here, though, the narrative shapeshifting – from tense thriller mode to expertly choreographed farce and crunching comic-book violence, even within the same scene – reaches a new level of slinky panache. The sheer confidence of those transitions is a marvel, founded on a rock-solid grasp of upstairs-downstairs psychogeography in both the house's floor plan and the contours of Seoul's social divides.

It all plays out in the context of brilliant production design, where snooping sight lines down staircases in the elegant Park residence facilitate developing dramatic intrigues, and much is made of the contrast between the glass-walled living room's view to sunshine and greenery and the grim outlook from the servants' semi-basement flat, tellingly open to the local council's blast of roach-killing fumigating spray.

Still, for all the abundant pleasures afforded by such mastery of construction, the clincher is in the film's deliberately stinging moments of uncertainty. One such scene has Kiwoo, labouring under the weight of this whole edifice of chicanery he's assembled, gazing out on the Parks' glittering afternoon garden party, populated by beautiful, effortlessly cool rich people having a beautiful, effortlessly cool time. "Will I ever fit in?" he wonders. And with his sigh of profoundly unanswerable melancholy, the film provides its thematic takeaway.

It's hard, then, not to draw connections with South Korea's other recent cinematic masterpiece, Lee Changdong's *Burning* (2018), since both films are evidently powered by a deep unease at their nation's social divisions. Where Lee's intensifying class antipathies and resentments subtly nudge us towards an abyss of existential anxiety, Bong's harder-edged plotting is of a very different storytelling character. Yet its slick, knowing aplomb ultimately points us to a chastening picture of the politics of envy as a zero-sum game. For all its uproarious highlights, *Parasite* departs with a heartbreaking coda, leaving its characters doing a life term in the prison of their discontents. Both titles, though, offer further evidence, as if any were actually needed, of South Korean cinema's facility for turning out absolutely canonical films on the world cinema stage. 📌

Q&A Song Kangho, actor

'Parasite' is the fourth film you've made with Bong Joon Ho. How did your collaboration begin?

Twenty-two years ago, I was in director Lee Changdong's film *Green Fish*. Director Bong watched this prior to his own debut as a director and I think he was very impressed by it, so he requested to meet me in 1997. Then, coincidentally, my film *The Foul King* [2000] was released within two weeks of director Bong's debut film, *Barking Dogs Never Bite*. *The Foul King* was incredibly successful, unlike director Bong's film, which really flopped. I later watched director Bong's debut film and liked it very much – I couldn't really understand why it failed so miserably. I felt then that I would really like to work with him, that he was someone with obvious talent as a director. And that's how we got to work together on his second film, *Memories of Murder*.



Do you tend to favour films with a political edge?

I'm not deliberately choosing something that's political, but that's just the way it unfolded in the last ten years or so. I've been positioned that way thanks to the films that come my way. So why do I choose these films? I choose them because I think it's very important that these stories are told in our society right now. For me, it's what story the film is trying to portray that's the most important thing. You've also worked with Park Chanwook four times.

Director Park is different from director Bong. His films are incredibly shocking and he's very experimental in how he approaches things. There's definitely an excitement about something new, but there's also a lot of concern and deliberation about whether this can be communicated to the audience. That's what I remember most about our last film together, *Thirst* (2009) 📌

Josh Slater-Williams



Upstairs downstairs: Cho Yeojeong as credulous wealthy housewife Yeonkyo in Bong Joon Ho's shapeshifting social satire



Choi Woo-shik as the scheming Kiwoo

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kwak Sin Ae
Moon Yang Kwon
Screenplay
Bong Joon Ho
Han Jin Won
Story
Bong Joon Ho
Director of
Photography
Hong Kyung Pyo

Edited by
Yang Jinmo
Production Designer
Lee Ha Jun
Music
Jung Jae Il
Sound Supervisor
Choi Tae Young
Costume Designer
Choi Se Yeon

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Corporation,
Barunson E&A
Production
Companies
CJ Entertainment
presents a Barunson
E&A production
Executive Producer
Miky Lee

Cast
Song Kang Ho
Ki Taek
Lee Sun Kyun
Dong Ik
Cho Yeo Jeong
Yeon Kyo
Choi Woo Shik
Ki Woo
Park So Dam
Ki Jung

Lee Jung Eun
Moon Gwang
Chang Hyae Jin
Chung Sook
Park Myung Hoon
Geun Se
Jung Ziso
Da Hye
Jung Hyeon Jun
Driver Yoon

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Curzon

South Korean
theatrical title
Gisaengchung

Seoul, the recent past. Brother and sister Kiwoo and Kijung live in poverty with father Kitaek and mother Chungsook, all subsisting on casual work. Kiwoo's friend Min suggests Kiwoo take over his job tutoring English to high-schooler Dahye, daughter of the wealthy Park family. Kiwoo impresses Dahye's credulous mother Yeonkyo enough to inveigle the rest of his family into the Park home: Kijung as art tutor to boisterous younger son Dasong, Kitaek as chauffeur to tech entrepreneur father Dongik and Chungsook as replacement for long-serving housekeeper Moongwang. All pose as skilled workers who are unrelated. When the Parks go away camping, the servant clan relax in the upscale

household, only for Moongwang to reveal that her debt-evading husband Geunse is hiding out in the building's secret sub-basement. After a violent confrontation, Moongwang is left for dead down there, but a bloody Geunse emerges the following day, knocking Kiwoo unconscious and unleashing havoc at a stylish garden party thrown by the Parks, now returned from their trip. Geunse kills Kijung, and is himself killed by Chung Sook, while Kitaek snaps and fatally wounds Dongik before fleeing. Kiwoo serves a suspended sentence along with his mother. He subsequently realises that Kitaek has taken refuge in the secret sub-basement. He dreams, unrealistically, of buying the place and releasing his father.

A Paris Education

France 2019

Director: Jean Paul Civeyrac

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

"It's nice to see a film that isn't full of Parisian clichés," says student Jean-Noël about a short made by his friend Etienne. Non-French viewers may snort at this line, coming as it does in a film in which earnest students agonise about the meaning of life and art, sometimes on the banks of the Seine. However, writer-director Jean Paul Civeyrac is only too aware of the clichés he is playing with in a film whose English title invokes the French *Bildungsroman* tradition of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*. As Jean-Noël points out, he and his friends are not Parisian but from the provinces, and Civeyrac's French title *Mes provinciales* alludes to the work by the philosopher Pascal usually translated as *The Provincial Letters*, a bible for the film's hero Etienne. This apparently quasi-autobiographical movie presents itself very much as an outsider's view of Paris and its attendant mythology of self-discovery and artistic triumph (or calamity).

The film is alert to the fact that it, like its characters, might seem painfully earnest. Etienne and his circle of aspiring *cinéastes* are accused by peers of being pretentious, and sometimes it's hard to disagree. This is a film in which characters make comments such as "Transparency is a fascist illusion" – lines that play better, and lighter, in the original French. They inhabit a world of snobbery

and dogmatism. A film lecturer sniffs at a hapless student's suggestion that Paolo Sorrentino and Mario Martone might be compared to the Italian auteurs of yore ("Commendable, but nothing more"). In response, the class horror buff William complains that Dario Argento's fame eclipses less familiar directors such as Sergio Martino, whom he admires for his "electrifying morbidity" (arcane names are not so much dropped here as hurled with abandon, like paving stones in May 1968). This in turn triggers Etienne's remark that William represents "the very picture of modern mediocrity" because he likes "regressive stuff". Sure enough, William will get to make a feature by the end of the movie, while Etienne is still hesitating over his script.

In the student milieu depicted here, intense belief is social capital. One young man is loathed by some, feted by others as "brilliant... harsh, uncompromising", though his aura outshines any actual visible talent. He is Mathias, a firebrand only too willing to denounce William's short as

The film presents itself very much as an outsider's view of Paris and its attendant mythology of self-discovery and artistic triumph or calamity

vomit-inducing, despite having only watched half of it. Mathias is Etienne's real love object, an arbiter of the highest cinephile values – although, as William objects, his ideas are hardly new. Indeed, his rhetoric is straight out of 1950s and 1960s *Cahiers*, with a distinct odour of Godard and Truffaut in their loudmouth prime. Like a character from the 19th-century novels the film echoes, Mathias is also committed to poetry, as exemplified by Gérard de Nerval, whose suicide

in 1855 – a model for Mathias's own? – remains one of the central legends of French romanticism.

Another element that may rankle with viewers is the morose central presence of Andronic Manet's Etienne, a gangling, self-absorbed, far from charismatic figure. Etienne's most creative act, arguably, is the elaborate performance of nervous panic he stages when the time finally comes to shoot a film. A half-hearted would-be womaniser, he slavishly follows an archaic Paris tradition by glumly staring at young women on the Metro, even sheepishly following one home (she tersely gives him the bum's rush).

In fact, the film's strongest characters are its young women, both in terms of what they achieve and in their screen presence: notably Valentina (played with humour and warmth by Jenna Thiam), who has a tender, rather mocking affection for Etienne; and activist Annabelle, who lambasts the film students for their introverted aestheticism. She's played by Sophie Verbeeck, whose mesmerising severity is fabulously captured in some of the contemplative close-ups that the film abounds in. Both these actors stand out in a fine young cast, with especial energy and spiky humour coming from Gonzague Van Bervesseles's Jean-Noël, whose skittish rendition of an Erik Satie song is a highlight.

Annabelle and Mathias differ in their attitudes to life and creative work: she rejects aesthetics, he's resistant to politics and 'the real' – though he argues, however vaguely, that art is inevitably political. Civeyrac's films have long explored a frontier between reality (rather than realism) and a sometimes hyper-refined aestheticism – displayed in elegant photography and languorous classical soundtracks – notably in *Young Girls in Black* (2010), about two teenage goths, and the remarkable Doris Lessing adaptation *My Friend Victoria* (2014), about two young black women's relationship with white bourgeois Paris. There is a racial dimension to *A Paris Education* too, evident in the casting of black actor Corentin Fila as Mathias, someone seen by the others as an enigma who doesn't belong anywhere. In this light, Mathias's fiercely held beliefs might be seen as his defence against that exclusion, or a defiant reclaiming of it.

The ending leaves Etienne in an ambivalent position, having either renounced his ideals or still seriously planning his big move, or just conceivably pondering suicide himself – the open window of the gorgeously opaque final shot recalls the one Mathias threw himself from. However, it seems more plausible to consider this window, shot in a slow track forward, as offering a vista of absolute possibility – for the film never abandons its faith in hope or beauty. Pierre-Hubert Martin's black-and-white cinematography favours a range of silvery greys, echoing the 1960s Russian portrait-of-a-generation feature that Etienne and his pals swoon over, Marlen Khutsiev's *Ilyich's Gate* (*I Am Twenty*, 1965).

There are also a few moments of rapturous chiaroscuro, such as the scene – which knowingly skirts and triumphantly transcends cliché – in which Etienne and Mathias share a nocturnal epiphany by the Seine. The moment, Mathias says, "seems like it exists just for us". He adds: "Cinema can make these moments felt. Make it apparent that... we're here... That's political too." This is one of the moments in Civeyrac's film where the mysticism of cinema, and of beauty, intersects magically with the reality of a city, its geography, its history and its present. ☺

Q&A Jean Paul Civeyrac, writer-director

What made you want to make this film?

The screenplay, about a group of film students, draws on various sources that suddenly crystallised. Discovering Marlen Khutsiev's *Ilyich's Gate* was decisive. That film, which blew me away, is the story of the friendship between three young men starting out in life. I saw it in June 2016, and started to write in July. I wanted to talk about cinema, friendship, love and also politics, and to make a film with the urgency of a first feature.

Is the students' fervour for cinema an inextinguishable flame?

Yes, of course, but of all the students, only a minority truly possess it. The fervour for cinema that features in *A Paris Education* is the one that drives anybody for whom making a film is an existential quest. They have to be worthy of the vision they have of their artform and themselves. Naturally, life takes care of teaching them exactly where they are at.

You were once a young man leaving the provinces for film school in Paris.

Yes, I grew up near Saint-Etienne, and arriving in Paris was a major upheaval. Seen from Firminy, Paris, where I knew no one, might as well have been Tokyo. It was a huge adventure! But at least half my classmates at La Fémis film school came from the provinces. In our little gang of four or five, it brought us closer together. We met up at the Cinémathèque, chatted with Parisian critics we had read

and with filmmakers we liked. The world of cinema, previously experienced from the teenage solitude of our bedrooms, suddenly took shape.

To some extent, filming Paris in black-and-white was an attempt to bestow on it a romantic aspect, to render that sense of adventure felt by every person from the provinces who discovers it. In other words, deep down to give it a quite singular beauty. ☺





New romantic: Andranic Manet as aspiring filmmaker Etienne in Jean Paul Civeyrac's *A Paris Education*



Out-of-town auteurs: Etienne and fellow students

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Frédéric Niedermayer
Michèle Pétin
Laurent Pétin
Written by
Jean Paul Civeyrac
Director of
Photography
Pierre-Hubert Martin
Film Editor
Louise Narboni
Production Designer

Brigitte Brassart
Sound
François Méreu
Costumes
Claire Dubien

©Moby Dick
Films/ARP
Production
Companies
A co-production of
Moby Dick Films/

ARP Sélection
In association with
ARTE/Cofinova 13
With the participation
of CNC

Cast
Andranic Manet
Etienne Tinan
Gonzague Van
Bervesselès

Jean-Noël
Corentin Fila
Mathias
Diane Rouxel
Lucie
Jenna Thiam
Valentina
Sophie Verbeeck
Annabelle
Valentine Catzeffis
Barbara
Charlotte Van

Bervesselès
Héloïse
Nicolas Bouchaud
Paul Rossi
Laurent Delbecq
William
Jeanne Ruff
Solange

In Black & White
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
New Wave Films

French theatrical title
Mes provinciales

France, mid-2010s. Etienne, a former philosophy student from Lyon, says goodbye to long-term girlfriend Lucie and moves to Paris to study film. There, he makes several new friends: flatmate Valentina, who studies art; Jean-Noël, a fellow film student who harbours an unrequited love for Etienne; and Mathias, a mercurial cinephile with outspoken convictions about the art of film. Valentina makes advances towards Etienne. However, following assorted flings, he says he no longer wants to be unfaithful to Lucie; later, before Valentina moves to Berlin, they sleep together. Soon after, Lucie breaks up with Etienne. Valentina is replaced in the

flat by Annabelle, a committed activist who lambasts the film students, especially Mathias, for their neglect of politics. Etienne falls for her, but she has become involved with Mathias. Later, when she and Mathias split, she rejects Etienne. The devoted Jean-Noël helps Etienne prepare his short film but eventually quits, realising that Etienne values Mathias's opinion more than his. Despite an attack of nerves, Etienne finishes shooting his film, but afterwards learns that Mathias has killed himself. Two years later, he is working for a TV company, living with Barbara, formerly his co-worker, and still planning to make films.

Cats

USA/United Kingdom/Japan 2019
Director: Tom Hooper
Certificate U 109m 48s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

The action in *Cats* is set on the evening when Old Deuteronomy (Judi Dench) chooses a cat to ascend to the Heaviside Layer, a kind of heaven. Our proxy is Victoria (Francesca Hayward), a little white cat who's been dumped by her owners and just happened upon the Jellicle cats in the back alleys of London. Though the film's narrative is much clearer than its mystical source material, these Jellicle cats remain the main block to entering into the story: something unnerving or unintentionally funny about them irreparably destroys the illusion.

Director Tom Hooper attempts to make things dynamic by arbitrarily tracking the camera around the cats as they dance, throwing in a Busby Berkeley flourish here and there. But such attempts at bravura routinely fail: Jennifer Hudson, as past-her-prime cat Grizabella, can't radiate the kind of misery suited to the character, and her rendition of the iconic 'Memory' is undercut by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Taylor Swift's new number 'Beautiful Ghosts', sung by Victoria.

This is a vision of *Cats* where all the undesirable characters are played by black actors and which includes breakdancing cats wearing Chuck Taylors. But that dodginess is merely a whisper of a suggestion, just like everything else in this unrelenting eyeball blitz. If that seems like gibberish, that's because it is – an accurate reflection of this not-so-fantastic mess. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Debra Hayward Tim Bevan Eric Fellner Tom Hooper Screenplay Lee Hall Tom Hooper Based on Andrew Lloyd Webber's stage musical <i>Cats</i> and the poems <i>Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats</i> by T.S. Eliot Originally produced for the London stage by Cameron Mackintosh and The Really Useful Group Director of Photography Christopher Ross Editor Melanie Ann Oliver Production Designer Eve Stewart Music Andrew Lloyd Webber Production Sound Mixer Simon Hayes Costume Designer Paco Delgado Visual Effects Mill Film MPC	Lola/VFX Stunt Co-ordinator Jo McLaren Choreography Andy Blankenhuehler ©Universal Studios, The Really Useful Group Ltd. and Perfect Universe Investment Inc Production Companies Universal Pictures presents in association with Perfect World Pictures a Working Title and Amblin Entertainment production in association with Monumental Pictures and The Really Useful Group A film by Tom Hooper Presented in association with Dentsu Inc. Executive Producers Andrew Lloyd Webber Angela Morrison Liza Chasin Jo Burn	Cast James Corden Bustopher Jones Judi Dench Old Deuteronomy Jason Derulo Rum Tum Tugger Idris Elba Macavity Jennifer Hudson Grizabella Ian McKellen Gus the theatre cat Taylor Swift Bombalurina Rebel Wilson Jennyanydots Francesca Hayward Victoria Ray Winstone Growltiger Laurie Davidson Mr Mistoffelees Dolby Digital/Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1] Distributor Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
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Early 20th-century London. Abandoned kitten Victoria is taken in by the Jellicle cats, who are awaiting the Jellicle Ball. There, Old Deuteronomy will choose one of them to ascend to the Heaviside Layer. Deuteronomy is captured by Macavity, but magical cat Mr Mistoffelees returns her to the ball. Deuteronomy chooses ageing glamour cat Grizabella to ascend.

Chhapaak

Director: Meghna Gulzar
Certificate 12A 120m 29s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

Acid attacks by spurned male suitors are an ongoing issue in South Asia. Meghna Gulzar's *Chhapaak* (the Hindi-language phonetic for 'splash') is based on the life of Laxmi Agarwal, who survived an acid attack at the age of 15 and fought to get her attacker sentenced and regulate the sale of acid.

Gulzar chooses to focus on the aftermath of the attack, rather than the act itself. Despite the weighty subject matter, she displays the same lightness of touch and economy of storytelling as in her previous works *Talvar* (2015) and *Raazi* (2018). The Delhi that she and her co-writer Atika Chohan present is populated with well-defined, lived-in characters. And despite this being a mainstream Bollywood film featuring a major star in Deepika Padukone (who also co-produced), Gulzar avoids easy sentimentality and melodrama.

It is only towards the end of the film that we see Padukone's character Malti, in all her luminous beauty, prior to the attack. Male acid-attack perpetrators usually aim for their female victims' faces in order to disfigure them for life. By initially showing Malti after the attack, when she has undergone several reconstructive surgeries, and only then revealing the beauty that she used to be, Gulzar forcefully conveys the horror of what has happened to her. For Padukone, this is the role of a lifetime, and one that she effectively underplays in keeping with the film's unsentimental tone. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Deepika Padukone Govind Singh Sandhu Meghna Gulzar Written by Atika Chohan Meghna Gulzar Director of Photography Malay Prakash Editor Nitin Baid Production Design Subrata Chakraborty Amit Ray Songs Music Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy [i.e. Ehsaan Noorani Shankar Mahadevan Loy Mendonsa] Lyrics Gulzar Background Score Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy Tubby Sound Design Pranav Shukla Costume Design Abhilasha Sharma Production Companies Fox Star Studios	presents a KA Productions, Mriga Films and Fox Star Studios production Executive Producer Prafull Sharma Cast Deepika Padukone Malti Vikrant Massey Amol Vishal Dahiya Basheer Shaikh, 'Babbu' Madhurjeet Sarghi Archana Bajaj Delzad Hiwale Malti's brother Ankit Bisht Rajesh Vaibhavi Upadhyaya Minakshi Anand Tiwari Bajaj's husband Manohar Tell Malti's father Payal Nair Shiraz In Colour [2.35:1]	Subtitles Distributor The Walt Disney Studios
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New Delhi, India, 2005. Angry that she is not interested in him romantically, Babbu subjects teenage schoolgirl Malti to a facial acid attack. Malti fights a case against her attacker in court and files a public-interest litigation to regulate the sale of acid. Babbu is sentenced to ten years' imprisonment but he appeals in the high court. Meanwhile, Malti starts a job at an NGO dedicated to helping acid-attack survivors, and develops a relationship with co-worker Amol. A judicial panel regulates the sale of acid in India. The high court upholds Babbu's sentence.

Color out of Space

USA/Portugal/Malaysia 2019
Director: Richard Stanley

Reviewed by Kim Newman

The American author H.P. Lovecraft wrote intense, peculiar, visionary cosmic horror stories, mostly for pulp magazines – 'The Colour Out of Space' first appeared in *Amazing Stories* in 1927 – but edged closer to mainstream consciousness after his death in 1937, thanks to the work of a circle of devotees who kept him in print. He experienced a paperback revival in the 1960s and 1970s, when his paranoid concerns, fuelled in his case by neurotic xenophobia, chimed with countercultural psychedelia.

The South African director Richard Stanley made a start on a mainstream genre career with the cyberpunk horror film *Hardware* (1990) and the African mystic serial-killer movie *Dust Devil* (1992), then was ousted from *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1996) in circumstances explored (and mythologised) in the documentary *Lost Soul: The Doomed Journey of Richard Stanley's Island of Dr Moreau* (2014).

For his long-incoming third completed feature, Stanley and co-writer Scarlett Amaris adapt the story Lovecraft considered his favourite among his fictions. The conflicting impulses of pulp commercial genre and transcendental terror thrum through the oeuvres of many outsider artists, and Stanley is far from the first to turn to Lovecraft as a high priest of this twisting pathway. Add the very wayward Nicolas Cage to the mix – raising the question of whether you get the fully engaged Cage of *Mom and Dad* (2017) or *Mandy* (2018) or the walk-through-and-cash-the-checkue Cage of a dozen other recent projects – and *Color Out of Space* is a tantalising prospect indeed.

One surprise, perhaps, is that the result is almost low-key in its accumulation of dread, working steadily towards a mini-apocalypse for one nuclear family rather than our entire plane of existence. Cage presents as eccentric, of course, playing struggling farmer Nathan Gardner, whose ordinary woes – a wife not yet fully recovered from cancer, a risky venture with alpacas, three variously awkward children – metastasise thanks to the mutagenic influence of a chunk of alien rock that crashes into his front yard and poisons the well. We glimpse a character reading one of Lovecraft's inspirations – Algernon Blackwood's 'The Willows' – and this Portuguese-shot version of Lovecraft's haunted New England wood is appropriately populated by half-glimpsed things and unexplained rustlings well before the explicit horrors show up.

'The Colour Out of Space' (the author preferred the British spelling) is stripped-down Lovecraft, relatively free of the trappings of his invented mythology – used by so many to yoke their own work to his – though Stanley does allow a glimpse of the 'Necronomicon', Lovecraft's tome of evil. It is also the most frequently adapted of his stories, perhaps because it offers a relatively straightforward narrative with something like proper character development, as opposed to the elliptical, collage-like structure of 'The Call of Cthulhu' or 'The Shadow Out of Time'. Daniel Haller's *Die, Monster, Die!* (1965), Pascal Kané's *La Couleur de l'abîme* (1983), David Keith's *The Curse* (1987), Ivan Zucco's *Colour from the Dark* (2008) and Huan Vu's *Die Farbe* (2010) have all trudged out to the Gardner farm and observed the

Daniel Isn't Real

Director: Adam Egypt Mortimer
Certificate 15 100m 14s

Reviewed by Lou Thomas

Two consecutive incidents of escalating traumatic intensity portend the arrival of Luke's imaginary friend Daniel in this second feature from director Adam Egypt Mortimer. Witnessing a kitchen row between his father and mother, frightened little Luke sneaks out of their Brooklyn Heights home – only to clock a bloodied dead body in the doorway of a nearby diner, the victim of a gun massacre carried out by a disturbed young man. It's a tense, shocking start, one that signals the high levels of anxiety subsequently faced by the grown-up Luke (Miles Robbins) and, by extension, the film's viewers.

When Luke reaches college 12 years after the opening incidents, his father long absent and mother Claire erratically cutting pages from books and plastering them on walls, fissures in his own mental health emerge and, with them, the reappearance of Daniel (Patrick Schwarzenegger). This adult pairing forms the crux of Mortimer's psychological thriller and provides the film's most interesting moments. An emblematic and ominous scene in which Luke breaks into a library with fledgling artist/love interest Cassie (Sasha Lane) sees Daniel read quotes from books for Luke to recite to impress her – with Daniel, as always, seen and heard by Luke and us alone. Daniel becomes furious when Luke refuses to repeat his exact wording. Control, a lack of it and losing it, is key. For all the good Daniel's confidence brings Luke, he's a sadist first and a friend second: in steam tunnels under their college, 'Daniel' attacks Luke's roommate Richard, burning him on scalding pipes. Inevitably, more violence and murder follow as Luke realises he can't just wish or medicate Daniel away, even after he enlists the help of a psychiatrist.

Split personality/imaginary friend narratives have been a literary trope since Robert Louis Stevenson gave the world Jekyll and Hyde in 1886, and have frequently been used in cinema, for example in M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999). For *Daniel Isn't*



Cold comfort farm: Joely Richardson, Nicolas Cage

effects of that malign meteorite; all have grappled with one of Lovecraft's least filmable ideas – an imaginary colour ("It was only by analogy that they called it colour at all"). In Stanley's vision, this becomes a purplish-pink neon reminiscent of certain lighting choices made by Dario Argento (*Suspiria*, *Inferno*), George A. Romero (*Creepshow* – which includes a Stephen King story that's a gloss on the Lovecraft), Stuart Gordon (*From Beyond*, 1986) and Ted Nicolaou (*TerrorVision*, 1986). A commingling of 1980s VHS and 1960s lava-lamp aesthetic is overlaid on Lovecraft's out-of-time vision, even with mutterings about iffy wi-fi in the woods, suggesting Stanley is picking up exactly where his filmography was interrupted by the wilderness adventure with Dr Moreau that left him stranded in a jungle, turned into one of his own beast-men.

Lovecraft was never afraid of seeming absurd, and elements here indulge Cage's propensity for uncontrolled genre camp (most notably

expressed in 1988's *Vampire's Kiss*). The actor's every utterance about or involvement with alpacas is hysterical, climaxing in an unholy fusion of animals into a living, multi-limbed carpet creature; and one perfectly turned demented line ("Benny lives in the well now") bids to become as quoted and sampled as his bee rants from the 2006 remake of *The Wicker Man*.

However, everyone else takes things slower and stranger, with wife Theresa (Joely Richardson) so brittlely resentful of her family's deleterious effect on her health and business that she attempts to reabsorb one of her children into her body. Amid the rampant mutation of plant and animal life, Madeleine Arthur and Brendan Meyer are remarkably subtle as the older Gardner children, numbly taking the blame for mishaps that are the result of vast cosmic forces converging on their home, doing their best to cope even as the poisoned well-water makes them glow from the inside.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Daniel Noah
Josh C. Waller
Lisa Whalen
Elijah Wood

Written by

Richard Stanley
Scarlett Amaris
Based on the short story *The Colour Out of Space* by H.P. Lovecraft

Director of Photography

Steve Annis

Editor

Brett W. Bachman
Production Designer
Katie Byron

Music

Colin Stetson

Sound Mixer

Olivier Blanc

Costume Designer

Patricia Doria

Visual Effects

User T-38

Stunt Co-ordinator

David Chan Cordeiro

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Production Companies

Ace Pictures
Entertainment
presents a
SpectreVision
production in
association with XYZ
and Bro Cinema
Supported by the
Tourism and Cinema
Fund Pic Portugal
Executive Producers
Annie Chang

Johnny Chang

Calvin Choong
Peter Wong
Timur Bekbosunov
Emma Lee
Stacy Jorgensen
Michael M. McGuire
Elisa Lleras

Cast

Nicolas Cage
Nathan Gardner
Joely Richardson
Theresa Gardner

Madeleine Arthur

Lavinia Gardner
Brendan Meyer
Benny Gardner
Julian Hilliard
Jack Gardner
Josh C. Waller
Sheriff Pierce
Elliot Knight
Ward Phillips
Q'Oranka Kilcher
Mayor Tooma
Tommy Chong
Ezra

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

Arkham, Massachusetts, present day. Ward Phillips, a hydrologist surveying the Miskatonic river in advance of a dam project, meets Lavinia Gardner, a teenager performing a Wiccan ritual in the woods in the hope of keeping her mother's cancer in remission. Lavinia's father Nathan has invested in alpacas to keep the struggling family farm

running. A strange meteorite lands on the Gardner property and breaks up, polluting the well and the land – mutating animal and plant life. Nathan goes mad as his family mutate. Phillips tries in vain to rescue Lavinia. After the Gardners have all died, the dam creates a reservoir that inundates the farm – Phillips vows never to drink from it.



