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Little White Lies

TRUTH & MOVIES



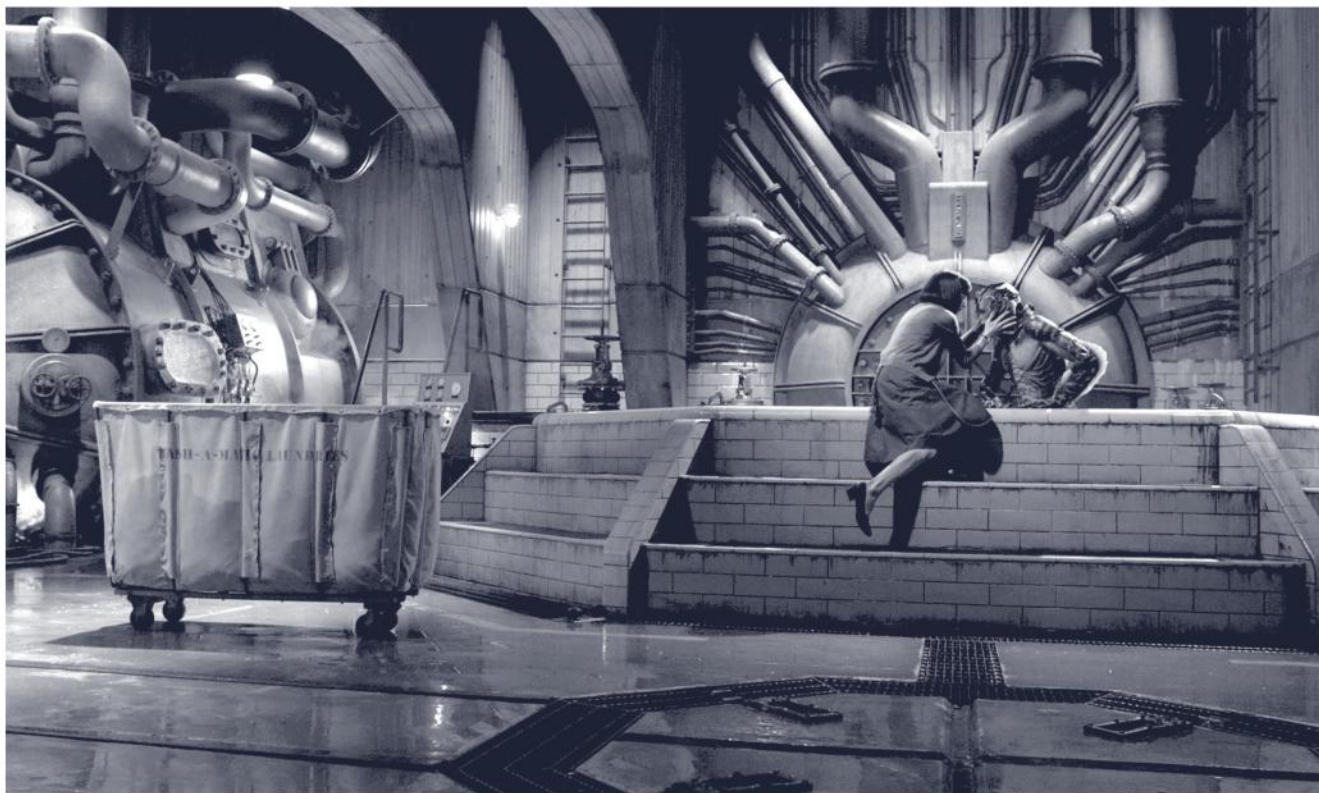
The Shape of Water







The natives in
the Amazon
worshipped it.
Like a god.





The Shape of Water

Directed by

GUILLERMO DEL TORO

Starring

SALLY HAWKINS, DOUG JONES, RICHARD JENKINS

Released

16 FEBRUARY, 2018

Guillermo del Toro's latest is a fairy tale for grown-ups with a cinephile twist, and it may be his most perfect confection to date.



In a promotional interview for *The Shape of Water*, director Guillermo del Toro expressed his regret at having turned down an opportunity some ten years ago to oversee the resurrection of Universal's monster movie series. The franchise, as is the way of these things, moved ahead without him. It was rebranded the 'Dark Universe,' only to implode at launch with the release of *The Mummy* this past summer. Despite the presence of Tom Cruise as their space chimp, the studio's \$125m experiment in Marvel-bothering was summarily pronounced DOA.

Audiences can count themselves lucky that del Toro chose to forge his own path, away from the enforced strictures of an inherited property. The decision left this singular filmmaker free to engineer a dark universe of his own design – a new world of gods and monsters, if you will? – of which *The Shape of Water* is the crowning summation.

The spirit of those early Universal pictures has long inflected del Toro's work. The wells of humanity of James Whale's *Frankenstein*; the empathy of its sequel, *Bride of Frankenstein*; the sexual fascination of Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* or, more explicitly, its follow-up, *Revenge of the Creature*. These all find their way into del Toro's latest, an effortless synthesis of influences. Yet *The Shape of Water* is no postmodern duck shoot of cultural

signifiers. It's a fairy tale steeped in tradition. It is a film that could only exist with a century of cinema behind it, and could only be masterminded by del Toro.