Imaginary fiend: Robbins, Schwarzenegger

Real, co-writers Mortimer and Brian DeLeeuw have adapted DeLeeuw's novel *In This Way I Was Saved* so that it plays like a smart psychological teen horror, an urban counterpart to Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko* (2001), though with more bloodshed.

Editor Brett W. Bachman keeps scenes feeling brisk, edgy and untamed, echoing Luke's state of mind and that of the schizophrenic Claire (performed with care by Mary Stuart Masterson). Clark's score, Lyle Vincent's vivid cinematography and Kaet McAnneny's striking production design ensure a unified look and sound, in keeping with other recent productions from the SpectreVision stable such as *Mandy* (2018) and *Color out of Space* (2019). As tormented Luke, Robbins – son of Tim Robbins and Susan Sarandon – is compelling, funny and enigmatic. Schwarzenegger is deliciously nefarious as Daniel, even if he's not quite as accomplished a killer as his own father in *The Terminator* (1984). **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Daniel Noah
Josh C. Waller
Lisa Whalen
Elijah Wood
Written by
Brian DeLeeuw
Adam Egypt
Mortimer
Based on the novel *In This Way I Was Saved*
by Brian DeLeeuw
Director of Photography
Lyle Vincent
Edited by
Brett W. Bachman
Production Designer
Kaet McAnneny
Original Music
Clark
Sound Mixer
Diana Sagrista
Costume Designer
Begoña Berges
Stunt Co-ordinator
Monique Ganderton
Production Companies
Ace Pictures
presents a
SpectreVision
production
Executive Producers
Annie Chang
Johnny Chang
Calvin Choong
Peter Wong
Timur Bekbosunov
Emma Lee
Stacy Jorgensen
Elisa Lleras
Michael M. McGuire
Cast
Miles Robbins
Luke
Patrick Schwarzenegger
Daniel
Sasha Lane
Cassie
Mary Stuart Masterson
Claire
Hannah Marks
Sophie
Chukwudi Iwuj
Braun
Griffin Robert Faulkner
young Luke
Nathan Reid
young Daniel
Chase Sui Wonders
Makayla
Andrew Bridges
Richard
Peter McRobbie
Percy Thigpen
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Arrow Films

Brooklyn Heights, New York City, 12 years ago. A young boy, Luke, witnesses his parents arguing in their kitchen, while in an adjacent diner a gunman murders innocent bystanders. After Luke sneaks out and sees a dead body, Daniel, a boy of his own age, appears to him. Under Daniel's instruction, Luke pours medication into his mother's smoothie, which makes her dangerously ill.

In the present, Luke attends college. His mother Claire now lives alone and has mental-health issues. Luke experiences hallucinations and visits psychiatrist Dr Braun. He begins a relationship with Cassie. Daniel reappears. At a party, Luke meets and kisses Sophie. He takes cocaine with her, her friend and his roommate Richard. 'Daniel' has sex with Sophie in the tunnels below the college and burns Richard on a steam pipe. Luke visits Claire in a psychiatric hospital, and tells Dr Braun about trying to kill her as a child. He visits the father of the diner shooter and discovers they shared similar visions. Dr Braun tries to coax Daniel from Luke with hypnosis but Daniel kills him. Luke and Daniel duel with swords and fall to their deaths from the roof of Cassie's building.

Dark Waters

USA 2019

Director: Todd Haynes

Certificate 12A 126m 39s



A bleak practice: Mark Ruffalo

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Edward Lachman's cinematography for *Dark Waters* is remarkable. Tasked with depicting the American Midwest to Southwest (more specifically, sprawling Cincinnati, Ohio, and small-town Parkersburg, West Virginia), the veteran DP imbues each exterior and interior location with its own sense of neglect or decay. The movie looks as if it's rotting from the inside out, which, given its subject matter – the seepage of dangerous 'forever chemicals' into a

rural population's water supply – represents an inspired and effective aesthetic choice, working as it does to complicate (if not quite transcend) the generic form of Todd Haynes's David-versus-Goliath legal thriller. Even as we're being asked to identify with, and root for, a crusading attorney tilting at the armoured windmills of multinational capitalism, the imagery suggests that his quest is unfolding within a fallen world.

Pegged as a departure for Haynes by US critics who've either missed or ignored the activist

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Christine Vachon
Pamela Koffler
Mark Ruffalo
Screenplay
Mario Correa
Matthew Michael
Carnahan
Based on magazine
article *The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare* by
Nathaniel Rich
Director of Photography
Edward Lachman
Editor
Affonso Gonçalves
Production Designer
Hannah Beachler
Music by/Score
Produced by
Marcelo Zarvos
Production Sound Mixer
Drew Kunin
Costume Designer
Christopher Peterson
©Storyteller
Distribution Co., LLC
Production Companies
Participant presents
a Will Hill/Killer
Content production
A Todd Haynes film
Executive Producers
Michael Sledd
Jeff Skoll
Jonathan King
Robert Kessel
Cast
Mark Ruffalo
Robert Bilott, 'Rob'
Anne Hathaway
Sarah Barlage Bilott
Tim Robbins
Tom Terp
Bill Camp
Wilbur Tennant
Victor Garber
Phil Donnelly
Mare Winningham
Darlene Kiger
Bill Pullman
Harry Deitzler
William Jackson Harper
James Ross
Louisa Krause
Carla Pfeiffer
Dolby Digital In Colour
[2.35:1]
Distributor
Entertainment One

Cincinnati, the late 1990s. Corporate defence lawyer Robert Bilott is asked by farmer Wilbur Tennant to investigate the poisoning of cattle on his land. They discover over a period of time that Teflon has leaked into the local water supply from the DuPont chemical plant. Wilbur and his wife have both contracted cancer and urge Robert to fight for them. After securing them a settlement, Robert sues DuPont on behalf of the community, demanding medical monitoring to track the effects of the chemicals on the population. The proposed

multimillion communal settlement is dependent on the outcome of the medical testing, and seven years pass, during which Robert's finances and health come under strain and his clients doubt his strategy. The study concludes that the chemicals are harmful, vindicating Robert's decision and proving the company's guilt, but DuPont reneges on its agreement. This evasion leaves Robert with no choice but to pursue his lawsuit one client at a time.

End credits inform us that eventually DuPont paid out \$671m to the victims of Teflon poisoning.

End of the Century

Argentina 2019
Director: Lucio Castro

streak in his work dating back to 1991's *Poison*, *Dark Waters* is adapted from a 2016 *New York Times Magazine* article entitled 'The Lawyer Who Became DuPont's Worst Nightmare'. Said lawyer, Robert Bilott, is, by his own real-world admission, an unlikely Quixote, having made his bones as a corporate defence attorney. As the film opens, Bilott (Mark Ruffalo) is on the verge of partnership at a conservative Cincinnati firm. What reroutes his path is an encounter with a farmer (Bill Camp) who leverages an old family friendship to compel Robert into an off-the-clock visit to Parkersburg, where he's presented with grotesque evidence of negligence by the owners of the local DuPont chemical plant – DuPont being one of his firm's most valued (and deep-pocketed) clients.

The question of what initially compels Robert to consider firing into his own ranks by taking on the case as a class-action suit is never quite crystallised in the film's script, nor in Ruffalo's performance, which only really comes into focus once the character has subversively passed the point of no return.

For all his sociopolitical acumen – previously channelled mainly through judicious deconstructions of pop culture – Haynes has never been a particularly righteous filmmaker; idealism isn't in his wheelhouse. But the movie nevertheless finds its groove, carried along by the gruesome particulars of the story and an acute understanding of group psychology. In addition to the cold, implacable hostility of DuPont's honchos and their legal team – to say nothing of his own doubts and those of his co-workers, boss (Tim Robbins) and wife (Anne Hathaway) – Robert must contend with the resentment of the people he's working for, who've been conditioned to believe that DuPont, for all its outsized wealth, has their community's best interests at heart. Even as its portrait of a working-class enclave afflicted by physical and ideological contaminants mostly spans the early 2000s, *Dark Waters* can't help but feel contemporary – a Trump movie even if it doesn't speak his name.

While claims that *Dark Waters* is a detour are superficial, it's true that Haynes's direction is more self-effacing here than is his norm: the film follows a horizontal trajectory, using the extreme duration of the case – and its attendant effect on Robert's bodily and mental health – to attenuate the drama instead of propelling it over the top. For every too-prosaic bit of speechifying, there's a quietly beguiling acting moment: Camp's performance as the rancher who catalyses the suit is a masterclass in terse, pushy dignity. As for Ruffalo, he dials down the smugness that wrecked his muckraking role in *Spotlight* (2015), emphasising instead a kind of weary bewilderment at his self-willed pariah status, punctuated by bursts of futile anger that seem as much about his certainty that he won't win as contempt for his opponents' tactics and practices.

No doubt that the bleakness of *Dark Waters* has had an effect on its reception: absent the moments of flamboyantly conceived beauty (and perverse humour) marking Haynes's output, it can't help but be categorised as a downer; the way Haynes undermines a late moment of catharsis is devastating. But the movie's refusal to find a silver lining in Robert's heroism or the idea of moral victories is also its corroded badge of honour. **B**



Imagined lives: Juan Barberini, Ramón Pujol

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

There is something of the narrative daring and quiet observational detail of Richard Linklater's *Before* trilogy in Lucio Castro's debut feature, the story of chance meetings in Barcelona between poet Ocho (Juan Barberini), visiting from New York, and children's television director Javi (Ramón Pujol). Playing out over different time periods – 1999, 2019 and an imagined 2019 in which the two men have stayed together after their first meeting – it could so easily have been a schmaltzy 'what if' romance. Instead, a lean script and two outstanding performances charged with a palpable erotic chemistry result in a deeply moving reflection on the intangible aspects of encounters that resonate in unexpected ways.

This is a film that works through contrasts and juxtapositions. Maps and postcards orientate Ocho in 1999, while WhatsApp messages and PrEP shape his discourse 20 years later. In the present day, he extols the virtues of freedom – he's just emerged from a 20-year relationship and has a presence on Grindr. Meanwhile Javi's priorities become clear through his insistence they use a condom; and while he delineates the merits of an open marriage, he is committed to family life, with a husband and daughter in Berlin.

Javi and Ocho's 1999 conversations acquire a bittersweet quality when read against the men's 2019 lives – Ocho hoped for a large family, Javi had never wanted children.

There is an assured confidence to Castro's filmmaking. The movie's languid opening, lasting 12 minutes, has no dialogue, focusing instead on Ocho's routines as he showers, visits the beach and walks through the city, which is where he again encounters Javi. Ocho's leisurely wanderings in Barcelona (in a partial pursuit of Javi) position him as a *flâneur*, linking the film to José Luis Guerín's *In the City of Silvia* (2007). Ways of seeing – whether it's the men observing each other, or looking at works of art during a museum visit – become key in defining their characters and relationship.

There is an air of fragility, something almost otherworldly, in the film's slightly washed-out palette, which connects to its themes of time passing and the elusive factors that determine how possibilities are taken up or not. The use of lines from artist David Wojnarowicz's 1992 memoir *Close to the Knives*, which appear on screen as Ocho departs in 1999, points to transition as a way of life. And it is transition in the sense of fluidity between real and imagined futures which proves such a central motif in this eloquent, impressive film. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Joanne Lee
Josh Wood
Lucio Castro

Written by

Lucio Castro

Director of Photography

Bernat Mestres

Edited by

Lucio Castro

Original Music

Robert Lombardo

Sound Design/

Mixing

Robert Lombardo

Production Company

Alsina 427

Cast

Juan Barberini

Ocho

Ramón Pujol

Javi

Mia Maestro

Sonia

Mariano López

Seoane

passerby

Helen Celia Castro-Wood

Oona

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Peccadillo

Pictures Ltd

Argentinian

theatrical title

Fin de siglo

Barcelona, the present. Argentine poet Ocho is visiting the city. He has a passionate sexual encounter with Javi, who is over from Berlin for work reasons and to see family. Javi reminds Ocho that they met 20 years earlier. The film moves to 1999, when Ocho arrives in Barcelona to stay with his friend Sonia; he meets Javi, Sonia's then boyfriend. Javi and Ocho both identify as heterosexual, though Ocho's sexual liaison with a stranger in the park indicates that he is sexually drawn to men. Javi shows Ocho the city; returning to the apartment, they drink, party and have sex. The film returns to 2019. Javi tells Ocho that Sonia died six years earlier; the men part. The final section imagines Ocho and Javi together, living in Barcelona with their young daughter.

First Love

Director: Miike Takashi

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

There have been quite a few Japanese movies titled *Hatsukoi* (*First Love*), including a new-wave classic by Hani Susumu and a transposition of Turgenev's novella to Tokyo by Tsuruoka Keiko, but Miike Takashi's film is the first to set a sweet, burgeoning romance between two damaged young people in the context of an all-out war between yakuza, Chinese triads and police. The young lovers-to-be are amateur boxer Leo, who spends most of the film believing he has a fatal brain tumour, and Yuri, a cocaine-addled prostitute who works as 'Monica' and is often left helpless by memories of her abusive father. They are haplessly drawn into the larger conflicts because Yuri's pimp Yasu and his Eurasian mistress Julie are drug-dealers for the triads. Much of the action takes place over one night, but the time-frames of the Leo-Yuri story and the yakuza-triad-police machinations don't entirely mesh.

The plot's underlying presumption is that the yakuza are in decline, while the Chinese triads are muscling in. Yakuza have traditionally stayed away from guns and drugs, but the Chinese incomers have no such scruples. The gang-war side of the plot hinges on the anarchic behaviour of one renegade yakuza (Kase, played by Sometani Shota), who defies his bosses by forming an alliance with a bent cop to snatch a large drug shipment from the triads. His actions naturally prompt reprisals and there are comic-graphic beatings, shootings, Taser-attacks and clobberings with whatever comes to hand throughout. The stream of tit-for-tats is almost wilfully confusing, largely because Miike and his writer Nakamura Masaru make no attempt to individualise (or even identify) most of the Japanese and Chinese gangsters, and many Western viewers will have trouble distinguishing the Japanese speakers from the Mandarin speakers. But in the course of that one crucial night we are required to notice that the yakuza *gumi* is decimated by Kase's treachery while the ever-expendable Chinese always have new and more powerful bosses to lead them.

The contrast between all the gangster kerfuffle and the relatively leisureed pace of the developing relationship between Leo and Yuri is deliberate, but the film risks asking too much of its audience by expecting them to reconcile the two strands as the events of a single night. This makes the film a rather abstract experience, and one with surprisingly little emotional heft. Many viewers will take it less as a drama than as an assembly of typically bravura Miike set pieces. As such, it pretty much delivers. Miike's black humour is well to the fore (a still-emoting severed head registers surprise at its own decapitation), and the Chinese godfather One-armed Wang's arrival late in the day and his skill at one-armed handling of a shotgun are something of a show-stopper. Such details, plus the sudden switch to cartoon-style animation (complete with a written-sound-effect "CRASH") for the climax's impossible car stunt all offer exactly what Miike's less critical fans have come to expect.

But Miike did the whole yakuza-versus-triads thing way back at the start of his career in *Shinjuku Triad Society* (1995), and the gangster strand in *First Love* is a less-energised rehash of that. Long-



Gun control: Becky

term admirers will remember that Miike once had a genuinely radical edge, which ran from his gay yakuza love story *Blues Harp* (1998) to his nihilism-through-the-ages epic *Izo* (2004) and his cosmic celebration of transgressive passions in *Big Bang Love: Juvenile A* (2006). He also showed an uncommon ability to refresh genres, as in the fatal-attraction thriller *Audition* (1999), the action

movie *Dead or Alive* (1999) and the charming, Ealing-style comedy of *Shangri-la* (2002), though none of his movies for kids quite hits the spot. Maybe, as he laments, Japanese companies are no longer open to the kind of taboo-breakers that he used to specialise in. Or maybe he just started to grow old; he'll turn 60 this year. Either way, *First Love* suggests that the great days are over. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Muneyuki Kii
Jeremy Thomas
Misako Saka
Written by
Nakamura Masaru
Director of Photography
Kita Nobuyasu

Editor

Kamiya Akira
Music
Endo Koji
Sound
Nakamura Jun

Production Companies

An Oriental Light and Magic, Recorded Picture Company, Toei Company production

Cast

Kubota Masataka
Katsuragi Leo

Omori Nao

Otomo
Sometani Shota
Kase
Konishi Sakurako
Yuri, 'Monica'
Miura Takahiro
Yasu
Becky

Julie

Murakami Jun
Ichikawa
Uchino Seiyo
Gondo

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

Japanese
theatrical title
Hatsukoi

Tokyo. Soon after losing a bout, amateur boxer Katsuragi Leo is told by a hospital doctor that he has a dangerous brain tumour. Meanwhile a turf war over drugs has broken out between yakuza and Chinese triad gangsters and claimed its first yakuza casualty. The investigation is led by senior policeman Otomo, who would like a piece of the drug profits himself. Young prostitute Yuri, who works as 'Monica' and is haunted by visions of her abusive father, is held semi-captive by her pimp Yasu and his partner Julie, who are involved in drug-dealing. Renegade yakuza Kase advises Otomo to 'arrest' Yuri so that she can be traded for an incoming drugs shipment. Leo intervenes when he sees Otomo struggling with Yuri

on the street and ends up spending most of the night walking and talking with her; Leo gets voicemail from the hospital to say that he is actually healthy. Kase kills Yasu and targets Julie too, telling his bosses that the Chinese triads did it. Kase and Otomo manage to track Yuri but find themselves in a skirmish with triads. Otomo flees with Leo, Yuri and the unconscious Kase; senior yakuza Ichikawa, aware of Kase's treachery, leads the pursuit. A large retail park closed for the night is the venue for cataclysmic clashes between yakuza, triads and police, using swords, guns and martial arts. Wounded yakuza boss Gondo enlists Leo as his driver for a daring escape. Sometime later, Leo and Yuri are living happily together.

The Gentlemen

United Kingdom/USA 2020

Director: Guy Ritchie

Certificate 18 113m 7s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Writer-director Guy Ritchie has often been criticised for the 'mockney' miscreants who inhabit his early features *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (1998), *Snatch* (2000), *Revolver* (2005) and *RocknRolla* (2008) – a motley ensemble whose Britishness, Englishness, even Londonishness, is a highly artificial construct, and whose pacy, crisscrossing japes owe more of a debt to the narrative involutions of Quentin Tarantino than to the real (if not quite legitimate) machinations of the metropolitan criminal fraternity.

It seems likely that Ritchie himself would happily own these charges of inauthenticity. After all, in *Snatch* he improbably (but brilliantly) cast Brad Pitt as an Irish 'pikey', and in *Revolver* he made London's underbelly a labyrinthine stage for metaphysics and mysticism. In all these films, and arguably also in his *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) and even *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword* (2017), Ritchie is taking a mythological approach to Britishness and its icons. This is also true of his latest, *The Gentlemen*, which returns to the sense and sensibilities of his earliest features, while constantly reminding the viewer of its status as legend by presenting its events as a movie script.

Hired by a vengeance-seeking newspaper editor (Eddie Marsan) to dish dirt on American expatriate and drug lord Mickey Pearson (Matthew McConaughey), disreputable detective Fletcher (Hugh Grant) has been following Mickey's gang for weeks as they negotiate the sale of their extensive marijuana empire to double-dealing Oklahoma billionaire Matthew Berger (Jeremy Strong). As internally squabbling Chinese gangsters, vengeful Russian mobsters, cash-strapped aristocrats and high-kicking, YouTube chancers (trained by Colin Farrell's Coach) all become embroiled in a plot that rapidly spirals out of control, Fletcher presents his observations to Mickey's lieutenant Raymond (Charlie Hunnam) in the form of a screenplay, which he hopes both to use for blackmail and to sell to a movie studio. Yet the screenplay's cinematic retelling of what has happened so far, presented via Fletcher's scurrilously hyperbolic narration/pitch to Raymond (playing sharp-eyed script editor), will turn out not to be the full picture, in a crime film that includes its own commentary track, making-of material and alternative takes. This metacinematic frame overtly highlights the artifice of what we are seeing, while matching in narrative terms the sophistication of (some of) the players.

We know that Mickey will die in the end, taken out in his own local by an assassin, because it is with this scene that *The Gentlemen* opens, launching us *in medias res*. Yet this is a film full of smoke and mirrors, dexterous manipulations, mistaken perceptions and dumb luck, in which Fletcher's script requires a certain reading between the lines, Ritchie's careful parcelling out of – and stylised cutting away from – key visual information invites imagination and ambiguity, and (half-)seeing is not always believing. If at first this seems set in a man's world of aggressive Darwinian machismo, that



Manors maketh the man: Henry Golding, Matthew McConaughey, Charlie Hunnam

impression is offset by the range of sexualities on display (Fletcher's pitch to Raymond is as much flirtation as extortion) and by Mickey's formidable other half Rosalind (Michelle Dockery), who on principle has staffed her motor shop almost exclusively with female employees.

Set in a multicultural London, with a tea-drinking, tweed-wearing American protagonist more English than the English yet knowingly tainted by his own murderous past, *The Gentlemen* does not so much lionise Mickey

as use him to expose the flaws in the British society that accommodates him: a landed gentry all too ready to sell out, a fourth estate desperate to be recognised by the big boys, amorally rapacious newcomers. And so this ironically titled film defines its characters' gentlemanliness largely in negative, or reduces it to an issue of style, as witty, well-groomed, wife-loving Mickey and his associates outclass all the other thugs. It is a coarse, convoluted, comical caper that exults in the joys of genre. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Guy Ritchie
Ivan Atkinson
Bill Block

Screenplay

Guy Ritchie

Story

Guy Ritchie
Ivan Atkinson
Marn Davies

Director of Photography

Alan Stewart

Editors

James Herbert
Paul Machliss

Production Designer

Gemma Jackson

Music Composed by/Supervising

Music Editor

Christopher Benstead

Production

Sound Mixer

Paul Munro

Costume Designer

Michael Wilkinson

Stunt Co-ordinator

Jason Hunjan

©Coach Films

UK Limited

Production Companies

STX Films and

Miramax Films

present a Toff Guy

production

A film by Guy Ritchie

Executive Producers

Robert Simonds

Adam Fogelson

Alan Wands

Bob Osher

Matthew Anderson

Andrew Golov

Cast

Matthew

McConaughey

Michael Pearson,

'Mickey'

Charlie Hunnam

Raymond, 'Ray'

Henry Golding

Dry Eye

Michelle Dockery

Rosalind Pearson

Jeremy Strong

Matthew Berger

Colin Farrell

Coach

Hugh Grant

Fletcher

Eddie Marsan

Big Dave

Tom Wu

Lord George

Bugzy Malone

Ernie

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Entertainment Film

Distributors Ltd

The present. After studying botany at Oxford, becoming a marijuana sower/supplier and killing people along the way, Mickey Pearson is now a respected American in London, hoping to sell his extensive marijuana-growing empire to Oklahoma billionaire Matthew Berger and retire. Shortly after he shows Matthew one of his secret farms, hidden beneath a bribed aristocrat's estate, the farm is raided by some young martial artists who post the raid online. Realising the identity of their victim, the boys' trainer Coach apologises to Mickey's lieutenant Raymond and offers his services. Mickey rejects an attempt by ambitious Triad member Dry Eye to purchase the business. When Mickey sends Raymond to rescue the aristocrat's daughter from heroin dealers, a Russian teenager is killed. Meanwhile, detective Fletcher, hired by a newspaper editor with a grudge against Mickey, tries to blackmail Raymond with his findings, not realising that Raymond has been on to him all along. Fletcher reveals that Matthew has been secretly meeting with the Chinese. Coach's boys silence the editor with a compromising film. Raymond shoots a mystery gunman trying to assassinate Mickey. Dry Eye attempts to rape Mickey's wife Rosalind but is killed by Mickey. Thugs sent by the dead Russian teenager's gangster father (who also sent the assassin) abduct Mickey, but are killed by Coach's boys (who think they are killing Mickey's men). Having caught Matthew trying to reduce the value of the marijuana business, Mickey pressures him to pay the loss on the originally agreed price – plus a pound of flesh.

Greed

USA/United Kingdom 2019
Director: Michael Winterbottom
Certificate 15 104m 4s

Reviewed by Tom Charity

Steve Coogan and Michael Winterbottom have worked together so often at this point it's difficult to tell them apart. Certainly, they frequently bring out the best in each other – in the popular *Trip* series, of course, but also in the sly shenanigans of *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005) and all the way back to *24 Hour Party People* (2002). Winterbottom's films with Coogan have wit, energy and mischief, a lightness that is not frivolous but acerbic and on point. So it's too bad to have to report that their new collaboration, *Greed*, has more in common with 2013's misjudged Paul Raymond biopic *The Look of Love*.

The idea is sharp. Clearly inspired by the Topshop boss Sir Philip Green, but taking aim at the calumnies endemic across every aspect of the rag trade, the movie is a political satire on the rampant excesses of unbridled capitalism. Richard 'Greedy' McCreadie (Coogan) is about to turn 60. Smarting from the embarrassment of being hauled over the coals at a House of Commons select committee to explain the trail of bankruptcies in his wake, McCreadie means to throw a party so extravagant it will dazzle the doubters and silence any naysayers. He's going to recreate a Roman amphitheatre on a Greek island, complete with gladiators, slaves and even a lion, buy in a glittering array of celebrities and invite the press to gawp.

This PR offensive also involves a memoir, ghosted by a mild-mannered hack (David Mitchell) whose inquiries into Greedy's rise and rise serve as a Kane-like biographical counterpoint to the calamitous party preparations (shades of Fyre Festival) and allow Winterbottom to remind us how Thatcherism spawned a generation of Greedies, young chancers exploiting every link along the chain.

The diagnosis is accurate. We see young McCreadie bullying South Asian factory bosses into accepting ever more marginal returns; flogging high-street brands until they flop; playing a shell game with the banks so that someone else always foots the bill. It's all distressingly true and well documented. But is it funny? Not so much. And that's problematic because it's pitched for laughs.

Granted, it has its moments. There are piercing digs at pop stars who sell themselves for private performances; and the arrival of Syrian refugees on the beach sparks some scalding satire. As for McCreadie, his unrepeatable exultation on the psychological impact of fuchsia is Coogan at his obscene best. But too many scenes falter in a no man's land between comedy and character drama. The film begins with E.M. Forster's oft-quoted "Only connect". But even as Winterbottom assiduously joins the dots between banking, high street and sweatshops, *Greed* simply never coheres. **C**



Cash of the titans: Steve Coogan

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Damian Jones
Melissa Parmenter
Screenplay
Michael Winterbottom
Additional Material
Sean Gray
Director of Photography
Giles Nuttgens
Editors
Liam Hendrix Heath
Marc Richardson
Mags Arnold

Production Designer
Denis Schnegg
Supervising Sound Editor
Joakim Sundström
Costume Designer
Anthony Unwin

©Columbia Pictures Industries, Inc and Channel Four Television Corporation
Production Companies

Sony Pictures International Productions and Film4 present a Revolution Films production in association with DJ Films
A Michael Winterbottom film
Executive Producers
Daniel Battsek
Ollie Madden

Cast
Steve Coogan
Sir Richard McCreadie
David Mitchell
Nick
Asa Butterfield
Finn McCreadie
Dinita Gohil
Amanda
Sophie Cookson
Lily McCreadie
Jamie Blackley
young Richard
Shanina Shaikh

Naomi
Jonny Sweet
Jules
Sarah Solemani
Melanie
Tim Key
Sam
Asim Chaudhry
Frank, lion tamer
Ollie Locke
Fabian
Pearl Mackie
Cathy
Kareem Alkabbani

Kareem
Shirley Henderson
Margaret
Isla Fisher
Samantha McCreadie

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Sony Pictures
Releasing

Sir Richard McCreadie, nicknamed 'Greedy' by the tabloids, is CEO of a British high-street fashion empire. For his 60th birthday, he plans a spectacular toga party on a Greek island, complete with coliseum, gladiators and a lion. But preparations are behind schedule and celebrities are cancelling. Meanwhile, ghostwriter Nick interviews family and associates for McCreadie's

memoir. The more he finds out his subject's business practices, the more disenchanted he becomes. McCreadie's personal assistant Amanda can no longer turn a blind eye to her boss's misdemeanours. On the night of the party, when the drunken McCreadie is alone in the amphitheatre, she unlocks the cage of the hungry lion, which administers swift poetic justice.

The Grudge

USA 2020
Director: Nicolas Pesce
Certificate 15 93m 36s



Import business: Andrea Riseborough

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Complete with ghoulies that do the same half-gurgling moan as those in Shimizu Takashi's 2002 film, this second Americanisation of *Ju-On: The Grudge* circles the drain of J-horror nostalgia with mixed results. Through a series of flashbacks (also like the Japanese film), this *Grudge* shows the gory and/or watery deaths of the unfortunate few who have stepped foot into 44 Reyburn Drive. The *ju-on* powering this house's murders was contracted from the original *ju-on* house in Tokyo: for reasons unclear, Fiona, a live-in nurse from a small town in Pennsylvania, was dispatched there, but left when things got too spooky.

Why the grudge didn't infect the airports or planes she passed through on her way back to the US is unclear, but it's best not to ask questions of such powerful imported juju. Detective Muldoon (Andrea Riseborough), a newly single mum, attempts to put the pieces together, a task that drove a fellow officer mad. (He's carved his face up like *Hannibal*'s Mason Verger; their brief tête-à-tête is one of the more fun, unhinged scenes of the film.) But Muldoon discovers that, just as in that other great J-horror classic *Ringu* (1998), solving the mystery isn't the same thing as stopping the curse.

Writer-director Nicolas Pesce does a decent job of balancing such homages. Many of the signposts of J-horror are derived from a rich cultural history that is specific to Japan – the US is simply too young a country to have anything similar. Even after twentysomething years of Sadako, girls with long wet hair just don't mean the same thing in the West as they do in Japan. Pesce instead offers veiled references for horror fans who can fill in the gaps: Jacki Weaver's portrayal of Lorna Moody, an assisted-suicide nurse whose death kicks off Muldoon's investigation, has a strong vibe of Zelda Rubinstein in *Poltergeist*. (There is a reference to the unconvincing ending of Netflix's *The Haunting of Hill House*, where a man hopes that the evil powering the house will allow his wife to stick around after she's died.) Still, the



main creepiness powering the film is not the conceit – a serial-killer house – but variations on jump scares, which cheapen the otherwise fine pacing, atmosphere, and performances. Even so, while second remakes of foreign-language franchise films are a thoroughly disreputable business, this packs the odd punch. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Sam Raimi

Rob Tapert

Taka Ichise

Written by

Nicolas Pesce

Story

Nicolas Pesce

Jeff Buhler

Based on the film

Ju-On: The Grudge

[2002] written

and directed by

Takashi Shimizu

Director of

Photography

Zachary Galler

Editors

Gardner Gould

Ken Blackwell

Production

Designer

Jean-André Carrière

Music

The Newton Brothers

Sound Mixer

Edgar Ozolins

Costume Designer

Patricia J. Henderson

©Grudge

Reboot, LLC

Production

Companies

Sam Raimi and Stage

6 Films present

in association

with Ghost House

Pictures a Nicolas

Pesce film

Executive

Producers

Roy Lee

Doug Davison

John Powers

Middleton

Schuyler Weiss

Nathan Kahane

Erin Westernman

Brady Fujikawa

Andrew Pfeffer

Cast

Andrea

Riseborough

Detective Muldoon

Demian Bishir

Detective Goodman

John Cho

Peter Spencer

Betty Gilpin

Nina Spencer

William Sadler

Detective Wilson

Frankie Faison

William Matheson

Tara Westwood

Fiona Landers

Dave Brown

Sam Landers

Lin Shaye

Faith Matheson

Jacki Weaver

Lorna Moody

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures

Releasing

A Guide to Second Date Sex

United Kingdom/USA 2019

Director: Rachel Hirons

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

In adapting her own multimedia play, which was based on conversations with real people and won critical approval at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2012 and London's Soho Theatre in 2013, writer-director Rachel Hirons makes a solid film debut, even if the story loses something in translation from stage to screen. This tale of a disastrous date night is a familiar one, and the immediacy and intimacy of the play seem diluted by celluloid, the texture flattened out. Yet leads George MacKay (1917) and Alexandra Roach (TV's *Sanditon*) have enough charm and chemistry to keep things engaging.

It's a film that improves considerably in its second half, as we get to know more of Ryan (McKay) and Laura (Roach) beyond their date-night nerves and as their genuinely sweet dynamic comes to the fore. Before that, however, they meet in a nightclub and forge enough of a drunken connection – which we see largely in flashbacks that prove to be essential reminders of what exactly this pair see in each other – to arrange a second date. Both are nervous, particularly about the prospect of sex, and when Laura arrives at the messy house Ryan shares with two other blokes, something of an awkward comedy of errors ensues, involving unkempt

bikini lines, jealous ex-girlfriends and disastrous advice from Ryan's self-proclaimed ladykiller housemate Dan (a wasted Michael Socha).

It's all a bit like Bridget Jones for the Instagram generation. And, like that film, while it purports to skewer modern dating clichés, it does rely rather heavily on them itself for narrative and dramatic impetus: Ryan's ex-girlfriend, on whom the boys have bestowed the unfortunate nickname of Tufts (Emma Rigby), is a wanton, drunken shrew; Dan is a hard-drinking Lothario with a one-track mind. And scenes in which Ryan refuses to take Laura out for dinner, instead encouraging her to stay in his bedroom in the hope of getting his leg over, are uncomfortable rather than amusing.

Yet, as with all of Hirons's work (she wrote the screenplay for 2013's *Powder Room*, an adaptation of her play *When Women Wee*, as well as *Vodka Diaries* for BBC Comedy Feeds and an episode of *Kiss Me First*), *A Guide to Second Date Sex* is ultimately, and most importantly, a celebration of female empowerment. Laura is vulnerable but never stupid; she is looking to make a connection but refuses to settle; she is open to intimacy but she's no pushover. In short, she knows her own worth enough to realise that she can, and should, demand respect – and, yes, excellent sex. **S**



Twice shy: George MacKay, Alexandra Roach

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

David Wade

Maggie Monteith

Paul Raphael

Written by

Rachel Hirons

Director of

Photography

Paul Mackay

Edited by

Lewis Albow

Production Designer

Olivia Young

Original Score by/

Score Recorded

and Mixed by

Toydrum:

James Griffith

Pablo Clements

Sound Recordist

Nigel Albermariche

Costume Designer

Sinéad O'Sullivan

©Addington Films Ltd

Production

Companies

Dignity Film

Finance presents

in association with

AMP a Starfield

Productions

production

In association

with Shooting

Scripts Films

A Rachel Hirons film

BFI

Executive Producers

Chris Reed

Adam Rolston

James Norrie

Bob Portal

Inderpal Singh

Cast

George MacKay

Ryan

Alexandra Roach

Laura

Emma Rigby

Tufts

Michael Socha

Dan

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Pinpoint

Tokyo, 2004. Fiona Landers, an American nurse, informs her co-worker Yoko that she is returning to the US after witnessing uncanny events in the house they work in. Fiona brings the curse back with her to Pennsylvania, and kills her family. In 2007, detectives Muldoon and Goodman are called to investigate the year-old death of an assisted suicide nurse, who was last seen at Fiona's former home. Through flashbacks, it is revealed that the house's curse has killed a realtor and his pregnant wife, as well as an elderly man; the house also drove Goodman's former partner insane. Muldoon burns down the house to stop the curse, but is killed in her own home by an angry spirit that's pretending to be her son.

After meeting in a London nightclub and forging a drunken connection, twentysomethings Ryan and Laura arrange a second date a week later. Both are anxious about the occasion, which takes place entirely in the house that Ryan shares with two other men. Their nerves lead to a string of awkward moments, particularly when things

start to become intimate. The situation worsens thanks to the unsavoury advice of housemate Dan and the arrival of Ryan's jealous ex-girlfriend. However, as Ryan and Laura let their guard down and get to know each other properly, the sparks begin to fly and they find that, by opening themselves up, they may have a chance at love.

Incidental Characters


United Kingdom 2019
Director: Benjamin Verrall
Certificate 12A 106m 45s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Four deeply self-involved people struggle with... well, not much, in a flimsy, plummy romcom that's heavy on the awkward social exchanges that Richard Curtis has ensured are *de rigueur* in the genre but light on the laughs and performer charisma it also requires.

"It's rarely the big characters or the long meaningful speeches that stay with you," muses one of the quartet, Alison (Isabella Marshall). "It's the throwaway comments... it's the incidental characters." Really? Perhaps there are those who go around recalling only trivialities and forgetting everything important, but it's a shaky peg on which to hang a story.

There's also a stropmy dismissal from Josie (Sophia Capasso) of "art that *means* something" – particularly contemptible, apparently, if it's by women and concerns their sexuality. Instead, the contention seems to be that what matters is stuff that doesn't matter. Josie is wounded by never having met her great-grandparents (because they are quite reasonably dead). Alison has somehow been able to take a year off work to get over an affair with someone else's husband (she was "humiliated and heartbroken"; no word on the wife). "We say stuff as if it has meaning," says a further driftily posh person, Alf (Howard Perret), "but we never really know." Again, really?

The issue here seems not to be that meaning is hopelessly elusive, but that starting from the premise that life is trivial is an excellent way not to generate it. 



On the margins: Sophia Capasso, Howard Perret

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Ruth Marshall
Amelia Rowcroft
Benjamin Verrall

Writer

Benjamin Verrall

Director of Photography

Jeremy Reed

Art Director

Amelia Rowcroft

Original Music

Joe Kiely
Production Sound
Kirstie Howell
Shane Gravestock

©Toffee Hammer

Production Ltd,
trading as Toffee
Hammer Films
Production
Company
Toffee Hammer
Productions

Cast

Sophia Capasso
Josie Jackson
Isabella Marshall
Alison Goode

Howard Perret

Alf Prescott
Steve Watts
Tony McGinley
Lucinda Curtis
Doris McGinley
Mark Knightley
Danny

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Toffee Hammer
Productions

Lewes, England, the present. After a year's break, Alison returns to her job at a small publishing firm. She reconnects with her boss Tony and befriends awkward new recruit Alf, who is struggling to navigate a budding relationship with artist Josie. Tony is upset by his mother's burgeoning dementia, but gradually finds the strength to come out of the closet, and publishes his own book of poems. Alf loses both Josie and his job, but finds a new calling making a children's TV show. Josie becomes a famous cartoonist.

Ip Man 4

Director: Wilson Yip
Certificate 15 105m 8s




Fight club: Danny Chan

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Ip Man 4: The Finale is often as not a patently ridiculous movie, set mostly in a mid-1960s California that is by no means convincingly doubled for by locations in China and Lancashire. There is a squeaky-clean diner that looks like a Johnny Rockets-type retro restaurant, loads of English and Australian actors struggling to swallow their accents while playing unscrupulous *gweilo*, and a scenery-scarfing Scott Adkins channelling R. Lee Ermeley and Sgt Slaughter as a sadistic Marine instructor whose white supremacy leads him through mysterious mental processes to a psychotic insistence on the superiority of Japanese karate over Chinese kung fu.

None of which is, necessarily, a demerit – in fact, it's all good for a giggle in the downtime between action set pieces. If you are looking for exquisite period details, plot mechanisms that aren't heavily lubricated with jingoism or anything resembling actual human behaviour, you might point yourself towards that *other* Ip Man biopic, Wong Kar Wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013), starring Tony Leung as the real-life Hong Kong-based instructor of wing chun-style kung fu who mentored a young Bruce Lee. The series

directed by Wilson Yip and featuring Donnie Yen in the lead, a franchise phenomenon of which this is purportedly the final instalment, offers but one major inducement, and that is the pleasure of seeing Yen pummel opponents into a quivering pâté with the fastest Southern Fist in the business. And measured against this yardstick of expectations, *Ip Man 4* does just fine.

Along with a spry Yen, *Ip Man 3*'s Danny Chan returns here as Lee (with this and *Once upon a Time... in Hollywood*, it's a good time for renescent Bruceploitation) caught up with opening a new martial-arts studio in San Francisco and drawing the opprobrium of Chinatown elders by deigning to teach non-Chinese students. Adkins is a hoot from the moment he gets his first glowering close-up, and has ample occasion to show off his famously intricate aerial kicks, each one a mini-drama unfurling in gravity-defying hangtime. The ultimate ground-and-pound defeat of his character, representative of a hopelessly racist, culture-barren America, opens the door for Chinese kung fu to be taught to the US military. That this is apparently a desirable outcome makes about as much sense as anything else in this lunk-headed and awfully pleasurable beat-'em-up. 

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Raymond Wong
Wilson Yip
Donnie Yen

Written by

Hiroshi Fukazawa
Edmond Wong

Director of Photography

Siu-Keung Cheng

Editor

Ka-Fai Cheung
Production Designer
Nina Topp

Music

Kenji Kawai

Production Companies

Mandarin Motion
Pictures Limited
presents a Tin Tin
Film Productions
Limited production

Executive Producers

Yuk-Lam Pang
Edmond Wong
Raymond Bak-Ming

Cast

Donnie Yen
Ip Man
Scott Adkins
Barton Geddes
Danny Chan
Bruce Lee
Vanness Wu
Hartman Wu
Chris Collins
Colin Frater
Wu Yue
Wan Zong Hua

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor

Asia Releasing

Hong Kong, 1964. Ip Man, a master of wing chun-style kung fu, is raising his son alone after the death of his wife. Discovering he has cancer, and wanting to secure a future for his son, he travels to San Francisco at the invitation of former student Bruce Lee. Needing a referral letter to enrol his son at school, he goes to the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, but is denied the letter by the organisation's president, Wan, after he refuses to reprimand Lee for teaching kung fu to non-Chinese students. One of Lee's students, a Marine named Hartman, endeavours to introduce kung fu to US military training, but is opposed by gunnery sergeant Barton Geddes and karate instructor Colin. Seeking to prove the superiority of karate, Colin bests several kung fu masters at a Chinatown festival, before being defeated by Ip. Arrested by immigration officers, Wan is taken into custody by Geddes, who crushes him in battle. Ip confronts Geddes and defeats him. Returning to Hong Kong, he starts to teach his son kung fu.

Like a Boss

USA 2020

Director: Miguel Arteta

Certificate 15 83m 17s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

As a teaming of performers from two of the most successful Hollywood comedies of the past decade – Rose Byrne from *Bridesmaids* (2011) and Tiffany Haddish from *Girls Trip* (2017) – *Like a Boss* certainly fits into a template for energetic if sometimes crass crowdpleasers driven by a principally female cast. But, sadly, what this feeble effort by director Miguel Arteta mostly demonstrates is that not even the ebullience of its leads or the contributions of its many capable supporting players can save a script that makes little sense, characters who make even less, or gags worn out by overuse, starting with the obligatory grossout, this time involving goat's milk.

Better things are heralded by the breezy early scenes that establish not just the chemistry between Byrne and Haddish but also their appealing generosity towards Billy Porter and Jennifer Coolidge, who walk away with nearly every scene they get as the duo's employees. Playing a cartoonish villain who is mocked both for her accent and her figure, Salma Hayek fares less well, which is especially disappointing given that her last pairing with Arteta was *Beatriz at Dinner* (2017), a comedy with a far defter take on matters of women, work and money. The fact that Byrne and Haddish's characters are so easily bamboozled by Hayek's conniving CEO strains credulity even by the lax standards of a comedy whose protagonists are frequently high. Likewise, for Hayek's Claire to eagerly espouse the values of female empowerment and mutual support while ruthlessly undercutting the actual women around her is an idea for a sharper-toothed movie than this one. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Marc Evans
Peter Principato
Joel Zadak
Itay Reiss

Screenplay

Sam Pitman
Adam Cole-Kelly

Story

Sam Pitman
Adam Cole-Kelly
Danielle
Sanchez-Witzel

Director of Photography

Jas Shelton

Edited by

Jay Deuby

Production Designer

Theresa Guleserian

Music

Christophe Beck

Production Sound Mixer

Erik H. Magnus

Costume Designer

Sekinah Brown

Choreographer

Aakomon Jones

@Paramount

Pictures Corporation

Production Companies

Paramount Pictures

presents an Artists

First production

Executive Producers

Tiffany Haddish

Nicolas Stern

Cast

Tiffany Haddish

Mia Carter

Rose Byrne

Mel Paige

Karan Soni

Josh Tinker

Jennifer Coolidge

Sydney

Ari Graynor

Angela

Natasha Rothwell

Jill

Jessica St. Clair

Kim

Billy Porter

Barret

Jacob Latimore

Harry

Jimmy O. Yang

Ron

Ryan Hansen

Greg

Salma Hayek

Claire Luna

Lisa Kudrow

Shay Whitmore

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Paramount

Pictures UK

Atlanta, present day. Inseparable friends since school, Mia and Mel run a cosmetics store that may soon close due to mounting debts. When a cosmetics giant led by Claire Luna makes an investment offer, Mel convinces the reluctant Mia to accept. Since a rupture between the friends means her company can take total control of their business, Claire exacerbates tensions between them. When they discover that Claire has been scheming to steal their signature product, Mia and Mel upstage her at a cosmetics show and announce a new venture financed by her former business partner.

Little Joe

Austria/United Kingdom/Germany 2019

Director: Jessica Hausner

Certificate 12A 105m 4s



Red alert: Emily Beecham

See Interview
on page 12

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

Two unruly women occupy the heart of Jessica Hausner's quietly paranoid thriller *Little Joe*.

On the one hand there is Alice, a bioengineer responsible for the creation of a new mood-lifting plant. Played by Emily Beecham (deserving Best Actress winner at Cannes last year), Alice is a cool, remote figure: dedicated to her work and uninterested, for the most part, in the romantic overtures of her colleague Chris (Ben Whishaw) or the drudgery of domestic labour. Every night, Alice returns late to her minimalist home to eat takeaway from cartons with her teenage son Joe (Kit Connor), after whom her plant is nicknamed. She is polite, enquiring after his day, but distracted. It is clear her real interests lie in the lab.

On the other hand there's Bella (a typically brilliant Kerry Fox), a lab assistant about whom rumours circulate of a mental breakdown. Bella is besotted with her dog, whose skittering presence in the pristine lab seems like a manifestation of her own chaotic emotions.

These two women collide uncomfortably when Bella accuses Alice of having created a monster: 'Little Joe', she believes, is infecting those who come into contact with it, turning them into emotionless zombies obsessed with protecting the plant. Is she correct that Alice is indeed an unwitting Frankenstein?

Working with her usual team of DP Martin Gschlacht, production designer Katharina Wöppermann, costume designer Tanja Hausner and editor Karina Ressler, Hausner carves out an

eerie atmosphere of studied artifice. Gschlacht pans evenly over the contents of the vast greenhouses like a CCTV camera, as the plants' tendrils stir and almost murmur. Typically for Hausner's films, many compositions are flat and symmetrical, allowing little point of entry: the team make magnificent use of Liverpool's Georgian architecture to render the world beyond the lab just as sterile and box-like as that within. But *Little Joe* also features a new type of shot for Hausner: spiky, angular, layering up glass and pillars and doorframes in a series of formations that seem to point towards the abyss. All of this is bathed in a strange, pastel palette of hospital green (canteen chairs, lab coats, rubber gloves) and Elastoplast peach-putty (Beecham's satin blouses, her smooth bowl haircut), against which Little Joe's crimson fronds make a violent smear. It's intriguing that Big Joe's Nikes, much commented on, are the only other flash of red in the film; and that red is a signature colour of sorts for Hausner, featuring prominently in both *Lourdes* (2009) and *Hotel* (2004).

Little Joe lacks the pathos of *Lourdes* (a film as much about the mystery of human behaviour as of divine miracles) or 2014's *Amour Fou*, functioning like *Hotel* as a kind of artfully affectless genre piece. Comparisons have been made to *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Village of the Damned*, but *Little Joe* is better placed alongside the recent *Zombi Child*, *Atlantics* and *Little Monsters* as part of a new strain of zombie film that suggests we are not so much possessed as already dispossessed – of our humanity, our emotion, our authenticity. What's weird here is that the introduction of the sinister plant makes barely any difference. Little Joe

renders those it infects oddly anodyne; but in the lab and at home, social interaction is already deadened. Fox apart, the actors give still, robotic performances that recall early Lanthimos.

One way of reading the film, then, is as a commentary on late-stage capitalism: in a world of Facebook and Big Pharma, we have no identity left to lose, and by letting go of nostalgia for our 'real' selves we might all be happy. Certainly, this is the conclusion suggested by the closing piece of pop music – Markus Binder's 'Happiness-Business' – which is as on the nose as Christian Petzold's use of Talking Heads' 'Road to Nowhere' at end of 2018's *Transit*. And yet the plant itself suggests the re-emergence of something repressed. Hausner is too subtle a filmmaker to be making an overtly feminist tract. Still... the final image lingers. Oddly phallic in bud, at the film's end, fully unfurled, Little Joe resembles nothing so much as a flaming – unruly – vagina dentata. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bruno Wagner
Bertrand Faivre
Philippe Bobet
Martin Gschlecht
Jessica Hausner
Gerardine O'Flynn
Written by
Jessica Hausner
Geraldine Bajard
Director of Photography
Martin Gschlecht
Edited by
Karina Ressler
Production Designer
Katharina Woppermann
Sound Engineer
Malcolm Cromie
Costume Designer
Tanja Hausner

©coop99
filmproduktion
GmbH/Little
Joe Productions
Ltd/Essential
Filmproduktion
GmbH/British
Broadcasting
Corporation/The

British Film Institute
Production Companies
A coop99, The
Bureau and Essential
Films production
A film by Jessica
Hausner
With the support
of Austrian Film
Institute, FISA - Film
Industry Support
Austria, Filmfonds
Wien, Kultur
Niederösterreich,
BBC Films,
Bayerischer
Rundfunk Arte,
Medienboard
Berlin-Brandenburg
In collaboration with
Coproduction Office,
Arte, ORF Film/
Fernseh-Abkommen
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
With the support
of Eurimages
Land
Niederösterreich
Executive Producers

Rose Garnett
Mary Burke
Vincent Gadelle
Marina Perales
Marhuenda
Michel Merkt

Cast
Emily Beecham
Alice Woodard
Ben Whishaw
Chris
Kerry Fox
Bella
Kit Connor
Joe Woodard
David Wilmut
Karl
Phénix Brossard
Ric
Sebastian Hülk
Ivan
Lindsay Duncan
psychotherapist

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
BFI Films

England, the present. Scientist Alice has developed a mood-lifting plant that will make people happier, provided they are willing to tend to and nurture it. Alice is divorced and lives with her son Joe. Her colleague Chris appears to be attracted to her, and the pair go on an awkward date. Her boss Karl is vaguely supportive, but another colleague, Bella, is hostile, especially after Alice's plants release a pollen that Bella believes is responsible for the death of her own crop. After Bella's dog is trapped in the greenhouse with Alice's plants, she claims his character has changed, and has him put down. Alice takes a plant home for Joe, naming it 'Little Joe'. Soon afterwards, Joe starts acting strangely, and asks to live with his father. Chris and other colleagues also begin behaving oddly. Alice confesses to having used unauthorised practices, but Karl still wants to continue the research. When Bella airs her suspicions about Little Joe, Chris and Karl chase her up a staircase and she falls to her death. Alice, now convinced Little Joe is dangerous, attempts to sabotage the crop, but Chris knocks her unconscious and leaves her in the greenhouse.

Sometime later, Alice drops Joe off with his father. At home, she says goodnight to her plant. It whispers back, "Goodnight Mum."

Lucian Freud

A Self Portrait

United Kingdom 2020, Director: David Bickerstaff
Certificate PG 86m 0s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Part of the specialist label Exhibition on Screen, this unfussy documentary supplies background to the recent Royal Academy of Arts show *Lucian Freud: The Self-Portraits*. A potted history of Freud's life – from his early years in Berlin to an uncertain start in the UK, several art schools and a stint as a merchant seaman curtailed by ill health – leads into a smoothly informative enquiry into his relationships and artistic practice, including analysis of some of his influences: Rembrandt, Velázquez, Francis Bacon.

Interviewees give pithy insights that combine deep knowledge of the artist's work with a healthy appetite for gossip. "Any number of relationships were available at once," notes painter and critic William Feaver of Freud's attractiveness to women, "and that became a lifelong habit." Artist David Austen explains that Freud "isn't a natural painter", and that the appeal of the work rests in the sense of difficulty and struggle it evokes. And sitter Martin Gayford, the subject of Freud's 'Man in a Blue Scarf', describes the intensity of the process: "For at least a year, I saw as much of Lucian as of my wife and children, maybe more."

While this film is mostly targeted at and of use to students and specialists, it's also a reminder that, in an age when documentaries tend to compete for bells, whistles and shocking moments, the calm and elegant transmission of expert knowledge and beautiful images can be more than enough. **S**



Canvassed views: *Lucian Freud: A Self-Portrait*

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Phil Grabsky
Co-written by
David Bickerstaff
Phil Grabsky
Based on the
exhibition *Lucian Freud: The Self-portraits*
Directed by
David Bickerstaff
Cinematographers
David Bickerstaff
Conall Freeley
Hugh Hood
Edited by
David Bickerstaff

Music
Asa Bennett
Dubbing Mixers
Lydia Brown
Tim Wheeler

©Exhibition
on Screen
Production Companies
Seventh Art
Productions and
Exhibition on
Screen present
Seventh Art
Productions for
Exhibition on Screen

Executive Producers
Tim Dawson
Phil Grabsky
Amanda Wilkie

narrated by
David Rintoul

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Seventh Art
Distribution

A documentary about the painter and draughtsman Lucian Freud, who died in 2011. Born in Berlin in 1922, he is brought to England in 1933 as his family evades the Nazis. After chequered educational experiences and service in the Merchant Navy, he establishes himself as an artist with a particular focus on portraiture. In 2008, his 1995 work 'Benefits Supervisor Sleeping' sells for £17.2 million, a record for a painting by a living artist. The film explores Freud's personal relationships, processes and influences.

Lullaby

Director: Lucie Borleteau
Certificate 15 99m 22s



Nanny in a state: Assya Da Silva, Karin Viard

Reviewed by Nikki Baughan

There's a sequence late in this French chiller in which a matriarchal middle-aged woman chastises her daughter-in-law for returning to work after having her two children. Leaving them with a nanny, she says, has forced on them a "cut-price mother". It's unclear whether this slur is in reference to the nanny or the stunned parent sitting across from her but, ultimately, its target is inconsequential. This uncomfortable scene underscores the problem at the heart of *Lullaby*: the seeping horror of director Lucie Borleteau and her co-writer Jérémie Elkaim's adaptation of Leïla Slimani's 2016 novel (which was based on a real-life case in New York in 2012) hangs squarely on the awful fact that it's obviously trying to lambast: that women are routinely judged on – and sometimes destroyed by – their maternal instinct, or lack of it.

In the film's earlier sequences, *Lullaby* makes some valid points about the limited options available to women who don't wish to be entirely defined by motherhood. Myriam (Leïla Bekhti) explicitly tells husband Paul (Antoine Reinartz) that life in their small Parisian flat with two children is suffocating her. He is understanding but dismissive, and there is never any indication that he might give up time from his own job to help with childcare. And so a nanny is the only choice.

The mother-in-law certainly has reason to lament the hiring of Louise (Karin Viard). While she may initially seem perfect for five-year-old Mila and her baby brother, there's something unsettling about her from the off – she often tests the children with aggressive games, shows them disproportionate amounts of affection. But instead of a sharp satire on the social status quo that places working women in nightmarishly impossible situations, *Lullaby* descends into a kitschy *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* psycho-thriller, as Louise slowly loses her grip in ways that more attentive parents would, it's suggested, see coming a mile away.

As Louise's behaviour grows ever more unhinged – she uses the kids' potty, bites the baby, wanders naked around the empty apartment – Viard's committed performance, together with the creeping visuals and discordant score,

Midnight Family

Mexico/USA 2019

Director: Luke Lorentzen

Certificate 15 80m 38s



makes for an atmospheric watch. This intensity slowly builds into a climactic final scene of unspeakable horror, which really leaves a mark.

Yet to what end? That this is a film based on real events means its makers can claim authenticity. Surely it's time, though, that issues of motherhood – of women actively wanting more from life than child rearing, or wanting only that – should stop being used as shorthand for easy genre thrills. Louise, driven to inhuman madness by the loss of her own child, is treated as a hysterical villain. And Myriam, guilty of nothing more than trying to find a balance (and, perhaps, of taking advantage of Louise's attentions), is handed the most brutal of punishments, shown in the most unnecessarily graphic of ways. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Pascal Caucheteux
Nathalie Gastaldo
Godeau
Philippe Godeau
Grégoire Sorlat

Written by

Lucie Borleteau
Jérémie Elkaim

Based on the novel
[*Chanson douce*]
by Leïla Slimani

Director of

Photography

Alexis Kavyrchine

Editing

Laurence Briaud

Art Direction

Samuel Deshors

Music

Pierre Desprats

Sound Recordist

Marie-Clotilde Chéry

Costume Designer

Dorothee Guiraud

Production

Companies

Pan-Européenne,

Why Not Productions

and StudioCanal

present a Why

Not Productions,

Pan-Européenne,

StudioCanal,

France 3 Cinéma

co-production

With the

participation of

Canal+, Ciné+,

France Télévisions

With the support of

Région Île-de-France

In association

with Indéfim 7,

Cinéma 13

A film by Lucie

Borleteau

Executive

Producers

Martine Cassinelli

Nicolas Livechi

Cast

Karin Viard

Louise

Leïla Bekhti

Myriam

Antoine Reinartz

Paul

Assya Da Silva

Mila

Noëlle Renaude

Sylvie, Paul's mother

Rehab Mehal

Wafa

Calypso Peretjatko

Adam, 9 months

Benjamin Patissier

Max Patissier

Adam, 15 months

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

StudioCanal Limited

French theatrical title

Chanson douce

Alternative

festival title

The Perfect Nanny

In present-day Paris, professional couple Myriam and Paul hire a nanny, Louise, to look after their young children. While Louise initially seems a perfect fit, she begins to exhibit increasingly strange behaviour – accusing the children of violence, turning up in the early hours. Louise reveals that she is still grieving for the loss of her own daughter. Her discovery that the children will be attending a crèche tips her over the edge and she murders them both.



Pushed to the limit: *Midnight Family*

Reviewed by Demetrios Matheou

Mexico City is one of those places where day-to-day life often seems stranger than fiction – something that comes across very powerfully in this fascinating, disturbing, yet weirdly entertaining fly-on-the-wall documentary. If a filmmaker wanted to dramatise the crazy scenario revealed here, there would be absolutely no need for bells and whistles.

American Luke Lorentzen's second doc feature opens with a caption stating that "a loose system of private ambulances has taken over much of the city's emergency healthcare". The need speaks for itself – without them, people would be dying on the streets. With them, however, the odds still feel pretty low. Lorentzen's masterstroke is the prism through which he chooses to view this cowboy industry: the Ochoa family. Not only does he have himself a searing social issue, but a personable set of characters and a highly unusual spin on the tradition of the 'family business'.

Shooting the film himself (he also served as producer and editor), Lorentzen spent six months driving around with the Ochoa family as they cruised the streets looking for patients, in a twisted reversal of 'ambulance chasing' – here, it's the ambulance crews themselves who are in exploitative pursuit of trade.

The Ochoa team comprises father Fer, who appears to have his own health problems, barely says a word and defers in all things to his

17-year-old son Juan, the brains and dynamo of the operation. These two share driving duties and a novel form of traffic management, using a loudspeaker to divert other vehicles from their path with urgent commands such as, "Move to the left, we could be saving your family." They're accompanied by Manuel Hernández (possibly a relation), a kindly, conscientious soul who appears to offer most of the immediate medical attention. And then there's Juan's brother Josué, who's aged nine or ten and simply along for the ride, playing by himself in the back of the ambulance. There's no sign of women in their lives, other than the girlfriend on the other end of Juan's cell phone, to whom he gives nightly reports of their escapades ("the craziest fractures I've ever seen"). The only discernible parenting that Josué receives is the instruction: "No school, no ambulance."

The film exists almost entirely at night, in a city without its customary vividness – a result of the hour, but also of the camera's focus inside the ambulance, or lingering in hospital corridors and car parks. At the same time, there's a charged chaos in the air, created partly by the sense that we're witnessing a distinctly amateur healthcare, and partly by the Wacky Races competitiveness of the rival ambulances, careering at high speed in a bid to be the first on the scene. With young Josué tossed about in the back, one wonders how Lorentzen can stay on



his feet, let alone operate his camera. They attend the usual assortment of casualties: car-crash victims, a teenage girl who's been headbutted by her boyfriend, a woman who's fallen four storeys from a building, a drug addict oblivious to the fact that his baby can't breathe. Throughout, the Ochoas perform a balancing act between care and self-interest. If a patient is conscious, they ask them directly for payment; if not, then a family member on the scene, who will sometimes be openly contemptuous. Each exchange is a haggle, though the Ochoas have hearts: we see Fer accept a patient's gratitude rather than cash; after another busy evening, Juan bemoans the fact that "we didn't make a single peso". With the police increasing the pressure – at one point Juan has to pay a bribe to avoid arrest – it's no wonder the family are living hand-to-mouth: their apartment has no furniture, not even beds; each night they pool their pesos for fast food.

And so the grip of Lorentzen's film is tightened as we see his subjects' goodwill wilt under the pressure. There are clear signs that the Ochoas are taking their injured to private hospitals – which pay for patients – even when a state facility is closer; and in one instance, it does seem that the patient has died as a result. Suddenly, these engaging people leave a bitter taste in the mouth.

Lorentzen's hands-off approach – no interviews, no voiceover narration, the only source of information provided by the camera-savvy Juan's casual remarks – brings mixed results. Many questions remain frustratingly unanswered. Have the Ochoas received training? How much of their equipment can they actually operate? How legal *are* they? At the same time, the unmoderated, bruising immersion evokes the Wild West nature of this excuse for healthcare. Anyone who has a beef with the NHS should watch *Midnight Family* and count their blessings. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kellen Quinn
Luke Lorentzen
Daniela Alatorre
Elena Fortes
Cinematography
Luke Lorentzen
Editing by
Luke Lorentzen
Music
Los Shajatos
Sound Design
Matias Barberis

©Family Ambulance
Film LLC
**Production
Companies**
A Hedgehog Films
production in
co-production
with No Ficción
In association with
Catapult Film Fund

Subtitles

Distributor
Dogwoof

In Colour
[2.35:1]

A documentary filmed in Mexico City, where the government operates fewer than 45 emergency ambulances for a population of nine million. Filling the gap is an underground industry of private ambulances, run for profit by people with questionable training and regulation. The film follows the Ochoa family, who operate one such ambulance. Every night, they cruise the city in search of patients, listening to their police radio or paying police contacts for notice of crime incidents and road accidents. The patients are charged for delivery to hospital, though the Ochoas – more kind-hearted than some of their rivals – perform the service for free if someone can't afford it. However, as the police tighten the supposed requirements for running the ambulance and increase their bribe demands accordingly, the Ochoas become more unscrupulous.

Mr. Jones

Poland/Canada/Ukraine/United Kingdom/USA 2019
Director: Agnieszka Holland
Certificate 15 118m 44s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The government-induced starvation in Soviet Ukraine in 1932-33, known as the Holodomor, may well have killed as many people as the Holocaust, though we hear much less about it. Polish-born Agnieszka Holland, with her acute political antennae (*Europa Europa*, *In Darkness*), makes an ideal director to tackle the subject; too bad that debut screenwriter Andrea Chalupa can't quite match her for dramatic pacing. *Mr. Jones* was originally released with a 140-minute running time; it's since been pared back to 118 minutes, but it occasionally still feels overstretched and repetitive.

The main problem is the insertion into this real-life story of extraneous matter, notably episodes of George Orwell (Joseph Mawle) writing *Animal Farm*, said to have been partly inspired by the courageous reporting of Welshman Gareth Jones, who dared penetrate the forbidden territory of Ukraine and single-handedly report on the ravages he saw; and the tentative attraction between Jones (James Norton) and fellow journalist Ada Brooks (Vanessa Kirby). Neither thread adds much, and serves only to sluice out much sense of urgency from the first half of the film.

Once Jones reaches Ukraine, the darkness takes hold – literally so, since most of this crucial sequence is shot in near-monochrome. Music, used sparingly elsewhere, is here almost entirely absent from the soundtrack; the relentless wind and crunch of snow beneath boots serve as comfortless accompaniment. Having seen people grabbing desperately at stale crusts and tree bark, Jones arrives at a hut where he's surprised to find a family of sad-eyed youngsters with meat to cook. Only after he's shared their meal does he discover, to his horror, what it is they and he have been eating.

Norton makes an appealing Jones, principled and incorruptible, stubbornly trying to



Telling the world: James Norton

convince a complacent Lloyd George (Kenneth Cranham) of the urgency of what he's seen. By contrast, Peter Sarsgaard entertainingly goes full-on sleaze as Pulitzer-winning *New York Times* journalist Walter Duranty, splitting his time between lavishing oleaginous praise on Stalin's regime and hosting decadent drug-fuelled parties where he wanders around stark naked, embracing unclothed males and females alike. *Mr. Jones* stumbles at times, but it's a valuable reminder of a heroic figure and a forgotten genocide, all the more relevant at a time when serious journalism is under crass attack. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Stanislaw Dziedzic
Andrea Chalupa
Klaudia Smieja-Rostworowska
Story/Screenplay
Andrea Chalupa
**Director of
Photography**
Tomasz Naumiuk
Edited by
Michał Czarniecki
Production Design
Grzegorz Piatkowski
Original Music
Antoni Komasa-Lazarkiewicz
Sound Supervisor
Wojciech Mielmaka

Costume Designer
Aleksandra Staszko

©Film Produkcja,
Parkhurst, Kinorob,
Jones Boy Film,
Krakow Festival Office,
Studio Produkcjne
Orka, Kino Swiat,
Silesia Film Institute
in Katowice
**Production
Companies**
Film Produkcja and
Parkhurst present in
co-production with
Kinorob, Jones Boy
Film in association
with Krakow Festival

Office, Studio
Produkcjne Orka, Kino
Swiat, Silesia Film
Institute in Katowice
Co-financed by
Polish Film Institute,
Ukrainian Film State
Agency, Creative
Scotland, Film
Produkcja Sp. z o.o.
Supported by the
Scottish Government
and the National
Lottery through
Creative Scotland's
Production
Growth Fund
Developed with
the support of the

BFI's Film Fund
Co-production: Studio
Produkcjne Orka Sp.
z o.o., Kino Swiat Sp.
z o.o., kbf Krakow
Festival Office
Co-financed by the
City of Krakow
Supported by Krakow
Film Commission
Co-production:
Silesia Film Institute
in Katowice
Co-financed by the
Silesian Film Fund
A Polish Film Institute,
Ukrainian State Film
Agency co-financed
production

Development
support Independent
Filmmaker Project
Executive Producer
Leah Ternery-Lord

Cast
James Norton
Gareth Jones
Vanessa Kirby
Ada Brooks
Peter Sarsgaard
Walter Duranty
Joseph Mawle
George Orwell
Kenneth Cranham
David Lloyd George
Celyn Jones

Matthew
Krzysztof Pieczyński
Maxim Litvinov
Matthew Marsh
William Randolph
Hearst
Marcin Czarnik
Paul Kleb

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

Polish theatrical title
Obywatel Jones

1933. Gareth Jones, young foreign policy adviser to ex-Liberal PM Lloyd George, tries to convince him and his colleagues of the danger posed by Hitler. They laugh at him, and Lloyd George dismisses him. A call from Gareth's friend, journalist Paul Kleb, in Moscow arouses his curiosity. Using his political connections, Gareth travels to Moscow, and learns that Kleb has been killed. He contacts 'New York Times' bureau chief Walter Duranty, who assures him that under Stalin's enlightened leadership everything in the USSR is wonderful. But Gareth hears rumours of

a terrible famine in Ukraine, confirmed by Walter's assistant – and Paul's ex-lover – British journalist Ada Brooks. He obtains permission to visit Ukraine, evades his minder and discovers that millions there are starving, as Stalin is confiscating the grain harvest to fund industrial modernisation. Arrested, Gareth returns to Britain, but no one will publish his story. Back in his native Wales he encounters US press baron William Randolph Hearst, who runs the story. End titles tell of Gareth's murder two years later in Mongolia, probably at Soviet instigation.

Portrait of a Lady on Fire

France 2019
Director: Céline Sciamma
Certificate 15 121m 35s

See Feature
on page 40

Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

There are some films so exquisite that any attempt to put them into words feels like an act of violence. Céline

Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (the French title translates more accurately as 'Portrait of a Young Girl on Fire' – the difference at the level of power and freedom matters) is just such a film. It seems spun of gossamer, at once tensile and tenuous. "Take time to look at me," a voice commands in its opening moments. This moment is fleeting, it implies. Appreciate it while you can.

After a brief prologue, the film opens in earnest as artist Marianne (Noémie Merlant) arrives on the Brittany coast sometime in the 18th century. She is sodden and panting, having thrown herself off the skiff bringing her to shore in order to rescue her materials, which have been swept overboard in a gorgeous, wordless scene (and one of very few to feature a man). On the beach, in the dusky half-light, the rocks form a proscenium arch. She wrings out her skirts and climbs to the isolated manor house that will be her lodging for the next seven days.

Marianne has been given a week to paint the portrait of Héloïse (Adèle Haenel), the second daughter of an unseen merchant. The painting will be sent to a prospective suitor in Milan; if he likes it well enough, he will marry the girl. Héloïse's older sister, it's suggested, has killed herself rather than accept the same fate. Héloïse herself has chosen another form of resistance: refusing to sit for the portrait. Marianne's assignment must be carried out in secret with the aid of maid Sophie (Luàna Bajrami), while she poses as a chaperone to the young woman.

What follows is a love story, one that is thrilling, erotic and all the more pleasing for feeling at once strange and familiar. The plot incorporates elements of Sarah Waters's *Fingersmith*, Choderlos de Laclos's novel *Dangerous Liaisons* and Stephen Frears's film version, and du Maurier's and Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, as well as the latter's *Vertigo*. A gorgeous, extended shot of a weeping woman listening to Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons' brings to mind Jonathan Glazer's *Birth* (2004) and Michael Haneke's *The Piano Teacher* (2001).

The film's compositions, meanwhile, recall artworks both timely and anachronistic: turning in the candlelit kitchen, Sophie looks like Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*; Héloïse, her hair escaping from its pins, resembles Gerhard Richter's *Betty*; a portrait spoiled with turps becomes a Francis Bacon portrait. Repeated inserts of a ghostly Héloïse in a wedding dress add a dash of gothic symbolism.

Merlant has the air of a beautiful small animal, an ermine or a mink. Her eyes are quick, dark, darting. Haenel is slower, with the dazed look of an animal bred in captivity. Their very physiques capture the contrast in the two women's freedoms and fates. This is a film of shapes and textures: the seashell curve of a perfect pink ear, the stiff folds of a brocade dress, the scratching of charcoal over crisp cream paper.

Much of the film is a chamber piece, centring on the three women (four if we count Valeria



The sea inside: Adèle Haenel

Golino's ambivalent matriarch) within the confines of the house. There are excursions to the exterior, but even here the women struggle to breathe freely. Their corsets pinch, and they wrap scarves around their faces to protect them from the wind and sand and salty air – all those coarse elements they secretly long for. Time and again these women return to the beach and the boundless horizon. Cinematographer Claire Mathon, who also shot Mati Diop's *Atlantics* (2019) and Alain Guiraudie's *Stranger by the Lake* (2013), once more demonstrates an affinity for water: for rushing sea tides and the foaming crests of waves.

The film's most indelible scene takes place on the beach, as the three protagonists stand around a bonfire with other local women. An uncanny, thrumming sound starts up, one that seems to come from below the world itself and to resonate within our bodies. It is like something from Lucile Hadžihalilovic or Gaspar Noé. Gradually it resolves into the sound of these women singing: "*Fugere non possum*" – we cannot escape. There is a paradoxical beauty here. None of these women can flee their fate, but here, in their connection to one another, there is consolation – and something like freedom. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bénédicte Couvreur
Written by
Céline Sciamma
Director of Photography
Claire Mathon
Editing
Julien Lacheray
Art Direction
Thomas Grezaud
Original Score
Para One

[i.e. Jean-Baptiste de Laubier]
Arthur Simonini
Sound
Julien Sicart
Daniel Sobrino
Costume Designer
Dorothee Guiraud

©Lilies Films/
Hold-Up Films &
Productions/ARTE
France Cinéma

Production Companies
Lilies Films presents
In co-production with ARTE France Cinéma and Hold-Up Films & Productions
With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée and the support of Région Île-de-France

With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, ARTE France
In association with Pyramide Distribution, MK2 Films and Cinécap 2
A film by Céline Sciamma
A Lilies Films production

Cast
Noémie Merlant
Marianne
Adèle Haenel
Héloïse
Luàna Bajrami
Sophie
Valeria Golino
countess
Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Subtitles
Distributor
Curzon

French theatrical title
Portrait de la jeune fille en feu

Paris, the 18th century. Marianne teaches young women to paint. After one of her students uncovers a canvas of hers, 'Portrait of a Lady on Fire', she recalls how it came about.

Some years before, Marianne arrives at a Brittany residence to paint the portrait of a young woman, Héloïse, to be sent to a wealthy suitor in Milan. Héloïse is reluctant to marry and does not want to sit for the portrait, so Marianne will have to paint in secret, while posing as a chaperone. Marianne and Héloïse grow close. When Marianne completes the

portrait, she admits the ruse. Héloïse feels it is a betrayal of their friendship, so Marianne destroys the painting. Héloïse offers to sit for her. They begin a sexual relationship while Héloïse's mother is away. On the eve of the mother's return, the pair argue about the different freedoms available to them. The next day, they say an emotional goodbye.

Marianne recounts seeing Héloïse twice more. Once in a portrait at an exhibition that included a secret sign of their relationship, and a final time as she watched her, unseen, at a music concert.

The Public

Director: Emilio Estevez



Taking a stand: Christian Slater, Emilio Estevez

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Emilio Estevez's *The Public* is, as they say, a 'well-intentioned' piece of work. Since writing, directing and starring in 1986's *Wisdom*, Estevez has jumped behind the camera sporadically, and here, wearing all three hats again, he turns to father Martin Sheen's native southwestern Ohio to make a movie that embodies something of the earnest, idealistic liberalism that dad made his stock-in-trade on seven seasons of *The West Wing*.

The film takes place largely in the confines of the downtown branch of the Cincinnati Public Library, its corridors and open spaces freely roamed by DP Juan Miguel Azpiroz's camera, covering the comings and goings of an ensemble cast that's like a scaled-down version of the kind Estevez put in motion in *Bobby* (2006). Estevez plays an ex-addict librarian who finds himself drawn to the centre of an Occupy-style sit-in

staged at the library by homeless patrons, who refuse to leave at closing time for fear of being out on the street on the coldest night of the year.

The result of their protest is portrayed as a human triumph, though in fact the necessity of such a mend-and-make-do solution is an indictment of the system's failed infrastructure – the public library isn't the institution best equipped to serve as a shelter for the homeless, just as art isn't the vehicle best equipped to enact political action. (There is another outlet for that: it's called political action.) Which is where the efficacy or even desirability of those good intentions comes into question. With all of its saintly-salty streetwise panhandlers peacefully protesting, what *The Public* lacks is genuinely subversive spirit, a streak of true Buñuelian anarchy – the bad intentions that might actually make the mandarin classes shiver for their safety. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Lisa Niedenthal
Emilio Estevez
Alex Lebovici
Steve Ponce
Written by
Emilio Estevez
Director of Photography
Juan Miguel Azpiroz
Edited by
Richard Chew
Richard Hu
Yang-Hua Hu
Production Designer
David J. Bomba
Music
Tyler Bates
Joanne Higginbottom
Costume Designer
Christopher Lawrence

Production Companies
Hammerstone presents in association with Living the Dream Films an E2 Films production
A film by Emilio Estevez

Cedarvale Pictures
Executive Producers
Ray Bouderau
Jordan Bouderau
Donal O'Sullivan
Bob Bonder
Bryant Goulding
Craig Phillips
Janet Templeton
Trevor Drinkwater
David Guillod
Richard Hull
Michael Bien
Brent Guttman
Tyler W. Konney
Jeffrey Pollack

Cast

Alec Baldwin
Bill Ramstead
Emilio Estevez
Stuart Goodson
Jena Malone
Myra
Taylor Schilling
Angela
Christian Slater
Josh Davis
Gabrielle Union
Rebecca Parks

Jeffrey Wright
Anderson
Michael K. Williams
Jackson
Che 'Rhymefest' Smith
Big George
Jacob Vargas
Ernesto
Ki Hong Lee
Chip
Patrick Hume
Caesar
Richard T. Jones
Chief Edwards
Susanna Thompson
Marcy Ramstead
Spencer Garrett
John Harper
Michael
Douglas Hall
Smutts

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Parkland
Entertainment

Cincinnati, present day. As winter temperatures drop, library supervisor Stuart Goodson reports to his job at the downtown public library, where he must assist patrons, many of them homeless and mentally disturbed. He must also deal with a district attorney intent on having him fired for an incident involving the eviction of an ill-smelling patron. Returning home after work, Stuart discusses his former battle with addiction with his neighbour Angela, with whom he begins a romance. Heading to work the following day, Stuart learns that a homeless man froze to death outside the library the night before, turned away by overcrowded shelters. That evening, a group of the homeless, led by a veteran named Jackson, refuse to leave the library at closing time for fear of the deadly cold. Stuart, threatened with dismissal by his employer, joins them in their protest. The occupation draws the attention of the local news media, the publicity-hungry DA and the police, whose crisis negotiator engages with Stuart. An attempt is made to slander Stuart by revealing his own history of homelessness and drug use, but the protest wins the support of the public, who respond with donations. Finally deciding to take back the library by force, the police are greeted by the protesters who, stripped naked, serenade them with a rendition of 'I Can See Clearly Now' as they are arrested.

Push

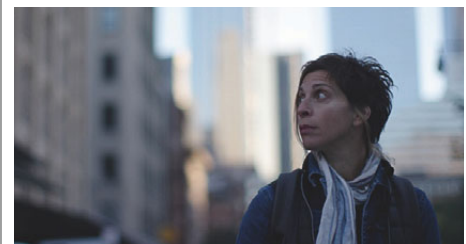
Sweden/Germany/Finland/Norway/Canada/United Kingdom/USA/Canada 2019
Director: Fredrik Gertten

Reviewed by Chris Hall

There has been a steady stream of documentaries about gentrification and social cleansing in recent years. Kelly Anderson's *My Brooklyn* (2012) explored the iniquities of rezoning, Cornelius Swart's *Priced Out* (2017) focused on Portland, Oregon, and Zed Nelson's *The Street* (2019) offered up a synecdoche of this global phenomenon by highlighting just one road in London's Hoxton. Swedish director Fredrik Gertten's compelling new documentary *Push* takes a much broader view, following the engaging Leilani Farha, a UN special rapporteur, as she travels the world doggedly collecting evidence for her report on inadequate housing. *Push* carefully builds its case city by city, and we see the human cost of displacement as developers buy up land and create luxury properties for people who do not already live in the community.

Push urgently asks who are cities for, who's going to live in them, and how will they function when only the rich are there? Though the film benefits from some heavyweight talking heads – the sociologist Saskia Sassen is good on housing as an asset and the failure of the political class to get to grips with what's happening, and the economist Joseph Stiglitz clearly explains how the 2008 global financial crisis has played a big part in increasing wealth inequality and how this fuels further gentrification – the structural problem is that there is no smoking gun.

Farha's pursuit of a private equity company throughout the film hits a dead end when the firm's representatives simply don't turn up to be interviewed for her report. Though it's telling enough in itself, what *Push* really needed was that confrontation. But when even the UN delegates are bored by her report – we see them distractedly looking at their phones – we realise the full nature of the problem. **S**



Crisis report: Leilani Farha

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Margarete Jangård
2nd Producer
Kerstin Übelacker
Cinematography
Janice d'Avila
Iris Ng
Editor
Erik Wall Bäfving
Anders Bewarp
Music
Florença Di Concilio
Sound Design
Martin Hennel

@WG Film AB,
SVT, Film i Skåne
Production Companies
WG Film presents in co-production with SVT, Film i Skåne, ZDF/Arte, YLE, NRK, TVO with support from and in association with Swedish Film Institute, Nordisk Film & TV Fond,

Bertha Foundation, Omidyar Network, City of Malmö
Co-producer Cave 7
Executive Producer
Fredrik Gertten

In Colour
[1.78:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Johnny Tull

A documentary following a UN special rapporteur as she travels to Toronto, Chile, London, Milan, Sweden, Berlin and Barcelona, collecting evidence from residents and talking to experts for a report on inadequate housing, which we see her deliver to the UN.

Quezon's Game

Philippines 2018
Director: Matthew Rosen



Visa visionary: David Bianco, Billy Ray Gallion, Raymond Bagatsing

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

This deeply felt, diligently made feature recounts the little-known story of the effort by Philippine president Manuel Quezon to honour both the history of Jewish immigration to his country and his own humanitarian conscience by securing visas for Jewish refugees from the Nazi regime. The Philippines was at that time an American colony, and clearance had to come from the US, represented here by high commissioner Paul McNutt (James Paoletti) and Colonel Dwight Eisenhower (David Bianco), then chief military aide to General Douglas MacArthur. It is Quezon's popularity and charisma, however, that sell the idea to the Philippine people; and the project is lent added personal urgency by his recurring and frequently debilitating tuberculosis.

Raymond Bagatsing is appropriately sympathetic and commanding in the role, and possessed of a grave elegance that helps a film clearly not swimming in money to feel like the period piece it needs to be (even if its title remains confounding – at no stage does Quezon seem playful, or his project akin to a game). Billy Ray Gallion as the determined, emotional Jewish businessman Alex Frieder and Rachel Alejandro as first lady Aurora Quezon also acquit

themselves well in their roles, and the film is effective at conveying the edginess and sporadic excitement of changing times in a colony buzzing with expats, military men, go-betweens and spies. Showing up for dinner at a ritzy German restaurant, the clubbable, well-connected Frieder suddenly finds himself refused access, because he's on the doorman's new list of Jews; Gallion plays his confused, humiliated retreat well.

Unfortunate, then, that the film has a general clunkiness: there's a lack of physical action to balance the endless talking scenes; the dialogue itself is often stilted and improbable ("Imagine what Germany could be if it weren't for the Nazis!"; "How the hell are we going to get 10,000 travel clearances from the devil himself?"); and although there's no dishonour in working with restricted resources, some accents, performances and hair-and-makeup jobs here leave the filmmakers' dearth of options painfully evident. The bad guys, meanwhile, American and German alike, are so crudely painted that they might as well enter their scenes accompanied by cracks of thunder. This choice robs the film of some authenticity: then as now, it was its normalisation that made anti-Semitism menacing, not Disney-villain sneers. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Carlo Katigbak
Olivia M. Lamasan
Lorena Rosen
Linggit Tan

Written by

Janice Y. Perez
Dean Rosen

Additional Dialogue

Anthony Macarayan

Original Story

Matthew Rosen

Design Team

Headed by
Maria Rowella Talusig

Music

Dean Rosen

Production

Sound Mixer

Anglea T. Pereyra

Production Companies

ABS-CBN Films

Production Companies

Productions, Star

Production Companies

Cinema, An iWant

Production Companies

original movie,

Production Companies

Kinotek Productions

Production Companies

Executive Producers

Production Companies

Carlo L. Katigbak

Production Companies

Olivia M. Lamasan

Production Companies

Linggit Tan-Marasigan

Production Companies

Lorena H. Rosen

Production Companies

Cast

Production Companies

Raymond Bagatsing

Production Companies

Manuel L. Quezon

Sound Mixer

Manuel L. Quezon

Sound Mixer

James Paoletti

Sound Mixer

Paul V. McNutt

Sound Mixer

Jennifer

Sound Mixer

Blair-Bianco

Sound Mixer

Mamie Eisenhower

Sound Mixer

Audie Gemora

Sound Mixer

Sergio Osmeña

Sound Mixer

Billy Ray Gallion

Sound Mixer

Alex Frieder

Sound Mixer

Tony Ahn

Sound Mixer

Herbert Frieder

Sound Mixer

Miguel Faustmann

Sound Mixer

Douglas MacArthur

New York, 1944. Exiled Philippine president Manuel Quezon and his wife Aurora watch the liberation of the Nazi death camps on television. We flash back to 1938. The Philippines remains a US territory, though its coming independence has been agreed. With pressure mounting on America to join the war in Europe and boatloads of Jewish refugees being turned away from both the US and Canada, Quezon and his US allies – high commissioner Paul McNutt, Jewish businessman Alex Frieder and future president Colonel Dwight Eisenhower – forge a plan to secure visas for Jewish refugees to come to the Philippines. The Nazis agree, but there is resistance both from American higher-ups and Quezon's own vice-president. Quezon appeals directly to the Philippine people, who protest and strike in favour of admitting the refugees. Quezon, meanwhile, becomes ill with the recurring tuberculosis that will eventually kill him. Visas are finally granted for 1,200 Jews. Exiled to the US once Japan occupied in 1942, Quezon dies in 1944. The Philippines gains independence in 1946.

Sound Mixer

In Colour and

Sound Mixer

Black & White

Sound Mixer

[1.85:1]

Sound Mixer

Part-subtitled

Sound Mixer

Distributor

Sound Mixer

ABS-CBN Europe

Second Spring

United Kingdom 2018
Director: Andy Kelleher

Reviewed by Chris Hall

Second Spring is a small-budget British feature directed by Andy Kelleher and starring Cathy Naden as enigmatic middle-aged lecturer Kathy. She starts to become forgetful and impulsive, but only her friends and family are aware of this. It takes us a while to discover the contours of her relationships. Is she still living with her husband Tim (Matthew Jure)? Or are they separated or in an open relationship? She meets Nick (Jerry Killick), a gardener who lives on a narrowboat, and has an affair with him, but without telling him about her diagnosis of frontotemporal dementia, which affects her ability to empathise and her sense of compassion. Nick just sees in her a fellow free spirit and drifter, rather than anything pathological (and it helps that one of her symptoms is a much increased sex drive).

A lot of the backgrounds and images in *Second Spring* evoke decay and loss but also wilderness and wonder, all metaphors for a fresh chance in life and for Kathy's almost childlike apprehension of her surroundings. When she and Nick visit the Hoo Peninsula in Kent, the marshlands seem to provide a landscape on which she can project her new self, and offer up images of renewal, childhood, memory, loss and change. The film is beautifully rendered on 16mm Fujifilm stock – the last to be shot on Fujifilm, according to Kelleher. This befits a work concerned with the end of things but appreciating surfaces and the moment.

Though *Second Spring* is incredibly low-key and subtle, its central performances, especially from Naden, and intriguing landscape photography lend it a melancholic, atmospheric charm. Ⓢ



Killick, Naden

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Andy Kelleher
Amiram Bukowski
Screenplay
Martin Herron

Producers

Jonas Mortensen

Producers

Editors

Andy Kelleher

Ariadna Fatjo-Vilas

Producers

Production Design

Ana Viana

Producers

Music

Peter Zummo

Producers

Sound

Valerio Cerini

Producers

Costume Design

Giulia Scrimieri

Producers

Luana Da Silveira

Producers

©Late Autumn

Producers

Limited

Producers

Production

Producers

Company

Neat Films presents

Producers

Cast

Cathy Naden

Kathy

Jerry Killick

Nick

Matthew Jure

Tim

Indra Ové

Trish

Eric Richard

David

Simeon Willis

Paul

Producers

Karl Collins

Graham

Adrian Annis

Terry

Sakuntala

Ramane

Alison

Thaisia Morgan

Hannah

Myles Blake

Kyle

Peter Spowage

Andy

In Colour

[1.66:1]

Producers

Distributor

Miracle

Communications

London, present day. Kathy becomes absent-minded and impulsive. She meets Nick and has an affair with him, without telling him that she has been diagnosed with dementia. They visit his childhood home in north Kent, where Kathy overhears a conversation about plans for an airport. She steals a rare Roman artefact and places it in the marshes, thinking this will save the area.

Spies in Disguise

USA 2019

Directors: Troy Quane, Nick Bruno
Certificate PG 101m 51s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Amid speculation about who'll be the next James Bond, the Blue Sky CG animation studio offers its own answer, a strutting cartoon superspy voiced by Will Smith. But after his tuxedoed introduction, the character is turned into a pratfalling pigeon by a freethinking millennial inventor who looks for alternatives to violence (voiced by Tom Holland). He can't be called Q, and the Smith spy isn't called James, but the inventor still tries out the codename 'Hydrogen Bond'; the joke's representative of a smartly funny film.

Blue Sky, whose recent cartoons have been poor, has taken cues from 2015's *Minions* (by the rival Illumination studio), and the comedy here is fast and punchy – Smith's avian transformation scene is cruelly hilarious. The last act is riskier, with a liberal message about finding kinder solutions and the horror of collateral damage (though the film can't quite say that Smith's character has killed *innocent* non-Americans). It's heartfelt, but it sits uncomfortably in a film where most of the bad guys are literal 'cartoon' caricatures. The heroic niceness of Holland's character is more convincing; even his dead-mum backstory is used to make a wider point about how one can choose to respond to tragedy.

The film's insurmountable problem is its narrative image. A cartoon about pigeons will entice few viewers away from *Frozen 2*, whose own liberal message is far clumsier. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Peter Chernin Jenno Topping Michael J. Travers	Jeremy Lazare	Ears Masi Oka Kimura
Screenplay Brad Copeland Lloyd Taylor	Production Companies Twentieth Century Fox presents a Blue Sky Studios production	Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]
Screen Story Cindy Davis Inspired by the animated short film <i>Pigeon: Impossible</i> [2009] by Lucas Martell	Executive Producers Chris Wedge Kori Adelson	Some screenings presented in 3D
Lighting Supervisor Jeeyun Sung Chisholm	Voice Cast Will Smith Lance Sterling Tom Holland Walter Beckett Rashida Jones Marcy Kappel Ben Mendelsohn Keller Killian, "Robohand" Reba McEntire Joy Jenkins, 'Joyless' Rachel Brosnahan Wendy Karen Gillan Eyes DJ Khaled	Distributor The Walt Disney Studios
Edited by Randy Trager Christopher Campbell		
Production Designer Michael Knapp		
Music Theodore Shapiro		
Supervising Sound Designer Randy Thom		
Animation Supervisors Joseph Antonuccio Jeff Gabor		

Superspy Lance Sterling is framed for the theft of a military attack drone and goes on the run. He seeks help from young inventor Walter, whom he recently fired because of the latter's insistence on eccentric, non-lethal gadgets. Lance mistakenly drinks Walter's newest invention, a solution that turns him into a pigeon. Over the subsequent adventure, Lance realises that his own casual use of violence motivated the drone thief, Killian, who targets Lance's colleagues in Washington in revenge. Using Walter's technology, the inventor and Lance save the day, capturing Killian alive.

Spycies

People's Republic of China 2018

Director: Guillaume Ivernel

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Solidly animated but narratively underpowered, this Chinese-French co-production is a chase-heavy animated family feature whose nicely rendered good looks (delightfully detailed cityscapes, whirling weather) are diminished by the lack of a smart, original story. Director Guillaume Ivernel employs the same mix of realistic settings and wacky cartoon characters that caught the eye in his polished, story-light 2008 *Dragon Hunters*.

This time around, there's a strong whiff of 2016's *Zootropolis* in odd-couple cat-and-rat investigators Vlad and Hector, traversing a hi-tech city populated by animals, in search of a dangerous substance that transforms the film's villain. Even the corruption that surfaces unexpectedly in the city's institutions feels thematically familiar. Heavily reliant on action sequences to drive it along (a motorbike chase that creates *Bourne*-style havoc, a basement battle with the ice-blasting 'Demon of the Cold'), the story punctuates long stretches of frantic comic business with sudden bursts of complex plot. Elaborate schemes to save endangered species by reversing global warming are unveiled, then paid off in a hasty series of twists.

There are some interesting themes (species extinction, climate change), which show the influence of Japanese animation's eco-interests. But the thin characterisation and largely-love-interest female roles give the film a generic feel, unlike better-crafted US-Chinese animated features such as *Abominable* (2019) or the amiable *Rock Dog* (2016). Competent voice work from game-and-cartoon veterans Kirk Thornton as Vlad and Dino Andrade as Hector can't add much when the characters struggle to develop beyond their smartmouth-and-nerd sparring positions. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Created by Zhang Zhiyi Produced by Ya Ning Producers Zuo Qingshu Liu Xiangjiang Benoit Luce Chen Yan Screenplay Stephane Carraz Michel Pages Zhang Zhiyi Additional Screenplay Material Davy Mourier Dialogue Writer Shi Yifan Film Editor Benjamin Massoubre Character Design Valerie Hadida Production Design Audrey-Anne Bazard Music Li Ye Sound Director	Wang Danrong Animation Director Alexandre Henri ©IQIYI Pictures (Beijing) Co., Limited Production Companies Presented by IQIYI Pictures (Beijing) Co., Ltd., Tianrui Pai Ming Culture Media Co., Ltd., Beijing Luxpopuli VFX Co., Ltd., Beijing Chase Film Co., Ltd., Gong Yu, Jing Sheng, Shang Shiyi, Zhang Yutong Co-presented by Liu Zhaozhu Executive Producers Zhang Beibei Maxime Delorme Christian Rajaud Yu Bo	Voice Cast Kirk Thornton Vladimir Dino Andrade Hector Salli Saffioti Mia Karen Strassman Chloe Jamieson Price Doc/Kotor Lauren Alexandre-Lasseur Adelaide Debbi Derryberry Melinda/Jim Barbara Goodson antiques sellers David Lodge reporter Clark In Colour [1.78:1] Distributor Kaleidoscope Film Distribution
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Maverick spy cat Vlad and rat Hector, a nerdy IT expert, go undercover in a hospital. They are trying to recover a stolen top-secret fuel that gives the mysterious 'Demon of the Cold' the power to freeze endangered animals. Rabbit nurse Chloe reveals that she and Doc Bear are working to save near-extinct species and reverse global warming. Vlad's boss, elephant Captain Kodor, is unmasked as the Demon, the revenge-seeking remnant of extinct mammoths. Vlad and his hospital friends tame him after a final battle.

Star Wars: Episode IX

The Rise of Skywalker

Director: J.J. Abrams

Certificate 12A 141m 41s

Reviewed by Rebecca Harrison

It's a long time ago on a distant planet. In flashbacks, a little girl cries out for her parents as they leave her behind. Where are they going? Why are they leaving her? How will she survive? Now, in the present, there is something that Rey's adoptive family are not telling her, and she cannot find peace. Worlds burn around her as the galaxy descends into the dark reign of the First Order's chaos. The Sith conspire to destroy everything. The dead speak. All the characters you have ever loved prepare to fight to the death against the Dark Side. But in spite of all the horror, this is Star Wars. And there is hope, always hope, and the power of the mysterious Force.

The final film in the nine-part saga is an energetic caper that ties together loose ends with the dexterity of the Millennium Falcon weaving through an asteroid field. It sees villainous Kylo Ren (Adam Driver) find an old Sith map to an uncharted planet (Exogol) that holds the key to the evil First Order's domination over the galaxy. Realising his discovery of a dark and terrifying secret, the Resistance – led by Jedi Rey (Daisy Ridley), plus Finn (John Boyega), Poe (Oscar Isaac) and a host of recurring characters – race to stop him from establishing a new era of Imperial rule. Returning as director, J.J. Abrams introduces an array of new planets, ships and characters that jostle for attention alongside old haunts and ghostly objects from the saga's past in this warm and enjoyable if flawed film. From *Fifth Element*-style runes to sacred Jedi texts, there are enough artefacts here to fill an archive. *The Rise of Skywalker* is a film that makes its history tangible, and in touching and being touched, it asks that you hold on in material ways to the world and the people around you.

Of course, many historic figures make meaningful returns to the screen, too, including Lando (Billy Dee Williams) and the masterful Leia (Carrie Fisher), who appears thanks to footage shot for the earlier sequel movies. For among the younger Resistance fighters, youthful imposter syndrome abounds: do they really have what it takes to honour their forebears and save the day? It's up to the film's elders to elevate their younger counterparts. Sometimes this means the older characters must give up their memories; sometimes the young are forced to remember. If the past must die – as Kylo asserted in *The Last Jedi* – then you have to reconcile yourself to your role in history, to your place in all this.

Places and planets in the movie lack the iconic majesty of earlier films, with Exogol the most memorable new addition with its *Revenge of the Sith*-style scorched earth. In fact, there are so many new locations and characters in the film that it leaves you a little breathless, with outlaw Zorri Bliss (Keri Russell) and First Order-survivor Jannah (Naomi Ackie) underserved by their rapid introductions and minimal screen time. Like the Millennium Falcon repeatedly jumping through hyperspace, the effect is overwhelming. Yet the rapid editing does work when juxtaposed with extreme close-ups of characters and objects that create more contemplative moments of stillness. The cinematography is in the same monstrous vein as *The Empire Strikes Back*: all canted frames,

True History of the Kelly Gang

Director: Justin Kurzel, Certificate 18 125m 6s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Ambiguity is clearly the watchword for this latest screen depiction of Australia's ever-confounding folk hero Ned Kelly. While the title claims that here – after the armour-plated outlaw's exploits were filmed as (more or less) star vehicles for Mick Jagger and Heath Ledger – is the 'true history' of Kelly's blood-soaked trajectory, we're swiftly taken aback by a caption warning that nothing we're about to see is actually true. Thereafter, the focus of Justin Kurzel's film proves to be less about the facts of the story and more about constructing a profile for posterity – underpinned by a voiceover detailing the letter doomed Ned writes for his unborn child.

While the tale of the Kelly gang could be seen as a case study in aberrant psychopathology – something Kurzel also explored in his career-defining true-crime debut *Snowtown* (2011) – here screenwriter Shaun Grant's adaptation of the admired Peter Carey novel opts to draw the outlaw as more sinned against than sinning. That's powerfully laid out in an opening section focusing on Kelly's abject rural upbringing, where startling newcomer Orlando Schwerdt portrays a boyhood innocent curdled by his parents' mindset, shaped by Irish rebelliousness against the corrupt forces of Anglo authority. Essie Davis delivers a full-on turn as Ned's mother, whose consuming love for her son essentially weaponises him as a vengeful force for her resentments. When George MacKay takes centre stage as the grown-up Ned, the character becomes a compendium of class and colonial discontent, whose cross-dressing and suggested bisexuality seem inspired by



Ultimate force: Daisy Ridley

oblique imagery and extreme high angles peering down over the perilous wrecks of the past. And both the score and sound design – which shifts from dialogue-free sequences to unnerving crackles and shrieks – are quite extraordinary.

In terms of representation, the film's female characters are poorly used. With a range of women on screen, Abrams wastes enormous potential for female friendships among familiar faces Maz (Lupita Nyong'o) and Connix (Billie Lourd), preferring empty gestures toward inclusivity. The sidelining of Resistance fighter Rose (Kelly Marie Tran), one of the stars of *The Last Jedi*, is even more troubling. That said, there are some much-needed moments of community for the black characters, and although Finn's sensitivity deserves greater

reward, his point of view is privileged throughout. His is the beating heart of this wild and joyous film, which – finally! – gives viewers the moment of queer representation that so many of us have been looking for.

Thus, *The Rise of Skywalker* pays dividends in fan service, and it pushes every nostalgic button on its dashboard. It's very funny, and by twists and turns incredibly sad, too, with surprises so big that Han Solo's ego looks small by comparison. As for Rey and Kylo's fates – she contains multitudes, and he contains more than he ever knew. In the end, it's a film about coming together and demonstrating kindness, about standing in solidarity and making ethical choices. In our own dark times, it reminds us of the power of hope. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Kathleen Kennedy
J.J. Abrams
Michelle Rejwan

Written by

J.J. Abrams
Chris Terrio
Based on characters created by George Lucas

Director of Photography

Dan Mindel

Edited by

Maryann Brandon
Stefan Grube

Production

Designers

Rick Carter
Kevin Jenkins

Music

John Williams

Production

Sound Mixer

Stuart Wilson

Costume Designer

Michael Kaplan

Visual Effects

& Animation

Industrial Light & Magic

Production

Companies

A Lucasfilm Ltd.

production

A Bad Robot

production

Executive Producers

Callum Greene

Tommy Gormley

Jason McGatlin

Cast

Carrie Fisher

General Leia Organa

Mark Hamill

Luke Skywalker

Adam Driver

Kylo Ren

Daisy Ridley

Rey

John Boyega

Finn

Oscar Isaac

Poe Dameron

Anthony Daniels

C-3PO

Naomi Ackie

Jannah

Domhnall Gleason

General Hux

Richard E. Grant

General Pryde

Lupita Nyong'o

Maz Kanata

Keri Russell

Zorii Bliss

Joonas Suotamo

Chewbacca

Kelly Marie Tran

Rose Tico

Ian McDiarmid

Palpatine

Billy Dee Williams

Lando Calrissian

Billie Lourd

Kaydel Ko Connix

Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

The Walt Disney

Studios

Kylo Ren, villainous leader of the First Order, finds a rune-covered relic in a burning forest. Using the runes as a compass, he travels to Exogol, a planet that is home to evil Emperor Palpatine. Palpatine tells Ren to kill Rey, a trainee Jedi who aims to bring light to the galaxy's darkness. Meanwhile, the Resistance – including Rey, Rose, Finn and Poe as well as veteran generals Leia and Lando – gathers intelligence from a First Order mole and learns of Ren and Palpatine's plans for domination. Seeking another relic that will guide them to Exogol, Rey,

Finn, Poe and droids C-3PO and BB-8 search for clues. They encounter Ren and his army along the way and overcome First Order counter-attacks. In one of their meetings, Rey learns from Ren that she is Palpatine's granddaughter. On reaching Exogol, the Resistance and its allies engage in an aerial fight with the First Order, while Rey battles the emperor. Ren arrives to offer her support, sacrificing his own life to help her, as he has turned to the light following the death of his mother Leia. Rey thwarts Palpatine; the Resistance is victorious.



History boy: George MacKay

anti-establishment gesture politics as much as deep internal need. MacKay's wide-eyed stare and sinewy physique make an impression, yet he gives little sense of being in command of the character's seething, complex psychology.

The petering-out second half is a bit of a shame, even if the baroque visuals show what Kurzel has taken from his forays into Shakespearean spectacle (*Macbeth*) and manga styling (*Assassin's Creed*). An opening drone-camera glide over a barren landscape and a climactic nocturnal shootout couched as an elemental play of shadow and light are just two examples of his chafing at the bonds of traditional historical pictorialism – throughout, one senses the sheer effort that's gone into creating a highly distinctive cinematic artefact.

It's a pity, though, that in throwing everything at the screen, what the film has to say about its subject, Ned Kelly himself, becomes rather lost in an energised, bustling, yet finally unsatisfying frenzy of activity. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Hal Vogel
Liz Watts
Justin Kurzel
Paul Ranford
Written by
Shaun Grant
Based on the novel
by Peter Carey
**Director of
Photography**
Ari Wegner
Editor
Nick Fenton
**Production
Designer**
Karen Murphy
Music
Jed Kurzel
Sound Recordist
Mark D'Angelo
Costume Designer
Alicia Babidge

**Production
Companies**
Screen Australia,
La Cinefracture and
Film4 present a
Porchlight Films,
Daybreak Pictures
production in
association with
Film Victoria, Asia
Film Investment
Group, Memento
Films International
**Executive
Producers**
David Aukin

Vincent Sheehan
Peter Carey
Daniel Battsek
Sue Bruce-Smith
Sam Lavender
Emilie Georges
Naïma Abed
Raphaël Perchet
Brad Feinstein
David Gross
Shaun Grant

Cast
George MacKay
Ned Kelly
Essie Davis
Ellen Kelly
Nicholas Hoult
Fitzpatrick
Orlando Schwerdt
young Ned Kelly
Charlie Hunnam
Sergeant O'Neil
Russell Crowe
Harry Power
**Thomasin
McKenzie**
Mary Hearn
Sean Keenan
Joe Byrne
Earl Cave
Dan Kelly
Marlon Williams
George King
Louis Hewison
Steve Hart
Gentle Ben Corbett
Red Kelly

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

Rural Victoria, the 1860s. Young Ned Kelly's criminal Irish father Red falls foul of unscrupulous police sergeant O'Neil, who has designs on the boy's prostitute mother Ellen. She ensures her son shares her resentment at the colonial authorities' anti-Irish attitudes, before selling him to notorious bushranger Harry Power to toughen him up. After a spell in prison, Ned, now in his twenties, returns to his family, protecting his loving mother from crafty Constable Fitzpatrick, taking up with hostess Mary and eventually leading his brothers in an outlaw gang. Often clad in female dress to spook the pursuing lawmen, they mount an ambitious attempt to rob a train at Glenrowan. Their plans are revealed to the police, who surround and massacre the fugitives. Sole survivor Ned goes to the gallows, but not before penning his life story for his unborn child.

Underwater

USA 2019
Director: William Eubank
Certificate 15 94m 51s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Though it's much noisier than *Alien*, *Underwater* retains many of the same dynamics as Ridley Scott's 1979 film – if nothing else because Kristen Stewart, like Sigourney Weaver before her, has to run around kicking ass in her underwear. Here, though, we are not in deep space but on the ocean floor, where a mining company is trying to extract as many resources as possible, triggering an earthquake that destroys the drilling station where Stewart's Norah works as an engineer.

Norah survives the disaster along with five others – the captain (Vincent Cassel), the clown (T.J. Miller), the naive young biologist (Jessica Henwick), another engineer (John Gallagher Jr) and a guy who has no personality because his deep sea diving suit malfunctions (Mamoudou Athie). Their best shot at survival is to walk a mile across the ocean floor to another station, a journey that leads them to discover a species of angry, eyeless, hungry deep-sea creature that can eat through their suits. Pressure and these half-sperm, half-demon creatures are the survivors' main foes.

Though director William Eubank opts for extreme slow motion and that ludicrous 'bewwwww' sound every time there's an explosion, the film sustains tension. The performances exceed the limitations of the 'we gotta get out of here' ensemble, as they have a level of spontaneity and uniqueness to them: after Norah punches the biologist in order to cram her into an escape pod, she anxiously says, "Sorry, sorry, sorry" – which is the most Kristen Stewart thing Kristen Stewart could've done in that situation. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Peter Chernin
Jenno Topping
Tonia Davis
Screenplay
Brian Duffield
Adam Cozad
Story
Brian Duffield
**Director of
Photography**
Bojan Bazelli
Edited by
Todd E. Miller
Brian Berdan
William Hoy
**Production
Designer**
Naaman Marshall
Music
Marco Beltrami
Brandon Roberts
Sound Mixer
David Wyman
Costume Designer
Dorotika Sapinska
Visual Effects
MPC

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Finance LLC
**Production
Companies**
Twentieth Century
Fox presents in
association with
TSG Entertainment
a Chernin
Entertainment
production
Executive Producer
Kevin Halloran

Cast
Kristin Stewart
Norah Price
Vincent Cassel
Captain Lucien
Mamoudou Athie
Rodrigo Nagenda
T.J. Miller
Paul Abel
John Gallagher Jr
Liam Smith
Jessica Henwick
Emily Haversham
Gunner Wright
Lee Miller
Fiona Rene

Godmother
Amanda Troop
Poseidon Patty

**Dolby Atmos
In Colour**
[2.35:1]

Distributor
The Walt Disney
Studios

At the bottom of the Mariana Trench, an underwater mining station collapses. Engineer Norah finds five other survivors; the captain suggests they walk a mile across the ocean floor to another station, which has escape pods. Setting out for the station, the survivors discover a hostile species that can eat through their suits. Norah and two colleagues reach the pods, but Norah stays behind because the third pod is malfunctioning. She creates an explosion in order to prevent the creatures from reaching the escape pods as they head to the surface, sacrificing herself.

Villain

United Kingdom/USA/Canada/Australia 2019
Director: Philip Barantini

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

When the heavy played by Craig Fairbrass deals with two recalcitrant patrons in his bar by going into the basement and returning with a hammer, viewers may presume that *Villain* is done with its lugubrious set-up and ready to deliver what's expected of any would-be gritty tale of a hardman trying and failing to leave behind his violent ways. Instead, the intentions of Philip Barantini's crime drama become more confusing when the brutal but brief scene of Eddie in action is followed by a much longer sequence devoted to a pub renovation.

To be fair, Barantini and writers Greg Hall and George Russo aim to craft a British gangster film in the more sombre vein of *Get Carter* (1971) or *Villain's* unrelated namesake from the same year, which starred Richard Burton as a memorably sadistic East End thug. But since the result is so leaden, its failed gravitas is a poor substitute for the more flamboyant mayhem – and more skilful filmmaking all round – of *Avengement* (2019), which starred Fairbrass in a story of hard-nosed brothers in a bad way. Though a reliably burly presence in the *Rise of the Footsoldier* franchise (2007-19), Fairbrass is unable to convey Eddie's inner struggle with the required nuance, instead seeming oddly impassive even in the more emotionally charged scenes with his daughter (Izuka Hoyle). A first-time feature director and himself a veteran actor in genre fare such as *World War Dead: Rise of the Fallen* (2015), Barantini gamely tries to bring some depth to the flat and familiar material, but unlike Eddie, he doesn't have what he needs in his toolbox. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bart Ruspoli
Screenplay
George Russo
Greg Hall
**Director of
Photography**
Matthew Lewis
Edited by
Alex Fountain
**Production
Designer**
Aimee Meek
Music
David Ridley
Aaron May
Sound Recordist
Dan Guest
Costume Designer
Arianna Del Cero

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Companies**
A Double Dutch
International
presentation
An Ascendant
Films production
in association
with White Hot

Productions and
Medium Kool Films
**Executive
Producers**
Jason Moring
Stanley Preschutti
Mark Padilla
Ian Kirk
Sara Sehdav
Philip Barantini
Ming Zhu
George Russo
Greg Hall

Cast
Craig Fairbrass
Eddie Franks
George Russo
Sean Franks
Izuka Hoyle
Chloe Franks
Mark Monero
Michael Till
Tomi May
Johnny Garrett
Eloise Lovell
Anderson
Rikki
Taz Skylar
Jason
Nicholas Aaron

Steve
Robert Glenister
Roy Garrett
**Michael John
Treanor**
Freddie Bagshott
Marcus Onilude
Mark Watts

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

London, present day. Newly released from prison, Eddie Franks tries to stay straight and reconnect with his estranged daughter Chloe. Instead, he resorts to his former ways to help his brother Sean, a drug mule with a large debt to gangsters Roy and Johnny Garrett. After the conflict with the gangsters culminates in their deaths, Eddie prepares to flee the country but is killed by Chloe's boyfriend in retaliation for an earlier assault.

Vitalina Varela

Portugal 2019
Director: Pedro Costa

See Feature
on page 46

Reviewed by Jonathan Romney

Sharing its name with its lead performer, *Vitalina Varela* could justifiably be called a 'portrait film', but it in no way resembles a documentary

about its central figure. Pedro Costa's films have sometimes hovered on the margins of documentary in taking their material from the real lives of the people who appear in them, members of Lisbon's disadvantaged and marginal populations, particularly immigrant workers from Cape Verde. Nevertheless, the austere, stylised, at times somewhat ceremonial treatment applied to those people's presences makes for a cinema that is genuinely singular, serenely imposing its own filmic language. Costa's work, since 2006's *Colossal Youth*, resembles a radically stripped-down form of modernist opera that evokes high passions and tragic events while dispensing with music and singing.

In 2014's *Horse Money*, the central figure of *Colossal Youth* – the venerable Cape Verdean worker Ventura, effectively playing himself – undertook a phantasmagoric night journey into his own biography. That film also introduced Vitalina Varela, who now takes centre stage; the non-professional player similarly enacts a version of her own experience as a widow discovering the unfamiliar world that her estranged husband Joaquim had inhabited. As *Horse Money* did with Ventura, the new film makes a mythic poem from the real Varela's experience – with much of her highly personal dialogue, reminiscing or remonstrating with her husband, written by Varela herself.

Like its predecessor, *Vitalina Varela* is rooted in concrete reality, while building an intensified world that feels closer to dream than to the everyday. The rundown quarter where the film is set is delineated as tangibly real by a constant backdrop of neighbourhood sound: conversation, screaming children, dogs, the throb of techno, the eerie rattle of doors in high winds. But apart from the odd close-up – of rain on a metal roof, say – we rarely see what produces it all. With the action so sparse – in some scenes, the actors hold themselves perfectly still for long periods – Costa is counterpointing audible noise against visual silence.

Photographed by Leonardo Simões, this dilapidated milieu is transformed into a seemingly subterranean labyrinth under a night sky of velvety blackness. Forced perspectives turn passages and interiors into geometric puzzle boxes; distressed walls absorb light, glowing with fungus-like fluorescence. The framings are extraordinary, their figures in cramped rooms hemmed in further by the darkness that edges the screen, while some shots foreground a pictorial dimension – like the positioning of Ventura's face in the centre of a sun-shaped grille that transforms him into a saint in an icon. Some highly expressionistic shots, using green-screen technology, feature stormy skies that might have been sampled from black-and-white silent-era epics.

Where *Horse Money* was heavy on text, language (Portuguese and Cape Verde Creole) is drastically pared down here, with increased



Darkness visible: Vitalina Varela

emphasis on physical presence and gesture: from the opening funeral parade, through two men's ritual of cleaning Joaquim's home, to Vitalina's activity of hacking at the ground in a forest – although it is unclear whether this latter action really takes place in the present or is a re-enacted memory of her work years before, building a home in Cape Verde. The film slips between past and present, actuality and imagination: when Vitalina recounts that Joaquim's previous lover was also called Vitalina, is she referring to another woman or to an alternative version of herself?

Featured in an imposing moment of static

portraiture in a key close-up in *Horse Money*, Vitalina is here further fleshed out as a taciturn, vulnerable personality, while again given a striking, hieratic presence in close-ups that intensify her heroic, almost regal image. In a scene of truly operatic resonance, she arrives at Lisbon airport, the stairs rolling to meet her plane as if she were a visiting dignitary; descending the steps barefoot, she is greeted by a solemn delegation of cleaners. The headscarf and leather jacket she often wears form a protective uniform, while images of her indoors – for example, taking a shower while the ceiling crumbles on to her – emphasise her lostness and solitude. But nothing undermines her strength and grandeur, which emerge through the variations of her widowed grief, as Vitalina speaks in tones that are by turns tender, rasping or a contained, stern whisper, as when she remonstrates with her dead husband.

As for Ventura, the quasi-priestly dignity he embodied in previous films here becomes sacerdotal status proper, signified by the addition of a purple stole to his customary black suit. He is solemn as ever, but his stately fragility is ever more visible in a constantly trembling hand, and in his sotto voce soliloquising of disconnected, enigmatic lines of litany-like dialogue.

Sombre though it is, *Vitalina Varela* feels finally like a testament to the power of survival. In its coda, we finally see daylight over Lisbon – cloudy skies over a cemetery, but daylight nonetheless. The closing shot returns to the past, with a blue Cape Verde sky over the house that the young Vitalina built years earlier, finally giving this otherwise bleak-seeming drama a new inflection, that of a long night's journey back to day.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Abel Ribeiro Chaves
Director of Photography
Leonardo Simões
Editing
João Dias
Vitor Carvalho
Sound
João Gazua

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Production Companies
OPTEC, Sociedade
Óptica Técnica
Financed by ICA -

Instituto do Cinema
e do Audiovisual
With the support of
Fundação Calouste
Gulbenkian, Câmara
Municipal de Lisboa

Cast
Vitalina Varela
Ventura
Manuel Tavares
Almeida
Francisco Brito
Marina Alves
Domingues
Nilsa Fortes

Lisa Lopi
Bruno Brito Varela
Imídio Landim
Monteiro
João Baptista
Fortes
João Raimundo
Monteiro
Benvinda Mendes

In Colour
[1.33:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Second Run

After 40 years' separation from her worker husband Joaquim, Cape Verdean woman Vitalina Varela arrives in Lisbon only to learn that he was buried three days earlier. Moving into his rundown home, Vitalina is visited by her husband's friends and co-workers, and visits a church whose priest says a prayer for Joaquim. Together, they visit the cemetery where he is buried.

Home Cinema



Sailor beware: Linda Lawson and Dennis Hopper as the 'mermaid' and her boyfriend in *Night Tide* (1961)

ON STRANGER TIDES

Curtis Harrington began his career as a darling of the avant garde, and ended it as a master of schlock – but how much had he really changed?

NIGHT TIDE

Curtis Harrington; US 1961; Powerhouse Indicator; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 86 minutes; 16:9-1.66. Extras: 1998 audio commentary with Curtis Harrington and Dennis Hopper; new audio commentary with Tony Rayns; archival documentary; 1987 David Del Valle interview with Harrington; Disc Two: 'Dream Logic: The Short Films of Curtis Harrington'; image gallery; booklet.

Reviewed by Andrew Male

Among all the wonderful anecdotes in Curtis Harrington's posthumously published memoir, *Nice Guys Don't Work in Hollywood* (2013), one story seems especially pertinent. It is 1951 and the 25-year-old Harrington is nearing the end of a glorious sojourn in Europe. In the ten years since he completed his first film – a ten-minute teenage adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (in which Harrington took the roles of both Roderick and Madeline Usher) – this young, gay, intelligent, middle-class

Californian has moved from lowly Paramount Studios messenger boy to University of Southern California film student and avant-garde filmmaker of note, beguiling the artistic demi-mondes of New York, Paris and London with a trio of short, poetic black-and-white films – *Fragment of Seeking* (1946), *Picnic* (1948), *On the Edge* (1949), all of which are included on the bonus second disc of this superb new Blu-ray release from Indicator – and mixing with the likes of Anaïs Nin, Gore Vidal, James Baldwin and Jean Cocteau.

Now, on his final day in Paris before returning to America, Harrington is invited to an extravagant party with the surrealist painters Leonor Fini and Stanislaw Lepri, a masked ball given by interior designer Carlos de Beistegui, and an audience with a group of beautiful young men called 'The Dark Angels'. His flight is already booked. He cannot attend.

Before his departure Harrington meets with the Italian film director Enrico Fulchignoni, and tells him his hopes of working in Hollywood. Suddenly, Fulchignoni is raging. "*La vie est un jungle!*" he shouts, "*Méfiez-vous!*" ("Life is a jungle! Beware!")

Part warning, part rebuke: from that point forward, Harrington's career would move away from the masked balls and dark angels. Often

in his career Harrington would refer to his works as blighted, cursed – *films maudits*. With Harrington, you can go further and argue that in theme, style and means of production, here was an *auteur maudit*, a director with one foot in the avant garde, one foot in Hollywood, yet never a part of either. "Film became my strength... and my curse," Harrington said. "My films are all tragedies. They all have a tragic ending."

From the earliest age, Harrington was inspired by the dreamlike and the macabre. As well as the image of the returned corpse in Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' ("a scar that I would never lose"), he drew inspiration from L. Frank Baum's Oz stories, the films of James Whale and Val Lewton, nudie vaudeville, magic and old Hollywood. However, unlike the early experimental films of his friend Kenneth Anger (whose *Fireworks* was made in parallel with Harrington's *Fragment of Seeking*, although released later), there is nothing masochistic or violent in Harrington's early, personal work.

Concerning themselves with seemingly straight-edged male characters pulled into erotic dream worlds by mysterious women, these early films possess a bleak innocence, a narcissistic vulnerability, a sense that his

protagonists, and even the films themselves, are not quite strong enough for the hallucinatory power of their influences.

That becomes most explicit in the main event in Indicator's release, Harrington's first full-length feature film, *Night Tide* (1961). Now in Hollywood, working as a go-between for Columbia producer Jerry Wald (one inspiration for the ruthlessly ambitious Sammy Glick in Budd Schulberg's 1941 novel *What Makes Sammy Run?*), Harrington developed a script about an innocent sailor from the Mid-west who falls in love with a sideshow mermaid, who might or might not be the real thing. Shot mostly non-union, for just \$50,000 (raised with the help of Roger Corman), and filmed in and around Venice Beach and Santa Monica Pier, *Night Tide* exists in a strange fugal netherworld of its own – somewhere between queer independent American cinema, Val Lewton horror and the poetic dream cinema of Jean Cocteau.

The central figure of the sailor on shore leave clearly connects the film to both Jean Genet's 1947 novel *Querelle of Brest* and Anger's *Fireworks*. But as played – in his first solo leading role – by a 25-year-old Dennis Hopper, Harrington's sailor becomes a haunted innocent, an Alice chasing a white rabbit, in the form of Linda Lawson's beautiful freak-show siren ("I work on the amusement pier. I'm an attraction").

Although Harrington had Hopper's sailor suit specially cut and coloured to emphasise its line, there is little sexual power in Hopper's performance. Instead, the power lies with Lawson and the other women in the cast, including Marjorie Eaton as an eccentric fortune-teller who gives Hopper a tarot reading ("the hanged man is a figure of deep entrancement") and Marjorie Cameron – credited without her first name, as 'Cameron' – the artist, occultist and former wife of rocket scientist Jack Parsons. Cameron, who'd previously starred in Harrington's 1956 short *The Wormwood Star* (also included in the Indicator release) plays an ominous woman in black, a sea-witch calling Lawson's mermaid back to the water. Cameron's role is a direct reference to Elizabeth Russell's appearance in Val Lewton's *Cat People* (1942) as a compatriot of the supposedly cursed Irina, but can also be seen as representing the exclusionary world of the avant garde that Harrington was bidding goodbye to.

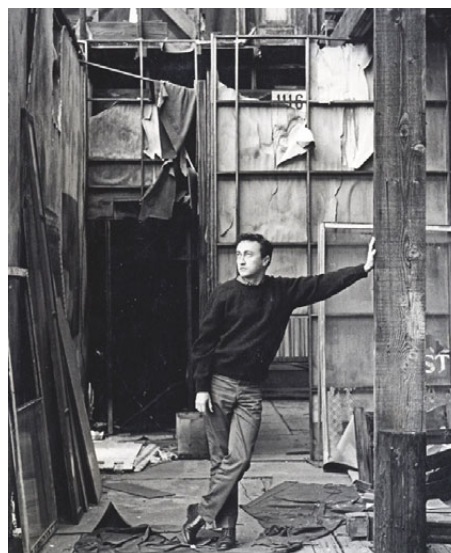
"Presented by" super fan Nicolas Winding Refn, the beautiful 4K restoration of *Night Tide* by the Cinema Preservation Alliance and Mark Toscano of the Academy Film Archive released in the Indicator edition, now possesses a surreal phosphorescent glow, a desolate littoral beauty that is utterly unique. At the time, it was ignored – released on a double bill with Corman's *The Raven* in 1963 (two years after Corman's film had first premiered), *Night Tide* quietly died a death. Harrington never returned to this world in his later films, some of which can be found on DVD releases of varying quality, and still awaiting the careful treatment afforded to *Night Tide* by Indicator. Something of its dreamlike dread remains in his low-budget sci-fi thriller of 1965 *Queen of Blood* – assembled

around special effects sequences from a 1963 Russian space movie, *Mechte Navstrechu* – but with his first major studio film, *Games* (1967), the feeling is one of chilly claustrophobia.

Loosely based on Hopper's society marriage to Brooke Hayward, and filtered through Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Les Diaboliques* (1955), it's a tale of a travelling saleswoman and possible witch (Simone Signoret) who inveigles her way into the home of a sociopathic art collector couple, played by James Caan and Katharine Ross. Unlike *Night Tide*, there is no air or light in *Games*. It's a pop art do-over of James Whale's *The Old Dark House* (1932), with Caan and Ross's townhouse working as a neat metaphor for Harrington's new Hollywood prison. Significantly, it is the 46-year-old Signoret who is lit as the film's true star, but what Harrington retains is the figure of the witch-like woman as the director of the action, albeit now confined within the shrinking space of Harrington's Hollywood *mise en scène*.

In *What's the Matter with Helen?* (1971), the idea of Hollywood as a prison becomes even more explicit. Harrington's own personal favourite of his Hollywood films, it stars Shelley Winters and Debbie Reynolds as mothers of two convicted killers who flee their Iowa homes to open a dance academy in 30s Hollywood (the inspiration was the Depression-era reign of the Meglin Kiddies dance troupe, which coached both Shirley Temple and Judy Garland). It's a gorgeous-looking film, with sets created by Jean Renoir's designer, Eugène Lourie, and costumes by Morton Haack. It's also a meticulously detailed portrait of Hollywood mania, delusion and sexual repression, an unacknowledged influence on John Schlesinger's hysterical *Day of The Locust* (1975) and a film that neatly links back to the

'Film became my strength... and my curse,' Harrington said. 'My films are all tragedies. They all have a tragic ending'



Curtis Harrington

themes of Harrington's experimental works: Eros and Thanatos, the will toward life and death.

Almost as good is *Whoever Slew Auntie Roo?*, another 'Grande Dame Guignol' affair, also from 1971. A reworking of 'Hansel and Gretel' as a macabre children's Christmas picture utterly devoid of sentiment, it stars Mark Lester and Chloe Franks as a brother and sister who become convinced that the kindly old lady (Shelley Winters) who throws yearly Yuletide parties for the local orphans is planning to murder them.

Sadly, because of distribution issues both films did nothing at the box office and Harrington became, in his words, "stuck in the hole of TV director... a slippery slope" that led to journeyman employment on episodes of *Baretta*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Wonder Woman* and *Dynasty*. He entertained himself by repeatedly hiring the manic Timothy Carey in thug roles but ultimately felt that he had fallen from cinema's "planet of illusion" to the "self-contained electronic impulses" of television.

There were triumphs, most of them involving the Golden Age stars he managed to cast in these TV shows, including Barbara Stanwyck, Ray Milland and Joan Blondell. He gave Gloria Swanson her only lead role after *Sunset Blvd.* (1950), as a matriarchal vineyard owner with the ability to control a swarm of murderous honeybees (*Killer Bees*, 1974), and got an incredible performance out of a cranky Ann Sothern as the overbearing mother of a psychotic, bisexual John Savage in *The Killing Kind* (1973). Despite being lumbered with leaden scripts and jobbing cinematographers, Harrington was still able to create *sui generis* moments of eerie beauty, such as the scene in his 1977 *Exorcist* knock-off *Ruby* in which a projectionist at a drive-in movie theatre is murdered by the ghost of a dead gangster during a screening of Nathan Hertz's *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958).

There were the usual unrealised projects, including an adaptation of Iris Murdoch's 1963 novel *The Unicorn* and Edward Gorey's "silent screenplay" *The Black Doll*. Harrington's final production was very nearly a 1987 episode of *The Twilight Zone*, starring Jenny Agutter and Martin Balsam as space explorers revisiting an abandoned Earth. But at the end of the 90s Harrington sold his 1944 copy of Aleister Crowley's *Book of Thoth* to finance his final short film, *Usher* (2000) – included with the other shorts in the Indicator set.

Intended as a full-circle return to "the story that haunted me so early in my life", *Usher* was filmed in Harrington's own *objet d'art*-cluttered home, with the director again taking the roles of Roderick and Madeline Usher. A final, oppressive house of games, it seemingly depicts Harrington/Usher as a prisoner of his own past. Yet it also features a central scene in which Usher throws an extravagant ball in the company of his surrealist friends and a handsome young man. It is Harrington returning to the European avant garde he left behind for Hollywood, and in that confined, airless *mise en scène*, crammed with the belongings of his life, Harrington's last film becomes his own mausoleum, his correct and crowning resting place. ☹

New releases

CLOAK AND DAGGER

Fritz Lang; US 1946; Eureka/Masters of Cinema; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate PG; 106 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: commentary by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas; video essay by David Cairns; 1946 radio adaptation; 1950 radio series; booklet.

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Few people would claim this was one of Fritz Lang's best – certainly not Lang, whose final reel was dumped by the studio in favour of a slightly scrappy romanticised ending. Lang and his screenwriters – the soon to be blacklisted Ring Lardner and Albert Maltz – had in mind a film about the coming of the atomic age, and the dangers that awaited the world; as it turned out, it was truer in spirit, if not in practical detail, to its source material, a series of magazine articles hyping the OSS, the Office for Strategic Services, wartime forerunner of the CIA.

The sense of something having been fudged is offset by powerfully gritty fight scenes, close attention to details of tradecraft, good acting, gorgeous, sombre photography and sharp editing. Gary Cooper plays an American physicist who quits his lab at the request of the OSS to go undercover in Europe to investigate Nazi A-bomb plans and smuggle out a nuclear scientist. It's a common criticism of the film that the far from cerebral Cooper is miscast; but his career was built largely on idealists and naïfs – in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (1936), *Sergeant York* (1941) and *Ball of Fire* (1941); and that wide-eyed gaze could plausibly be that of someone who's looking beyond, to the edge of the cosmos or the heart of the atom. Lilli Palmer, as the Italian partisan who scorns his naivety before falling for him, yo-yos plausibly between traumatised disillusion and romantic ecstasies.

There are foreshadowings of Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966), also about a physicist turning spy in enemy territory, and that film's most famous scene – the messy murder of a communist agent – takes its cue from Cooper's impressive eye-gouging, finger-bending grapple with a fascist. But *Cloak and Dagger* is close, as well, to Powell and Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943), with its message about the need to adopt the enemy's methods to defeat them – though it is perhaps more anxious about the price.

Disc: The clarity of the black-and-white film is astonishing. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas's commentary, while it strains for laughs, is thoughtful on the way the film bends traditional gender roles; the most impressive extra is David Cairns's nuanced appreciation.

COSH BOY

Lewis Gilbert; UK 1953; BFI; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 12; 75 minutes; 1.37:1. Extras: feature film *Johnny on the Run*; three shorts; TV footage; interview with actor Ian Whittaker; extended title sequence; image gallery; booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

When the British Board of Film Classification introduced the 'X' (adults only) certificate in 1951, it was intended to facilitate the release of more adult-themed movies, and avoid the sensationalist over-reaction that had greeted *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* (1948). In this it failed dismally. As with *Miss Blandish*, *Cosh Boy* – only

the second British X film – inspired what now seems like a ludicrously disproportionate storm of outrage. "There's only one thing the film industry can do with *Cosh Boy*," frothed John Prebble in the *Sunday Dispatch*. "BAN IT."

The film – directed by Lewis Gilbert (*Reach for the Sky*, 1956; *Alfie*, 1966; *Educating Rita*, 1983) – tells of a petty teenage London thug, Roy Walsh (James Kenny), who coerces his dim-witted gang into carrying out most of his violence for him. He also gets his girlfriend (an early role for Joan Collins) pregnant, then rejects her. Eventually, of course, he goes too far and gets arrested, though not before the cops have left him alone with his stern new stepdad to receive a good belting – the sole episode that today's audience might find shocking. That apart, it's a scrupulously moral, indeed moralising, movie – though its reception can't have been helped by the fact that it was released ten days after the Christopher Craig-Derek Bentley murder case swamped the newspapers. It does find room for the odd flash of humour, not least a heavily innuendo-laden interview between Hermione Gingold's street-walker and Sid James's police sergeant.

Disc: This BFI Flipside release has a generous helping of extras, including three other Lewis Gilbert works: his second short, *The Ten Year Plan* (1945), a semi-documentary about housing, improbably starring Charles Hawtrey as a screenwriter; *Johnny on the Run* (1953), his next feature after *Cosh Boy*, hearteningly pro-immigrant and a rather better film than its predecessor; and a bizarre mini-musical, *Harmony Lane* (1954), originally shot in stereo and 3D and pseudonymously credited to 'Byron Gill'. The 30-page booklet is packed with useful information.

THE COTTON CLUB ENCORE

Francis Ford Coppola; US 1984/2019; Lionsgate; Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 139 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: introduction; Q&A.

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

Francis Ford Coppola's fondness for recutting his past work has generally involved successful titles – *The Godfather* (1972), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *The Outsiders* (1983) – that were in no particular need of revision. With *The Cotton Club* (1984), however, there was clearly room for improvement, particularly since the director often claimed something substantially better had been left on the cutting-room floor. This notorious flop's



Club class: *Cosh Boy*

whole structure was rooted in compromise, between his desire to explore African-American history and the demands of financiers insisting on a white star. So a plotline involving a musician, Dixie Dwyer (Richard Gere), entangled with gangsters in Prohibition-era New York was juxtaposed with a second one focusing on a dancer, Sandman Williams (Gregory Hines), employed by the eponymous club, where black talent performed for an all-white audience.

Coppola's solution was to construct the film around processes of separation and reconciliation, linking the overall shape of the narrative (constantly abandoning and rediscovering its twin protagonists) with a more intimate emphasis on romantic and familial relationships that keep splitting apart and reforming. That concern is also evident in the choreography (notably the dance accompanying Duke Ellington's 'Creole Love Call'). Even the realms of reality and fantasy refuse to remain discrete, the distinction collapsing completely towards the end, and Coppola's fragmented editing underlines rather than smooths over the unsettled nature of what we are watching.

Perhaps that is why the film comes across as unfinished, and each cut feels equally viable. At 139 minutes, *The Cotton Club Encore* runs only 11 minutes longer than the theatrical release, but achieves a finer balance between its two narratives (a fresh opening sequence establishing an existing bond between Sandman and Dixie helps), while giving greater prominence to music and dance. Gregory Hines's performance of 'She's Tall, She's Tan, She's Terrific' and Lonette McKee's rendition of 'Stormy Weather' are obvious highlights of this 'redux' edition, along with the charming scene in which Dixie dances with his mother (Gwen Verdon) while mobster Dutch Schultz (James Remar) tries to hire him. But Coppola has trimmed a significant amount of footage, too, eliminating Dixie's encounter with Gloria Swanson and cameos by Charles Chaplin, Fanny Brice and James Cagney.

The attempt to de-emphasise storytelling is admirable, but leaves several loose ends; Dutch's killing of Irish mobster Joe Flynn (John Ryan), against the orders of club-owner Owney Madden (Bob Hoskins), now has no consequences whatsoever – the shorter variant showed Madden ordering Dutch to pay \$25,000 in compensation. Coppola (whose name has regained the 'Ford' it lost on the original credits) has also reworked the colour scheme, bathing many scenes in a nostalgic golden glow. It says a great deal about the director's cut of this richly fascinating, deeply flawed project that it is far from clear whether we are now being asked to feel nostalgia for the mythic America of almost a century ago, or the possibilities of large-scale auteurist filmmaking represented by *The Cotton Club* itself.

Disc: Lionsgate's transfer, available on both Blu-ray and DVD, looks fine, though the quality of the restored footage doesn't quite match that of the surrounding film. The only extras are a two-minute introduction by the director and a 19-minute post-screening discussion (chaired by Kent Jones) from the 2019 New York Film Festival, involving Coppola, Maurice Hines and a mostly silent James Remar.



INSIDE INFORMATION

Stephen King, one-time king of horror that taps directly into the zeitgeist, is resurgent. Bad news for the zeitgeist, good news for TV

THE OUTSIDER

Reviewed by Kim Newman

A mood of unease and shifting ground is established in the opening act of the first episode of HBO/Sky Atlantic's *The Outsider*, written by Richard Price from a 2018 novel by Stephen King – which, in the bizarre world of high-end TV scores Price a 'created by' credit.

Oklahoma small-town detective Ralph Anderson (Ben Mendelsohn), who is grieving for a recently dead son, investigates a murder he can't help but take personally. High-school kid Frankie Patterson has been lured into a white van and savagely slain. In a terse exchange about teeth-marks on the corpse, Anderson asks "Animal?" and the forensics tech responds simply (and horrifically) "No." Witness accounts confirm fingerprint evidence that proves the boy was abducted and killed by a trusted adult, Little League coach Terry Maitland (Jason Bateman). Anderson interviews an array of witnesses – including a little girl, an old lady and the manager of a local strip club (an oddly cast Paddy Considine) – and interchanges segue into flashbacks featuring a sinister, calmly self-incriminating Maitland who looks exactly like (but does not otherwise resemble) the devout family man Anderson arrests in public, slapping the cuffs on him in the middle of a baseball game.

A politically ambitious DA sees a slam-dunk case, but Maitland's lawyer Howie Salomon (Bill Camp) produces evidence that the teacher was at a conference 60 miles from the crime scene, asking a question about why the school board has banned *Slaughterhouse-Five*, at the time of the murder. Maitland is at once irrefutably guilty and undeniably innocent, but the fact of his arrest smashes his home life almost as definitively as Frankie's murder wrecks his family. In the first two episodes – all that were available for review – we only get hints of Stephen King-type happenings, notably a hooded misshapen figure loitering at the fringes of crowds. Richard Price-type characters (cops, lawyers, suspects, lowlifes) contemplate Maitland's seeming bilocation and deem this supernatural wrongness an affront to sanity... though the entirely natural brutality of the murder, committed by an apparent pillar of the community, is as much terror as they can cope with, even before bringing in the disappearance of the Roanoke colonists and intimations of the demonic. King is certainly referencing H.P. Lovecraft's story 'The Outsider', but is also a fan of the short-lived 1968-99 private eye TV series of the same name; to him, the title signals adherence both to cosmic horror and disenchanted neo-noir, a seam he has worked at least since the small-town serial killer cop segment of *The Dead Zone* (1979).



H.P. source: Ben Mendelsohn and Cynthia Erivo in the Lovecraft-inspired *The Outsider*

So many tropes of current TV date back to Stephen King that there's a risk direct adaptations seem like collages

After a fallow spell, King has re-emerged as a prime source for TV and film horrors, to the point that his overlapping stories cover more ground than the Marvel Cinematic Universe (there's even a whole series about the extended King universe, Hulu's *Castle Rock*). The 'coming this season' trail at the end of episode two promises Anderson's worldview will be further challenged by a team-up with Holly Gibney (Cynthia Erivo), a neuroatypical sleuth carried over from King's 2014 novel *Mr Mercedes* (Justine Lupe plays her in the David E. Kelley TV series spun off from that). So many tropes of current TV, as seen in Scandi-noirs and post-modern American crime

drama (*True Detective*, *Sharp Objects*), date back to King that there's a risk direct adaptations seem like collages of themes, characters and moods that have become standardised. Only King would insert a lengthy Little League baseball anecdote – Bateman's acting highlight in episode two – as set-up for a major plot reversal; but we've seen a lot of glum policemen traipse through dark woods and negotiate soap opera home lives in pursuit of trickster serial killers with paranormal activities.

Bateman also directs the first two episodes, and has a knack for juggling times and moods without causing confusion – maybe a few foreshadowings are too blatant, though that might be a plot-point, as the detectives wonder whether they're being led into traps by the killer. Mendelsohn, one of the best and most versatile utility actors of the current generation, has a rare low-key straight leading role, surrounded by others who get to be stranger than him. It's early days, but the first two episodes definitely sink in the hook. **S**

MORE STREAMING RECOMMENDATIONS

Korean Film Archive YouTube Channel

Dozens of classic Korean films from the Korean Film Archive's collections are available to stream via its YouTube channel, with English subtitles. Among the directors whose work is collected is Bong Joon Ho's great influence, Kim Kiyoung, 13 of whose films are on the channel, including *Yang San Province* (1955), *Woman of Fire* (1971), *Insect Woman* (1972) and *Promises* (1975). There are also useful collections by decade, new restorations and collections ordered by actor. See www.youtube.com/user/KoreanFilm for more details.

Studio Ghibli on Netflix

Twenty-one of the Japanese animation studio's features, including all those by Miyazaki, are to be made available on Netflix, released in batches of seven at a time on the first of the month over each of the coming three months.

Nighty Night

Both series of Julia Davis's jet-black comedy about sociopathic hairdresser Jill are now on BBC iPlayer. No less a figure than Paul Thomas Anderson is a self-declared fan, as he told S&S when we spoke to him for *Phantom Thread*. **S**

Archive Television by Robert Hanks

TOMMY COOPER

Bill Turner; UK 1969-71; Network; Region 2 DVD; 325 minutes; 1.33:1

MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS, SERIES 1

Ian MacNaughton, John Howard Davies; UK 1969-70; Network; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 393 minutes; 1.33:1. Extras: studio outtakes; extended Ron Obvious filmed material; booklet.

MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS, SERIES 2

Ian MacNaughton; UK 1970; Network; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 12; 387 minutes; 1.33:1. Extras: extended material; censored audio; restored animation; student film *And Now for Something Completely Different* (1970); 1971 interview with MacNaughton (audio); booklet.

Of course, there are dozens of Tom Cruise-scale counter-examples, but it remains a truth that size, on screen, has its own pull. A Robbie Coltrane, a Melissa McCarthy or, taking it into another dimension, a Clint Eastwood or a Geena Davis just soaks up more of the frame and more of your attention. Tommy Cooper was 6ft 3in tall and weighed 15 stone – that's a shade over 1.9m and 95kg, for the youngsters – and his head was a couple of sizes up from that, tiny eyes set among heavy bones and an expanse of ham-pink flesh (the colour would be down to the booze): not a pretty sight, but a sight.

It's hard to say how much his size contributed to his success as a comedian, but watching this early London Weekend Television series you get the impression that the producers weren't taking any chances. His regular sidekicks, Peter Reeves and Clovissa Newcombe, are notably gracile, and a high proportion of the guest stars were at the petite end of things: Ronnie Corbett, Arthur Lowe, Stubby Kaye, Ted Ray, Joan Greenwood (wait, what? Yes, that Joan Greenwood). Next to them, he looms improbably, a member of some closely related species. The illusion of clumsy geniality is just that: he was an obsessive perfectionist where the act was concerned, reputedly the most tight-fisted man in showbusiness, and sometimes violent drunk. But the illusion is complete.

Most episodes of *Tommy Cooper* – one of a series of shows through which he dominated ITV's light entertainment output for much of the 60s and 70s – follow a reasonably tight format: Cooper kicks off, in trademark fez, performing some studiously inept magic – an air of impending anti-climax if not outright catastrophe carefully ramped up, Cooper approaching the tricks with either an air of resignation, as though he's doing this against his better judgement, or an optimism that invites punishment. There's a series of rapid-fire sketches linked by a theme – doctors, crime – sometimes with an announcement that this is part of a series intended to help young people choose a career. Cooper is interviewed unconvincingly dressed as a historical figure (Julius Caesar, Lord Nelson). And the half-hour is wrapped up with a five- or eight-minute pastiche featuring this week's guest star: Kaye in a 30s gangster flick, for instance.

The gags are often ancient ("I bet on a horse at twenty to one, he came in at twenty past four"), with a lot of what you might politely term traditional material about obese and/or



Tommy Cooper The illusion of clumsy geniality is just that: he was obsessive, tight-fisted and a sometimes violent drunk. But the illusion is complete

ugly wives and mothers-in-law ("She went to have her face lifted... she did... and they said it couldn't be done. So for ten pounds they lowered her body"), and a prevailing assumption that any long or obscure word must be a euphemism for something anatomical ("It's about my father's will. He had a stipulation inserted in his bequests." "The poor devil!"). The dreadfulness is sometimes inadvertent, often the point: what you're laughing at, if you are, is less the jokes themselves than the idea that they're funny – that and Cooper's manner, switching between desperation for a laugh and triumphant glee at having squeezed another lousy punchline in. I found my resistance wearing down; at first I was bored and annoyed; by the fourth or fifth programme I was having rather a good time. And every so often, it hints at genius: a spoof of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which Jekyll is the great Arthur Lowe and Hyde is Cooper in joke-shop monster hands, vampire fangs and ginger wig; Greenwood superb in a Noël Coward-style society romance (though her climactic performance of 'Knees up, Mother Brown' doesn't suggest any deep familiarity with the concept of a knees-up); or Cooper simply picking up a spear, jiggling it around and then announcing "Shakespeare".

It's worth comparing this determinedly old-fashioned comedy, born out of wartime forces entertainments and post-war variety, with the contemporary avant-gardism of *Monty Python's Flying Circus*. The Pythons were younger and – Cleese and the late Terry Jones, in particular – had artistic ambitions; they were all Oxbridge-educated, hyper-articulate, fond of dropping highbrow

references, and even engaging with highbrow ideas. But there are surprising resemblances to Cooper: the penchant for panto-style dragging up, the movie stereotypes (Italian gangsters with pinstripes and tommy-guns), the pleasure in the ropiness of the gag. Or maybe they aren't surprising, given the genealogy. Cooper's scripts were edited by the American expatriate Dick Vosburgh, and contributors included David Nobbs – later the creator of Reggie Perrin – Barry Cryer and sometimes Bill Oddie. There was a big overlap with the Python personnel, through David Frost's various satirical ventures and ITV's *At Last the 1948 Show* (1967); a bearded Vosburgh even turns up in 'Owl Stretching Time', the fourth episode of *MPFC*'s first series, as a gangster dentist. And the Pythons, like Cooper, knew what size could do for a gag: check out Cleese in the Ministry of Silly Walks, in the first programme of the second series.

Network brought out a handsome restoration of the original Python TV shows on Blu-ray at the end of last year, to mark the 50th anniversary, at a price that meant it appealed mainly to people who could already recite every sketch by heart. For less hardened fans, the series are being issued individually: series one and two are already out, with three and four to follow. The difference from the previous complete DVD set, released by Sony, is striking – skies are bluer, the colours of Terry Gilliam's animations deeper, the lines are crisper; the old DVDs look worn and pixelated by comparison. And some of the extended material, much of it unseen, is genuinely good. If *Python* still has a stranglehold on your imagination, a sound investment. **S**

New releases



IRONWEED

Héctor Babenco; US 1987; Eureka Classics; Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD dual format; Certificate 15; 143 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: trailer, booklet.

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

With his first US film, the Brazilian director Héctor Babenco (*Pixote*, 1981; *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, 1985) pursued his preoccupation with the lower reaches of society – petty criminals, bums and outcasts. *Ironweed* is set in 1938 Albany, NY, where Francis Phelan (Jack Nicholson), a one-time baseball star whose life and career long since went down the drain, returns to his native city to confront the ghosts of his past: his on-and-off lover Helen (Meryl Streep), like him reduced to living on the streets, and his family, whom he abandoned after causing the death of his infant son.

With its dead-end street-gutter ambience and prevailingly dour and downbeat mood, *Ironweed* got a rough reception from critics (“an unmitigated waste of talent,” growled Hal Hinson in the *Washington Post*) and public alike. Nor did the script, adapted by William Kennedy from his own Pulitzer-winning novel, win many plaudits. The film deserved better, though. Both Nicholson and Streep dig deep into their roles, with no hint of actorly grandstanding, and the resigned sadness in Nicholson's eyes makes itself movingly felt. There's relief, too in the shape of Tom Waits as Francis's booze-ridden pal Rudy, cancer-ridden and perversely cheerful; and Carroll Baker as Francis's gentle and forgiving wife. True, *Ironweed* goes on too long, but it's not all dirt and desperation.

Disc: Unlike previous DVD releases, Eureka presents the film in its original screen ratio and full running-time. Surprisingly, though, there are no on-disc extras barring a trailer; both essays in the booklet concentrate largely on the two lead performances. More context would have been welcome.

THE MIRACLE WORKER

Arthur Penn; US 1962; Eureka Classics; Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 106 minutes; 1.66:1. Extras: audio essay by Amy Simmons; theatrical trailer, booklet.

Reviewed by Kate Stables

“Half stage and half film,” Arthur Penn fretted about his third outing with William Gibson's story of deaf-blind Helen Keller's extraordinary education (he'd already directed it for TV and on Broadway). As Richard Combs's combative booklet essay asserts, though, it's full of bravura cinematic touches, from Keller's stumbling, rolling shadow-play behind the credits, to the expressionist kaleidoscope flashbacks of teacher Annie Sullivan's childhood horrors. A fine, fierce performance piece, it's scorchingly unsentimental in portraying the knock-down-drag-out fights that Anne Bancroft's Sullivan weathers with Patty Duke's wild, stubborn Keller. Both Bancroft and Duke commit utterly to their performances (the famously violent eight-minute dining-room clash feels like gladiatorial combat), carrying off Oscars that vindicated Penn's unwavering choice of Bancroft over Elizabeth Taylor and a bigger budget. Bancroft, endlessly driven and knocked-back as the tactless, traumatised, vision-impaired teacher, creates a novel depiction of a strong woman, as transformed by the tough process as



Vet in a spin: *Resurrected*

her pupil. As Alexandra Heller-Nicholas notes in her booklet essay, the film is about female ambition, as much about finding agency as it is about finding language. Mirroring the film's themes of light and dark, Ernesto Capparós's deep-focus cinematography is full of arresting contrasts (though the extras package is excellent, an audio commentary with a detailed close reading of the film would have been a boon).

Disc: A gorgeous, velvety transfer, showing off Ruth Morley's evocative, rustling Old South costuming. Amy Simmons's audio essay is smart about Penn's dynamic style – carefully orchestrated to appear spontaneous – and witty about the elements that made the film the ur-Oscar-bait movie.

ORPHANS

Peter Mullan; UK 1998; Powerhouse/Indicator; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 102 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: commentary by Peter Mullan; 2019 BBC Scotland reunion documentary; making-of; deleted scenes; audition tapes; Mullan's shorts 1993-95 (*Close*; *Good Day for the Bad Guys*; *Fridge*); trailer; booklet.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Boasting the pitch-black humour of Glasgow patter, a propensity for settling arguments with violence, and a certain teary-eyed sentiment when it comes to mummies and wee 'uns, Peter Mullan's feature debut as writer-director is as uncompromisingly Scottish as its maker's raspy burr of an accent. In the two decades since its release, he's had a prolific career as an in-demand actor, but only stepped behind the camera twice more (*The Magdalene Sisters*, *Neds*). That's arguably short return for his undeniable talent, though *Orphans'* full-on comedy, carnage and surreal imagery give it a unique cachet for those who can cope with its pedal-to-the-metal ebullience.

Grief can do strange things to people, and the loss of their adored mother leaves these bereaved siblings teetering close to the edge. The eldest and most pompous (Gary Lewis, later the uncomprehending dad in *Billy Elliot*) bears the weight with a crazed sincerity, his brother (Douglas Henshall) gets stabbed defending the family honour in a pub-brawl, and that causes the youngest of the boys (Stephen McCole) to career off on a search for firearms and vengeance, while their disabled sister (Rosemarie Stevenson, her only film role) is left to the mean streets in her motorised wheelchair. The misadventures that befall them encompass unexpected grotesquerie, brutally astringent dialogue, and an overriding

sense of dismay at an atomised social fabric. At times, its construction is a triumph of gung-ho ambition over directorial inexperience, yet the bumps and scrapes give it a character that a more slick and sober approach would never have provided. In his massively entertaining commentary, Mullan describes one moment as “heartbreaking but nuts”, a spot-on summation for a film that deserves its own cult following.

Disc: The HD transfer shows up well, and a recent BBC Scotland 20th anniversary doc is lovingly done. Mullan's commentary is one to cherish however, with almost as many great one-liners as the film itself. He engagingly sends up his own pretensions, but his anger at Film4 for destroying all the out-takes – hence the intriguing deleted scenes appear here in VHS quality – is justified. The inclusion of Mullan's enterprising early shorts makes this a definitive release.

RESURRECTED

Paul Greengrass; UK 1989; Powerhouse/Indicator; region-free Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 92 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: archive interviews with Greengrass and David Thewlis; interview with Rita Tushingham; Imperial War Museum audio interview with veteran Philip Williams; trailer; booklet.

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Having spent his formative years on ITV's flagship current affairs series *World in Action*, Paul Greengrass graduated with this drama tackling the then-contentious issue of the Falklands campaign and its aftermath. It takes a sceptical line on the jingoism and triumphalism of the era by tackling the substantially true story of a British army combatant who'd been assumed missing in action and was given a funeral by his grieving family, only to turn up alive, weeks later, having been fending for himself in the Falklands countryside.

In his first leading role, a youthful David Thewlis impresses as a protagonist clearly suffering from PTSD before the condition became more widely recognised, while his hazy recall, together with a reluctance to embrace the role of returning hero, makes his presence ultimately troubling for his relatives and former comrades alike.

Thewlis's defiant ambiguity, and events that render him a sort of non-person, leave the narrative stuck in a low-gear for much of its running time, so that it lacks the cut and thrust that, say, Alan Clarke might have brought to the material. Greengrass's direction, possibly hampered by budgetary restraints, hasn't the zesty mobility of his later work, as Hollywood's go-to guy for *vérité*-styled action, but the film's simmering anger undoubtedly has a cumulative impact. It has worn better than, for instance, the heavy-handed theatrics of Martin Stellman's similarly themed *For Queen & Country*, released the year before.

Thewlis's unravelling fragility, as he struggles to remain his own man, draws us in. One extraordinary grace note has the camera tracking back from a hospital ward TV showing Lewis Gilbert's 1956 flag-waver *Reach for the Sky*, contrasting Kenneth More's gung-ho portrayal of double-amputee World War II pilot Douglas Bader with the languishing Thewlis, facing uncertain



New releases

prospects. The moment stunningly articulates the film's point about Britain's need to question its investment in militarism as a key component of national identity.

Disc: Useful interviews with Greengrass and Thewlis from a previous DVD release take the place of a commentary track, though the HD transfer's a very clean job. An Imperial War Museum audio interview with former soldier Philip Williams adds a telling real-world perspective on the actual events.

SCORPIO FILMS – THE DUTCH SEX WAVE COLLECTION

OBSESSIONS / BLUE MOVIE / FRANK & EVA / MY NIGHTS WITH SUSAN, SANDRA, OLGA & JULIE

Pim de la Parra/Wim Verstappen; Netherlands 1969/1971/1973/1975; Cult Epics; region-free Blu-ray or DVD; 362 minutes; 1.33:1/2.35:1. Extras: audio commentary on *Frank & Eva*; short films (*Heartbeat San Francisco*; *Joop*; *Joop Strikes Again*); featurettes on Scorpio, sex in Dutch films, the EYE Film Institute; Martin Scorsese interviews, script notes (*Obsession*); stills gallery; booklet.

Reviewed by David Thompson

As everyone contributing to this time capsule of a disc collection is keen to point out, in the early 1970s Holland became the most sexually liberated country in Europe. Promiscuity was rife and open marriages were (if everyone is to be believed) a commonplace. All of which provided a rich source of material for a burgeoning film production company named Scorpio Films, founded by Pim de la Parra and Wim Verstappen, the editors of a polemical film journal, *Skoop*. Before their arrival in the mid-60s, the Dutch film industry was extremely parochial and limited to a handful of titles a year. Sharing roles as either producer or director, de la Parra and Verstappen found a huge audience at home for their movies but also sold them around the world. Curiously, they made little impact in the UK, possibly because of the polarised distribution at that time, which defined foreign films either as art (subtitled and shown in specialist cinemas) or smut (crudely dubbed, mostly censored and treated as exploitation).

Where to place Scorpio Films today? I don't believe there are any lost masterpieces, but they did pursue a cinema that explored sexual politics while cheerfully indulging spectators keen on looking at flesh. The surviving member of the duo, de la Parra, still possesses the impish countenance of a bright student keen to make an impression and a quick buck. He wanted his first film as director, *Obsessions*, to be a "sex and psycho suspense murder mystery". Shot in English but clearly set in Amsterdam, it has a score made up from out-takes generously provided by Bernard Herrmann and a co-scripting credit for Martin Scorsese, no less. Its theme of voyeurism borrows heavily from Hitchcock, and the plot is murky at best, but it set the company on a roll. Verstappen's *Blue Movie* was an even bigger success, making the two men millionaires. It echoes J.G. Ballard in its vision of a new high-rise as a hot bed of sexual shenanigans, and by featuring a male erection it effectively brought an end to Dutch censorship.

De la Parra directed the other two films here: *Frank and Eva*, the story of a couple whose open marriage is a never-ending round of bust-ups



Forging ahead: *Trapped*

and reconciliations, is notable for an early – and undeniably charismatic – appearance by the future Emmanuelle, Sylvia Kristel; *My Nights... is* a quirky drama of sexual games and murderous intrigues among the inhabitants of an isolated house. In their subsequent productions, the duo went for bigger budgets and within a few years were bankrupt. By then the mantle had passed to one Paul Verhoeven, whose even bolder attitude, wider social interests and – frankly – greater talent would really put Dutch cinema on the map.

Disc: Good if not outstanding transfers (the negative of *Obsessions* is lost, and the film has a rather beige look throughout). Some of the extras are skimpy, with only short clips included from two promising-looking documentaries. The script pages of *Obsessions* with notes by Scorsese (mostly about making the dialogue sound more American and sharpening suspense scenes) are fascinating.

TRAPPED

Richard Fleischer; US 1949; Flicker Alley; region-free Blu-ray and DVD dual format; 78 minutes; 1.37:1.

Extras: commentary; featurettes; booklet

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

Long before blockbusters such as *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) and *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), Richard Fleischer cut his teeth on punchy B-movie noirs. And long before *Airplane!* (1980) made Lloyd Bridges a comic star, he was a bit-part actor with a nice line in snarling tough guys. They make a devilishly good match in this engrossing Los Angeles thriller. For decades believed lost, *Trapped* surfaced a few years ago when a collector deposited a 35mm print at the Harvard Film Archive. Now that it has been restored we can savour the tense brilliance of this cut-price gem.

Bridges plays Tris, a counterfeiter busted out of jail by Treasury agents who want to exploit him to snare a new set of forgers passing bills printed on his old plates. Naturally, Tris is out for what he can get: ideally, a fresh score and a new start in Mexico with his lover, a doe-eyed cigarette girl played by a young Barbara Payton. John Hoyt plays a smoothly plausible bigshot who seems to have designs on Tris's girl. The game of double-cross and double-double-cross begins, ratcheting up the tension with the introduction of each sweaty sidekick and every thrown fist.

If you're only familiar with the later work of Fleischer or Bridges, this will be a revelation. The dialogue in Earl Felton and George Zuckerman's taut script is as hardboiled as the film's hero, and after the documentary-style opening tour of the US Treasury Department,

the twists unfold at a thrilling pace. Fleischer's reputation as a master of action began with these budget bruisers and *Trapped* is as good as they get. Bridges has some memorably vicious fight scenes, and the climactic shootout deploys a barrage of gunfire amid a mesh of shadows and unexpected angles to great effect.

Disc: The restoration is a treat, discovering crisp detail among the sunlight and shadows. Extras comprise an illustrated, informative booklet, two documentaries (one on Fleischer by his son and another on the film itself), and a chatty, smart audio commentary by Alan K. Rode and Julie Kirgo.

WINTER KILLS

William Richert; US 1979; Powerhouse/Indicator; Region B Blu-ray; Cert 18; 97/91 minutes; 1.85:1. Extras: audio commentary by Richert; interviews with Richert, Bridges, and key collaborators; trailer with commentary; radio spot; Glenn Kenny on conspiracy movies; booklet.

Reviewed by Tom Charity

In the wake of the political assassinations that ripped across the United States in the 1960s, conspiracy movies found a febrile, paranoid audience eager to entertain speculative explanations. The novelist Richard Condon anticipated the zeitgeist with his Cold War brainwashing thriller *The Manchurian Candidate* (published 1959, filmed 1962). *Winter Kills* (1974) riffs on the JFK assassination, pointing to a second gunman and a (now familiar) nexus of Mafia and anti-Castro Cubans behind the trigger-men. It's hard to credit that William Richert's astonishing movie version really exists in the world, and the more you learn about its production and (minuscule) release, the stronger that feeling becomes. The cast is mind-boggling: Jeff Bridges, John Huston as a Joe Kennedy figure, *noir* veterans Sterling Hayden and Ralph Meeker, Richard Boone, Eli Wallach, Toshiro Mifune, Elizabeth Taylor, Dorothy Malone, and Anthony Perkins as all-seeing, all-knowing John Cerruti, a cross between J. Edgar Hoover, Big Brother, and (we might think) Mark Zuckerberg. Then there's the crew: cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, production designer Robert Boyle, score by Maurice Jarre. Not bad for a first-time filmmaker who had never touched a 35mm camera before. The movie is flawed, funny and fascinating. It's also that perfect storm, a paranoia movie that might just have been suppressed by its own distributor to protect a subsidiary's defence contracts.

Disc: Indicator's disc includes the original 97-minute release and a tighter 91-minute director's cut – most notable for an additional coda – plus a couple of highly amusing featurettes, dating back to the 2002 DVD release, in which Richert, Bridges, Zsigmond, Boyle and others reminisce fondly about a crazy shoot produced by gangsters who were looking to go legit on the back of *Black Emmanuelle* (1975) and figured the more they owed (\$4 million in the red) the less likely anyone would be to shut it down (wrong). Zsigmond's cinematography may never have looked better than it does in this 4K upgrade. Note: Kino Lorber is simultaneously releasing substantially the same package for Region A consumers. 📺

LA HORSE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Critics were unimpressed by this gritty rural thriller but French audiences loved it. The audiences got it right

By Adam Scovell

There are distinct signs that suggest I'm about to watch a crime film from France that I will enjoy. An unusual score will begin, one that I will be humming for days afterwards. The lead actor's name – usually but not uniquely Jean Gabin, Lino Ventura, Alain Delon or Patrick Dewaere – will flash up on the screen in its own box. And finally, when the source material is credited, the magic words *Éditions Gallimard – Collection Série noire* will haunt in sickly yellow under the original novel's title and author. It was a great thrill, then, to discover early last year Pierre Granier-Deferre's wonderfully pulpy *La Horse* (1970), which fulfils all of these requirements with aplomb, yet remains little appreciated in the UK.

Based on a rural thriller by Michel Lambesc (the penname of Georges Godefroy), *La Horse* follows the Maroilleurs, a farming family in the marshes of Gêfosse-Fontenay in the Calvados region of Normandy. Auguste (Jean Gabin) is the strict patriarch who runs the farm calmly but firmly. Finding a bag of heroin in one of their duck-shooting huts, Auguste realises that his grandson Henri (Marc Porel) is involved in drug-smuggling through Le Havre. With the drugs destroyed and one gangster shot in a barn after making threats, the farm is besieged with villains out for revenge and the return of the \$2m-worth of 'la horse'. But how long will the family last before the police realise there's a quiet war raging over the marshes?

From its fantastic but undeniably kitsch score by Serge Gainsbourg to its narrative of isolated rural dwellers fending off urbanites, *La Horse* seems an unusual mixture of ideas and styles. But digging beneath the surface, one finds that Granier-Deferre's film expresses national continuity far more strongly than at first appears. The film is clearly in part a response to Jacques Becker's *It Happened at the Inn* (*Goupi mains rouges*, 1943 – see Home Cinema, *S&S*, March 2018), a similar tale of murderous rural intrigue. Equally – and aptly, considering Gabin's other films of the era – the film plays on the spectre of the Dominici Affair: the murder of a respected British family in the 1950s, the fall-out from which showed that parts of France were still deeply entrenched in an unnervingly older mindset. The rural setting is, therefore, key to the film.

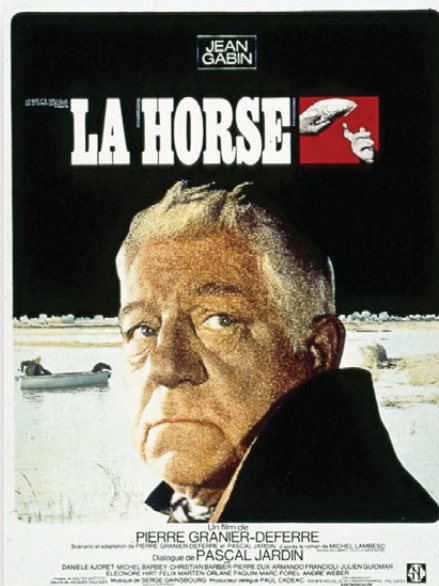
In the film's opening montage we see the encroaching development of a motorway. It is oddly reminiscent of David Gladwell's *Requiem for a Village* (1976), where a traditional way of life is increasingly disturbed by roads and city dwellers. The irony in both films is that violence can make its home anywhere. The final showdown between



Creek tragedy: Jean Gabin in *La Horse*


The film feels closer to the novels of Emile Zola in its mix of raw earthiness and stubborn character – but with added pulp

the family and the gangsters even feels like an inverse of Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971) – a farm is under siege, but it is suited modernity attacking rural conservatism, rather than the other way round. Though *La Horse* is rarely as visceral, its rural community is just as shielded by tradition. If anything, the film feels closer to the novels of Emile Zola in its mix of raw earthiness and stubborn character – but with added pulp.



At the time, Gabin had just released the last of his films to gain general respect, Henri Verneuil's *The Sicilian Clan* (1969). *La Horse* must have come as quite a shock for critics: moving from the suave and stylish urbanism of Verneuil's film, Granier-Deferre's is an entirely different proposition: muddy, relentless and revelling in its own uncompromising character. Despite its popularity with French audiences, the film's critical reception was only lukewarm, and it was barely distributed outside France. The *Le Monde* review was typical, praising Gabin's solid performance but suggesting that the film was aimed at spectators nostalgic for *le cinéma de papa*. In other words, nothing too challenging.

But *La Horse* is just one of a number of films from this period of Gabin's career that suggest his later work has been dismissed too hastily. They include another Granier-Deferre collaboration, the excellent Georges Simenon adaptation *Le Chat* (1971), his Maigret-ish turn in Denys de La Patellière's *Killer* (1972), playing the head of the Dominici family itself in Claude Bernard-Aubert's *The Dominici Affair* (1973), and a melancholy role in José Giovanni's *Two Men in Town* (1974) alongside Alain Delon. All these films have a refreshing grittiness to them, arguably more so than Gabin's films of the previous decade, which veer more readily in tone. But all sit far too darkly in the shadow of his canonical work.

In a 1971 interview with *Monsieur Cinéma*, a French TV programme dedicated to film, Gabin summarised the strengths of *La Horse*. "C'est un film sur les gens de la terre," he said: it is a film about the people of the earth, workers on the land. How appropriate a description for this most Zola-esque and underrated of crime films, one that to this day deserves a wider audience. 

Books

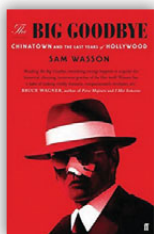


How the West was won: Jack Nicholson in *Chinatown*, Roman Polanski's classic tale of corruption and greed in 1930s California

THE BIG GOODBYE

Chinatown and the Last Years of Hollywood

By Sam Wasson, Faber & Faber, 416pp, ISBN 9780571347636



Reviewed by Tom Charity

When did the Golden Age lose its lustre? The demise of the glory days is a constant refrain in cinephilia, as it is in life, and the point of the question is not simply to pinpoint the precipice, but to savour the bittersweet remembrance of innocence lost. It's the losing that haunts us, which makes us human, maybe.

Chinatown is one of those gold-plated classics, a masterpiece that was recognised as a cut above the rest immediately on its release in 1974 (rave reviews; 11 Academy Award nominations) and which has only grown in stature over the years. It doesn't hurt that it's also weirdly timeless, set in 1937 and evoking the private eye *film noir* genres associated with Raymond Chandler and Humphrey Bogart – it's a classicist's classic. And its reputation was bolstered by the estimation of Syd Field in his seminal film-school book *Screenplay*, first published in 1979, that this was the best written film of the decade.

Well, maybe... Sam Wasson doesn't set out to destroy that claim in *The Big Goodbye*, but his investigation into what Field would call 'backstory' illuminates how reductive

it is to ascribe a movie's virtues to words on a page, and how complicated the question of authorship in cinema really is.

This is an exceptional film book, far more than the production history of *Chinatown*, and so vividly written you will want to seek out Wasson's previous studies on Bob Fosse (see Books, *Sight & Sound*, May 2014), Paul Mazursky, Blake Edwards and *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (*Fifth Avenue, 5 A.M.*).

Wasson begins with childhood vignettes of his key players: the actor, Jack Nicholson, who only had suspicions who his father might be; the producer, Robert Evans, whose father dreamed of being a concert pianist but who had to pull teeth for a living; the screenwriter, Robert Towne, son of a successful and overbearing property developer; and the director, Roman Polanski, whose parents were sent to the Camps, but who survived on the streets. Even here, in their contrasted and complementary boyhoods, we discern how the seeds of the creative impulse are entwined with anguish and defeat.

"When these four boys grew up, they made a movie together called *Chinatown*. Robert Towne once said that *Chinatown* is a state of mind. Not just a place on the map of Los Angeles, but a condition of total awareness almost indistinguishable from blindness. [...] This is a book about Chinatowns: Roman Polanski's, Robert Towne's, Robert Evans's, Jack Nicholson's, the ones they made and the ones they inherited, their guilt and their innocence, what they did right, what they did wrong – and what they could do nothing to stop."

The movie would be unrecognisable and

more than likely a failure without each man's contribution, to say nothing of Paramount's, rebounding from bloated disaster in the early 1970s to become the hippest studio of the Hollywood renaissance. And this is not to overlook the equally fundamental contributions of less fêted artists, such as production designer Richard Sylbert, whose explication of the aesthetics of the film is like a magic key.

Evans liked to take credit for scrapping the original score and bringing in Jerry Goldsmith just weeks before release, and it's true that Goldsmith's elegiac trumpet theme seeps regret and romance into a predominantly cold and cynical movie. But Wasson suggests that the interventions of Susanna Moore (Sylbert's wife), who recommended Bunny Berigan's 1937 recording 'I Can't Get Started', and Julie Payne (Towne's partner), who had the guts to tell Evans the original score had to go, actually laid the foundations for his abrupt volte-face.

Movies come together alchemically, and sometimes, as here, the ingredients, the personalities, the circumstances, cook and coalesce with the temperature of the times. *Chinatown* is set in the late 1930s, but in its historically grounded tale of nefarious civic corruption it somehow channelled the Watergate

'The Big Goodbye' illuminates how complicated the question of authorship in cinema really is – it's an exceptional film book

hearings taking place in 1973, and if you sit down and watch it again today it reverberates with the rampant greed and nepotism of our era.

The murder of Sharon Tate is another defining factor, both for the Angeleno community – horrified, and soon locked and loaded – and for the traumatised child of the Holocaust, Polanski, whose deep nihilism gets a relatively nuanced and sympathetic hearing here. This is a man who, in the wake of the killings, escorted one close friend to the opticians to see if his eyesight matched the bifocals discovered at the crime scene, and who broke into the car of another friend he suspected may have held a grudge against him, to dig for incriminating evidence. None of this, of course, excuses Polanski's crimes and his rape of 13-year-old Samantha Geimer in 1977 is not passed over.


It's Towne who comes off worst, though, and who appears not to have talked to Wasson, ceding that privilege to his alienated ex-wife – a choice he may regret if he ever reads this book, which traces his fall from grace through stinging personal betrayals and tales of copious drug use. Even before success and cocaine went to Towne's head, Wasson suggests that the screenplays which made his name – *The Last Detail* (1973), *Chinatown* and *Shampoo* (1975) – were co-written by a man you have probably never heard of, Towne's best friend Edward Taylor, who appears to have served as something much more than a sounding board but who went unacknowledged for his pains.

It's well known that Polanski wrote the great final scene of *Chinatown* himself, concocting something bleaker and more despairing than Towne could live with. But Polanski also deserves credit for stripping Towne's sprawling, ambitious, novelistic screenplay to its core, insisting, for example, that the camera stick with Nicholson's Jake Gittes throughout.

Wasson writes about Los Angeles with the same love and diligence Towne brought to his script, sensitive to the city's nocturnal beauty and the hidden eddies of romance. He also, like Towne, deftly links personal histories with greater social and political shifts: how cocaine swept through the film industry in the mid-70s; how wide releasing and saturation advertising transforming the economics of the business, so that even men of taste and artistic ambition like Nicholson became cogs in the machine and, arguably, part of the problem.

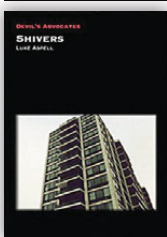
Individuals, even studio heads, were powerless before the conglomeration of Hollywood. This is Wasson's tragic denouement: how corporate capitalism co-opted and cheapened the movie capital's dreams just as surely as Noah Cross stole the future and squeezed it into his crotch pocket.

Reaching the book's fourth and final part – an anguished coda touching on sundry acrimonious perfidies both personal and professional, especially relating to excruciating, forlorn attempts not only to make a sequel, *The Two Jakes*, but to turn back the clock and restore the lost promise of their youthful successes and regain their credibility – I exclaimed aloud more than once, and even welled up over the final page.

The Big Goodbye is worthy of *Chinatown*, this unforgettable movie – high praise indeed. 

SHIVERS

By Luke Aspell, Devil's Advocates Auteur Publishing, 120pp, ISBN 9781911325970



Reviewed by David Cairns

I was well aware of the BFI Classics series of monographs, which deal with canonical titles in international cinema, but only recently discovered the Devil's Advocates series from Auteur Publishing, which was launched in 2011 and which specialises in horror movies and includes more cult and leftfield selections.

For instance, Anne Billson considers *Let the Right One In* (2008) through a very personal lens as a lifetime horror aficionado, while Jez Conolly and David Owain Bates consider *Dead of Night* (1945) in the light of Ealing films, its various directors, actors and crew members, and literary influences such as J.B. Priestley. In her study of *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992), Lindsay Hallam considers the film both as genre-busting TV spin-off, and a sombre work which finds or invents the precise genre needed for its devastating exploration of sexual abuse.

In the latest addition to the series, experimental filmmaker and writer Luke Aspell offers a study of David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975) that – unlike much critical writing on the subject – isn't too much concerned with the film's potential influence on, say, *Alien* (1979, noted once), and doesn't contain the well-worn phrase 'body horror'. The film is instead located within the body of its writer-director's work, as a transitional film between the early experimental movies and the genre films which developed from it. It's also considered alongside literary and philosophical parallels, from J.G. Ballard's 1975 novel *High-Rise* to Freud, Jung and Angela Carter.

It's remarkable that Aspell can dig into 'Shivers' in such detail, addressing it more or less shot by shot, without progress dragging




David Cronenberg's *Shivers* (1975)

Shivers, the book, matches its subject's dry wit, clinical chilliness and naked pleasure in sensation. It's remarkable that Aspell can dig into the movie in such detail, addressing it more or less shot by shot, without progress ever dragging. It seems as if he's managed to sink hooks into the movie's fast-flowing narrative so as to be pulled along through its runtime. As a kind of passenger or parasite clinging to the story, he can relax and watch the scenery go by in a contemplative manner, alert to every detail.

Part of what makes the ride so stimulating is Aspell's shameless appreciation of every facet of his subject: elements of performance, photography and design which may be mistakes can be roped into the film's disturbing effect as if they were deliberate (though as a filmmaker himself, he knows damn well many of them are not). A shaky camera move, a loss of focus, the stiltedness of an actor or the barrenness of an under-dressed location all offer opportunities for Aspell to display his voracious enthusiasm for this cheap, quickly made but unusual and wildly imaginative film.

Aspell also takes it for granted, wisely, that Cronenberg knows what he's doing, so inconsistencies in the film's writing, where the parasite-infected residents of the Starliner housing complex are at times zombie-like, at times ferocious, at times perfectly rational, come to seem like carefully considered choices. "Cronenberg is a modern, and modernist, filmmaker, and requires a solid empiricist runway for his flights of fancy, but he's a filmmaker of the irrational, of dreams that become nightmares," Aspell writes. It's an observation that explains some of the weirder features of Cronenberg's later features *Rabid* (1976), *Scanners* (1980) and *The Fly* (1986), which come on like purely speculative fiction but then advance into surreal and unlikely scenarios of biological adaptation that don't really stand up to logical examination, but do have a dreamlike power. This becomes explicit in films like *Videodrome* (1983), *Naked Lunch* (1991), *eXistenZ* (1999) and *Spider* (2002), in which Cronenbergian parasites seemingly infect the film narrative itself, mutating it imperceptibly as we watch.

The author also notes approvingly the little-addressed reticence of the movie to show the sex and violence it hints at: Cronenberg has more often been seen as a maker of explicit horrors and special-effects showcases, atrocity exhibitions in which nothing's left to the imagination. Not so: the filmmaker serves up sights no normal viewer could imagine for themselves ("This is more fun than we've had for several minutes, as the puppet is obviously being pushed by Migicovsky's tongue," is a fairly representative sentence), but when his story features more naturalistic mayhem he cuts away far more than you'd expect.

Even product placement (Coca-Cola and Carlsberg) becomes something for Aspell to explore with regard to the film's meaning and reception – "the most taboo aspect of *Shivers' mise-en-scène*." This happy willingness to accept everything the film offers as fuel for cogitation makes for an engaging read: you feel like you've seen an exciting film and heard a stimulating lecture all at once. 

MR MURDER

The Life and Times of Tod Slaughter

By Denis Meikle, Kip Xool and Doug Young.
Hemlock Books, 284pp, ISBN 9781999305642



Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Reading this exhaustive biography of the first real star of British horror, written by Denis Meikle, and based on 20 years of extensive information-gathering from co-authors Kip Xool and Doug Young, one gets a

sense that class and its attendant notions of good taste are the primary reasons why the extraordinary interwar star of stage and screen Tod Slaughter has been relegated to the margins of discussions of both national and genre cinema.

With a name that seemingly fated him to pursue the very British brand of blood-and-thunder villainy in which he came to specialise, the man born Norman Carter Slaughter in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1885 embodied a popular film culture of the 1930s that was largely ignored even by reviewers of the time, and which barely registered at all beyond these shores. (Unlike fellow compatriots drawn from the stage, such as Boris Karloff, Charles Laughton or Claude Rains, Slaughter never made films outside his homeland.)

Jug-eared, long-limbed and with a proclivity for melodramatic flourish honed over several decades of treading the boards, Slaughter made for as unlikely a star of the silver screen as such contemporaries as George Formby or Gracie Fields. He was already into his fifties when George King, the shrewd producer of quota quickies (films made on the cheap to benefit from legislation requiring cinemas to screen a fixed proportion of British product) and the director of many of his star turns, launched Slaughter's film career with a run of titles that were the closest the British industry ever got to a bona fide series akin to the Universal Pictures horrors of the 1930s. As Meikle writes, Slaughter "represented a good investment for King: he was a 'name' of sorts, he would come cheap, and he had a whole back-catalogue of ready horrors to hand in which he was well-practised".

Their first collaboration was *Maria Marten, or The Murder in the Red Barn* (1935), a lurid melodrama based on an infamous true-crime case from the early 19th century. Slaughter took the role of callous Squire William Corder, who does the titular peasant girl wrong, then does her in. In 1927, Slaughter had transformed the fortunes of the Elephant and Castle Theatre he was managing when his stage version, produced to mark the anniversary of the case, saw the great and the good of London's cultural scene flocking south of the river for an evening of – as one contemporary reviewer put it – "gore, gallows, sentiment, and comedy... pounded with a crafty pestle into a thoroughly stimulating entertainment". Interestingly, however, for this stage version another actor played the role with which Slaughter would be most associated throughout his film career.

Slaughter's second screen outing, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1936), was based on another of his theatrical stock-in-trades, and he consolidated his 'Mr Murder' public persona through tie-in radio broadcasts and a vinyl release



Touch of evil: Tod Slaughter, aka 'Mr Murder'


of his performance ("What a lovely throat she's got for a razor. I'd love to polish her off...")

As the authors point out, when compared with their transatlantic counterparts, Slaughter's films tended towards the dramatically hidebound and cinematically threadbare. They're also largely devoid of the more ghoulish elements that might have endeared them to later horror fans – we have the overzealous hand of the British censor to blame for that.

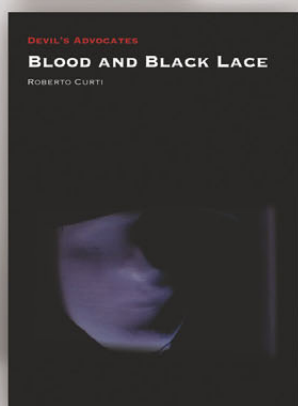
Nevertheless, no less a figure than Graham Greene had kind things to say about *The Face at the Window* (1939), a proto-werewolf tale set in 1880s Paris, featuring a mad scientist attempting to bring life to the dead. Writing in the *Spectator*, Greene argued against the prevailing tide of opinion when he wrote: "It is one of the best English

Slaughter's brand of blood-and-thunder villainy embodied a popular film culture of the 1930s that was largely ignored by critics

pictures I have seen and leaves the American horror films far behind." However, by this time the horrors of the outside world were displacing any need for them on UK screens, and though he continued to make films into the 1950s, Slaughter's fortunes began to falter. He died in 1956.

In laying equal emphasis on his stage career, *Mr Murder* sheds vital light on a relatively murky domain of British vernacular culture and its relationship to its cinema. But where this book really shines as a piece of social history is through its extensive illustrative materials. Among the copious photos, playbills, news clippings and other ephemera of the era, is a letter written to Slaughter's wife and co-performer Jenny Lynn from her first husband, effectively disowning her, and allowing her to go ahead and marry Slaughter – an example that typifies the book's fastidiousness in exhuming every aspect of his life. The book's greatest coup, however, is its unearthing of Slaughter's unpublished memoirs – discovered in his nephew Clive's attic – pages of which are produced within the book, and which allow the real voice behind Slaughter's 'Mr Murder' persona to be heard. 

Read

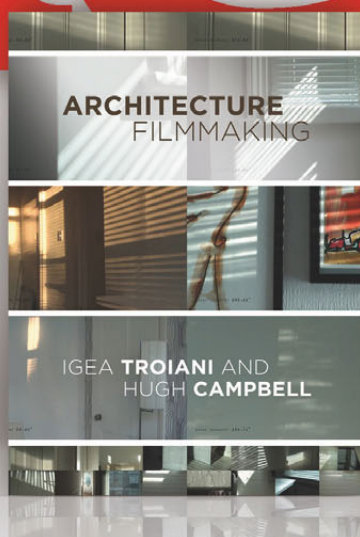


BLOOD AND BLACK LACE

By Roberto Curti, Auteur/*Devil's Advocates*, 120pp, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781911325932
Mario Bava's *Blood and Black Lace* (1964) is commonly considered the archetypal *giallo*. A murder mystery about a faceless killer stalking the premises of a luxurious fashion house in Rome, it set the rules for the genre. But it is first and foremost an exquisitely stylish film, full of gorgeous colour schemes, elegant camerawork and surrealistic imagery.

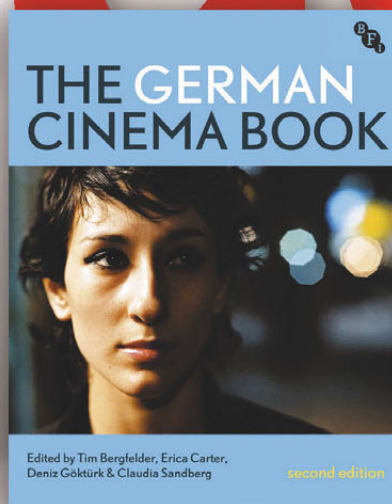
This *Devil's Advocate* recollects *Blood and Black Lace's* production history in the context of the Italian film industry of the period and includes plenty of previously undisclosed data. Roberto Curti analyses its main narrative and stylistic aspects, including the groundbreaking prominence of violence and sadism, as well as Bava's clever handling of the audience's expectations through irony and pitch-black humour. The book places the film within Bava's oeuvre, and considers its impact on the *giallo* genre and on future filmmakers.

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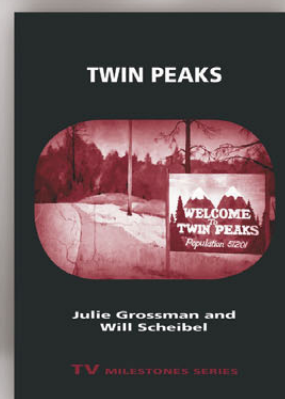
ARCHITECTURE FILMMAKING

Edited by Igea Troiani and Hugh Campbell, Intellect, 404pp, hardback, £90, ISBN 9781783209941
This book investigates the ways in which architectural researchers, teachers of architecture, their students and practising architects, filmmakers and artists are using filmmaking in their practice. Unlike other books on architecture and film, *Architecture Filmmaking* investigates how the now-expanded field of architecture utilises the practice of filmmaking (feature/short film, stop-motion animation and documentary) or video/moving image in research, teaching and practice, and what the consequences of this interdisciplinary exchange are. www.intellectbooks.com/architecture-filmmaking



THE GERMAN CINEMA BOOK, SECOND EDITION

Edited by Tim Bergfelder, Erica Carter, Deniz Göktürk & Claudia Sandberg, British Film Institute, 624pp, illustrated, paperback, £34.99, ISBN 9781844575305
The new edition of this essential introduction addresses the whole history of cinema in Germany, covering key periods and movements including early and silent cinema, Weimar cinema, Nazi cinema, the New German Cinema, the Berlin School, the cinema of migration, and moving images in the digital era. Contributions by leading scholars are grouped into sections that focus on genre; stars; authorship; film production, distribution and exhibition; theory and politics, including women's and queer cinema; and transnational connections. Spotlight articles within each section offer key case studies, including of individual films that illuminate larger histories (*Heimat*, *Downfall*, *The Lives of Others*, and many more); stars from Hans Albers to Hanna Schygulla; directors including FW. Murnau, Wim Wenders and Helke Sander; and film theorists including Siegfried Kracauer and Béla Balázs. www.bloomsbury.com/BFI



TWIN PEAKS

By Julie Grossman & Will Scheibel, Wayne State University Press, TV Milestones Series, 122pp, paperback, £18.50/\$19.99, ISBN 9780814346228
Twin Peaks takes fans through the world that Mark Frost and David Lynch created, and examines its impact on society, genre and the television industry. Julie Grossman and Will Scheibel explore the influences of melodrama and *film noir*, the significance around the idea of 'home' as well as female trauma and agency. It argues that the show has transcended conventional binaries not only in film and television but also in culture and gender, and explores the ways in which the series critiques multiple forms of objectification in culture. Readers interested in film, television, pop culture and gender studies, as well as fans and new audiences discovering *Twin Peaks*, will embrace this book. In the UK and Europe: www.eurospanbookstore.com/waynestate
In North America: www.wsupress.wayne.edu

Read



Studying Feminist Film Theory
Terri Murray

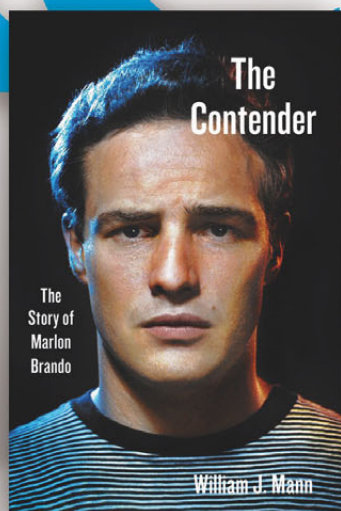


STUDYING FEMINIST FILM THEORY

By Terri Murray, Auteur, 136pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781911325796

Studying Feminist Film Theory is aimed at helping media and film studies students understand the basics of a complex theory that is nonetheless essential for the critical study of the moving image. No prior knowledge of the theory is required, as Terri Murray explains key terminology and the contributions of influential theorists whose seminal texts have influenced our understanding of gender representations. Many illustrative case studies from popular cinema are used to allow students to consider the connotations of visual and aural elements of film, narrative conflicts and oppositions, the implications of spectator positioning and viewer identification, and an ideological critical approach to film. Case studies are designed to be accessible to those new to the subject, and include the work of directors Kathryn Bigelow (*Strange Days*), Jane Campion (*The Piano*), Spike Lee (*BlackKkKlansman*), Claire Denis (*Beau travail*) and Paul Verhoeven (*Basic Instinct*, *Elle*).

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THE CONTENDER

The Story of Marlon Brando

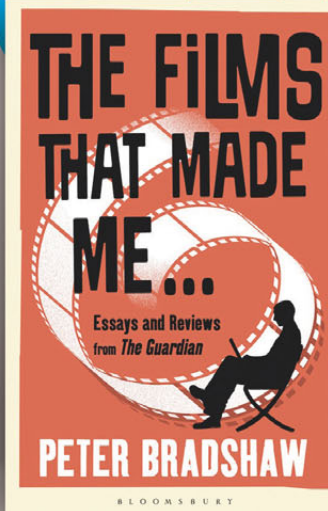
By William J. Mann, HarperCollins, 736pp, hardback, £22, ISBN 9780062427649

The most influential actor of his era, Marlon Brando changed the way other actors perceived their craft. Brando was heralded as the American Hamlet – the Yank who surpassed British stage royalty Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson as the standard of greatness in the mid-20th century.

Brando's impact on American culture matches his professional significance; he was also one of the first stars to use his fame as a platform to address social, political and moral issues, courageously calling out America's deep-rooted racism.

William Mann's brilliant biography of the Hollywood legend illuminates this cultural icon for a new age. Based on new and revelatory material, *The Contender* explores the star and the man, including childhood traumas that reverberated through his professional and personal life.

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THE FILMS THAT MADE ME...

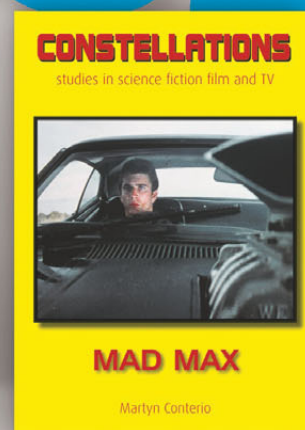
By Peter Bradshaw, Bloomsbury Caravel, 544pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781448217557

Peter Bradshaw is the film reviewer for intelligent, curious cinemagoers; he has worked at the *Guardian* for more than 20 years. *The Films That Made Me...* collates his finest reviews from the last two decades, which carry with them his deep experience, knowledge and understanding of film.

Each section begins with a brief introductory article in Bradshaw's light, humorous tone. Ranging from *The Cat in the Hat* and the *Twilight* saga to *Synecdoche: New York*, he shares the films that he loved, the films that he hated, the films that made him laugh, cry, swoon and scared.

Bradshaw's reviews range from the insightful and introspective to the savage and funny. *The Films That Made Me...* is a must-read for all film fanatics.

www.bloomsbury.com/thefilmsthatmademe



MAD MAX

By Martyn Conterio, Auteur/Constellations, 100pp, paperback, £9.99, ISBN 9781911325864

Mad Max (1979) is a one-off. Lumped in with the low-budget indigenous Australian films that became known as Ozploitation, yet completely unlike other films made during the 1970s New Wave, George Miller's beautifully crafted directorial debut is a singular piece of action cinema. This Constellation examines *Mad Max*'s considerable formal qualities in detail, including Miller's theory of cinema as "visual rock 'n' roll" and his marriage of classical Hollywood editing with Soviet-style montage. It also situates the film at a particular historical moment, one when Australia was beset by economic woes, environmental disasters and political change. Taking in everything from the film's extremely controversial domestic critical reception to its legacy today, via a string of sequels and the creation of an entire subgenre – the post-apocalyptic actioner – this is a book for film students and fans alike.

www.facebook.com/constellationsbooks

READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN
Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

I read your recent article about the new Britbox streaming service with interest ('Boxing clever', Home Cinema, *S&S*, February). The main draw for me – and, I am sure, many others – is that practically every single episode of classic *Doctor Who* from season one in 1963 to season 26 in 1989 is available: more than 600 episodes, from William Hartnell to Sylvester McCoy. This doesn't even count the incomplete serials, animated episodes, specials and more that are also available. Judging by the very well attended and (what was for me and many others) emotional screening of a Sylvester McCoy story at the BFI Southbank in London in November, there will be a real appetite for this, and it makes it well worth the subscription price!

Gareth Logue *Blackpool*

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT'S DUE

Having previously emailed to moan about Nick Pinkerton's auteur-y writing style, it's only right that I message you again to praise his review of *Once upon a Time... in Hollywood* in the '50 Best Films of 2019' issue (*S&S*, January). His anecdotes here are less selfie for selfie's sake but instead central to the piece. A smooth leap.

Tony Barrett *By email*

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN

Congratulations for running Tony Rayns's review of the Blu-ray release of John Farrow's fine 1947 film *The Big Clock* ('Out of time', Home Cinema, *S&S*, July 2019) – one of his very best. Also for your terrific summary of this criminally overlooked filmmaker's life and history. Rayns ends his article with the sentence: "Still, the Farrow rediscovery starts here!" We'd like to let you know that after about a decade's research we are close to finishing a feature-length documentary on John Farrow's life, work and legacy, which will be released early next year.

Frans Vandenburg and Claude Gonzalez

Producers and directors of 'John Farrow: Hollywood's Man in the Shadows'

UNSUNG WOMEN

I appreciate that Isabel Stevens may be talking about cinematic interpretations ('Book smart', *S&S*, February), but it seems odd that she describes Gillian Armstrong as "the first woman to direct an adaptation" of *Little Women* before going on to single out the 1970 BBC serial as possibly "the worst ever". Its director, Patricia 'Paddy' Russell, was not even the first woman to oversee a TV adaptation of the book; two BBC serialisations in the 1950s were 'produced' by Pamela Brown and Joy Harington respectively.

Rose White *Basingstoke*

TOO MUCH, TOO YOUNG

Lorenza Mazzetti ('Genius at work', *S&S*, December 2018) died today; an event that was never going to happen. Using reason, you knew of course it would, but you simply could not feel

LETTER OF THE MONTH MEN WITHOUT WOMEN



In Hannah McGill's excellent article on Stanley Kubrick, 'Eyes of the beholder' (*S&S*, December 2019), she states: "Women and people of colour are peripheral in his films; cruelty, violence and abusive sex are played for laughs..." Lest readers get the idea that Kubrick was unconcerned with woman, people of colour and abusiveness, I would offer that he was one of the most morally astute of filmmakers. The reason why women, especially, and people of colour are not seemingly at the centre of his films is because these films, again and again, are indictments of the havoc and abuse perpetrated by privileged white men.

It has been such from the very beginning, in *Paths of Glory* (1957), wherein the sole woman, Christiane Susanne Harlan (credited

in the film as Susanne Christiane and soon to become Kubrick's wife; pictured above), is presented first to show the dehumanisation of men by men, and then as their saviour. Repeatedly, Kubrick shows us the terrible consequences of men's worlds absent of women.

As for the laughter at abuse, etc, this is the blackest of humour – a complicated response to things that are so horrible that we could just as easily gasp or cry. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) gets abundant laughter from the prospect of mass annihilation, but no one would argue that Kubrick was treating the matter lightly. **Ralph Hammann** Director, 'Richard Wilbur and the Things of This World', Williamstown, US

it. That's what it's like when someone old and wise dies – someone who has lived for nearly a century and has a wealth of cultural and spiritual riches trailing behind them. A person whose life and work you draw on, practically drink from.

On 23 January 2019 Jonas Mekas died aged 96. He was also so full of energy that he was never going to die. On 29 March 2019 Agnès Varda died aged 90. She had enough curiosity to sustain her forever. Mazzetti died on 4 January 2020, aged 92. Less than a year earlier she had talked of what a pity it was that her contemporaries and collaborators were gone; the wicked sparkle in her own eyes made it clear she carried within herself a feverish force of life that would defy death itself.

All of these remarkable people had long

lives, longer than most, and their deaths were natural. They had to come and should not have been a shock, for that's how things are ordered. Nonetheless, their living existence was part of the world in a way that was permanent and unquestionable. You could not feel it coming.

Ginte Regina *By email* ✉

Additions and corrections

February p.58 *Richard Jewell*: Certificate 15, 130m 45s; p.63 *Be Natural: The Untold Story of Alice Guy-Blaché*: Certificate PG, 102m 33s; *Bombshell*: USA/Canada 2019, ©Lucite Desk LLC and Lions Gate Films Inc.; p.73 *No Fathers in Kashmir*: Certificate 15, 108m 05s; p.75 *Plus One*: Not submitted for theatrical classification, Video certificate: 15, Running time: 98m 39s; p.75 the Chinese theatrical title of *Present Perfect* is *Wanmei Xianzaishi* p.77 *The Runaways*: Certificate 12A, 113m 9s; *Show Me the Picture: The Story of Jim Marshall*: Certificate 15, 92m 45s; p.78 *Talking About Trees*: Certificate PG, 93m 26s; p.79 *Uncut Gems*: Certificate 15, 135m 21s

MEMORIES OF MURDER



A real-life twist has cast the final moments of Bong Joon Ho's 2003 portrait of a series of unsolved murders in a chilling new light

By James Bell and Bong Joon Ho

JB: The final moments of Bong Joon Ho's second feature return us to the place we found ourselves when the film began: crouched with detective Park Dooman (Song Kangho) by a covered drainage ditch on the edge of a peaceful, sun-kissed field of swaying wheat just outside Hwaseong city in Korea's Gyeonggi province.

In those opening moments, the apparent bucolic idyll is shattered by detective Park's grim discovery in the concrete pipe of a woman's naked body crawling with insects – the first victim in what will become a string of killings of girls and women over the next five years. Bong's film follows the consistently frustrated attempt to catch the killer, telling a horrifying story based largely on a real-life case that had traumatised South Korea in the late 1980s and early 90s.

At the film's conclusion, we're again with Park, but where he was a detective when we met him, he's now a besuited, bespectacled salesman with a tidy haircut, working for a company selling juice extractor machines. It's now 2003, and 17 years have passed since the events that opened the film. As it did to the men investigating the still unsolved 'Zodiac killings' depicted in David Fincher's *Zodiac* (made in 2007, four years after Bong's film, and owing it a clear debt), the case took a heavy toll on Detective Park. Despite all his efforts, and

a suspect he and his associate Detective Seo Taeyoon (Kim Sangkyung) felt confident was their man, the murderer was never caught.

The failure to capture the killer has come to haunt both detectives in the film, as the real-life case had haunted Korean society. The Hwaseong murders, as they became known, were the first recorded instance of a serial killer operating in Korea, and the failure to catch the perpetrator came to exemplify for many Koreans the broader corruptions and incompetencies of the Korean state in the twilight years of military rule – an era many Koreans, Bong Joon Ho included, often wished to forget.

When we first see Park again in the film's coda, he seems to have been able to move on from the case. But finding himself again at the edge of the field, the past comes rushing back. As he peers into the drainage pipe – empty this time – a young schoolgirl passes and asks him what he is doing. "I'm just looking," he replies. "That's so weird," the girl says. "A while back a man was here looking into that hole. I asked him the same question." "What did he say?" asks Park, excitedly. "He remembered doing something here a long time ago, so he came back to take a look," the girl replies. "Did you see his face? What did he look like?" Park demands. "Well. Kind of plain," says the girl, "Just... ordinary."

At that – and brilliantly acted by Song

He looks into the camera, as though studying the audience watching the film. 'Are you the killer?' the look seems to ask

Kangho – Park's face registers all the pent-up torture of still not knowing. He turns and looks straight into the camera, as though studying the audience watching the film. "Are you the killer?" the look seems to ask. "Or you over there? Or you?" Then the film fades to black.

The real-life crime looked like it would remain unsolved until, suddenly, last year, a match was made on a DNA database. A man named Lee Choonjae, now in his mid-fifties and serving a life sentence since 1994 for the rape and murder of his sister-in-law, was linked – however, the statute of limitations expired in April 2006, meaning police will be unable to prosecute.

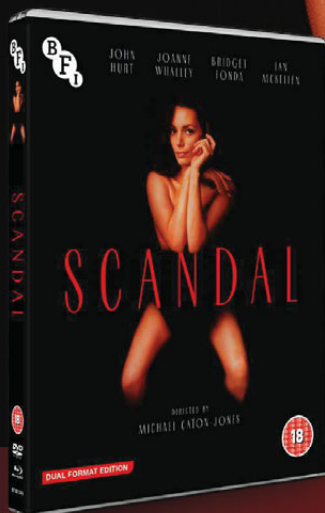
BJH: During the writing of *Memories of Murder* I spent a long time researching, meeting people – the detective involved, the journalist who investigated the case. But of course, the one person I couldn't meet was the serial killer. I became obsessed, and I kept thinking about him for years after I made the film.

With the ending, I wanted the murderer to lock eyes with the detective. I remember thinking 'Maybe the serial killer might one day come to a theatre, and sit there watching the film about himself and what he did many years ago.' It made me extremely uncomfortable to imagine that.

I read an interview with one of the killer's cellmates, in which he said that they had watched the film together on TV around three times, and each time the killer watched it, he would shout at the screen 'That bastard!' People tend to lie about such things, so I don't really know what to believe, but I would definitely like to meet him – though I don't know if my request to visit would ever get approved by the jail authorities. 📍



SCANDAL



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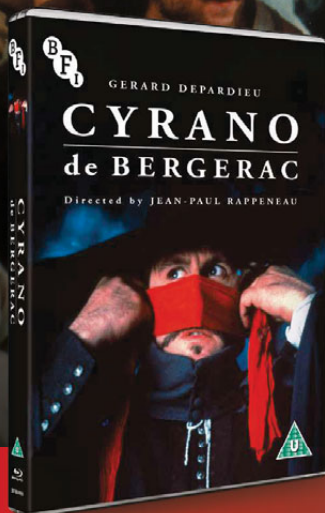
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