In the same way the Brothers Grimm codified a millennium of European folklore on the page, del Toro draws from the spring of the 20th century's pre-eminent means of self-mythologising. Movies are, for him, pregnant with fantasy and fear. They permeate his work like the smell of toasted cocoa, which one character here describes as, "Tragedy and delight, hand in hand." This cross-pollination of genre is nothing short of remarkable. The blindsiding tonal shifts signal that we are clearly in the hands of a master.

The world of *The Shape of Water* is a movie world. One where its protagonists work in a secret government facility that hosts experiments on mysterious creatures snatched from the depths of South America. It's a place where our heroine lives above a dilapidated revival cinema which screens double features of biblical epics and swiftly forgotten musicals. Here, a mute cleaning lady can fall in love with a god.

Just like Grimms' fairy tales, mid-century sci-fi and fantasy proved inherently political. The year is 1962, but it is also today. Against a



backdrop of the civil rights movement and space race paranoia, a group of social outcasts come together to save a kindred soul – an amphibian man known as “The Asset” – from government autopsy. While the *Hellboy* films saw del Toro’s rough-and-tumble misfits seemingly plucked from a late Howard Hawks film, *The Shape of Water* draws its world-beaten underdogs as emissaries of humanity.

It’s no coincidence that the headline feature at the cinema over which the “princess without voice” lives is Henry Koster’s *The Story of Ruth*, a largely forgotten melodrama that posits love as the reward for kindness in the face of extreme prejudice. An extraordinary Sally Hawkins is Elisa, an orphan discovered by the banks of a river, her neck scarred from the removal of her larynx as a child. Her neighbour is Giles (Richard Jenkins), an alcoholic artist, struggling to hold on to a gig painting Rockwellian jello ads.

We first meet Elisa submerged underwater, floating above her sofa in peaceful reverie. She awakens, and the connection between water and fantasy continues with a morning routine that consists of boiling eggs on a stove while masturbating in the bathtub. Del Toro shares his screenwriting credit for the first time with *Divergent* scribe Vanessa Taylor, and both show little interest in Disney-fied recourse to sublimation of strength and desire for their princess.

Elisa pointedly possesses her own sexual agency, and the film is awash with Freudian imagery symbolising female sexuality and (re-)birth.

Elisa and Giles pass their evenings in front of his television, switching away from the violence of the news that sees black protesters attacked with German Shepherds (and a familiar cattle prod) for the escapist fare of golden age musicals. They tap their feet along to Betty Grable numbers. They marvel at another mismatched couple as Bojangles and Shirley Temple perform *The Little Colonel*’s stair dance. They take Alice Faye’s poignant rendition of “You’ll Never Know” to heart. Harsh reality and Hollywood daydreams are boxed-in on Giles’ flickering set. Soon they will manifest in the couple’s lives, the latter primed to explode in a transcendent third act *coup de cinéma*.

That old Hollywood magic finds a vessel in the love story between Eliza and the amphibian man, who is magnificently portrayed by Doug Jones. Superficial design similarities warrant the comparison to his role as fishy help-meet Abe Sapien in *Hellboy*, but this is a more sophisticated and detailed performance. The simultaneous animalism and humanity – the love and longing he expresses through the CGI-assisted suit – never cease to



amaze. Elsewhere, a focus-pull reveals two raindrops chasing each other as Madeleine Peyroux sings ‘La Javanaise’. A room filled with water becomes the site of a sexual tryst. Del Toro brings such swoon-inducing romanticism to their hesitant courtship that it’s hard to hesitate for a second in accepting the interspecies coupling. Which is both film and filmmaker’s point: the unconditional championing of the ‘other.’

As Dan Laustsen’s fluid camera eddies and glides through scenes, del Toro brings his peerless mastery of colour to bear. When Giles presents his artwork to his old boss, the red jello just won’t do. “They want green now. It’s the future.” Green – the dominant colour in Elisa’s apartment – is the future. “I’m not so sure about the green,” says Michael Shannon’s villain-in-chief, Strickland, when out to buy a new Cadillac. “Not green, my friend... teal,” says the car dealer in return. Teal – almost, but not quite green – is the colour of the government facility, the workplace where, “Decency is a commodity we don’t use, so we export it.” It is a time and a place on the cusp of the future, a colour on the cusp of green. It’s unlike the vividly-hued green sweets Strickland permanently sucks on, the ones that can’t abate his sickness, his necrosis. The man that isn’t so sure of his place in the future, isn’t so sure about the green.

In an era of subservience and false fronts, where even a racist pie seller has to put on a fake accent to get by, del Toro finds

grace, love and even a halting measure of self-acceptance for world weary “relic” Giles. To these social pariahs del Toro affords an unqualified dignity. Buried deep in the closing credits is an acknowledgement of the work of the 12th Century Muslim poet, Hakim Sanai, who is perhaps responsible for the film’s closing words. That Sufi spiritualism should inform *The Shape of Water’s* message of love and tolerance (in opposition to Strickland’s twisted biblical appropriations) comes as little surprise given its director’s wide pool of influences.

Del Toro relinquished the chance to offer his take on the Universal monster movie franchise he clearly loves so much. Yet by the end of his exquisite new film, it’s hard not to recall the words intoned by a blind hermit to the monster in the gothic classic, *Bride of Frankenstein*: “You’re welcome, my friend, whoever you are.”

MATT THRIFT

ANTICIPATION. *That trailer looks beautiful, but what are we getting?* **4**

ENJOYMENT. *A transcendent love story and timeless hymn to tolerance.* **5**

IN RETROSPECT. *Del Toro’s greatest work. Simply magnificent.* **5**

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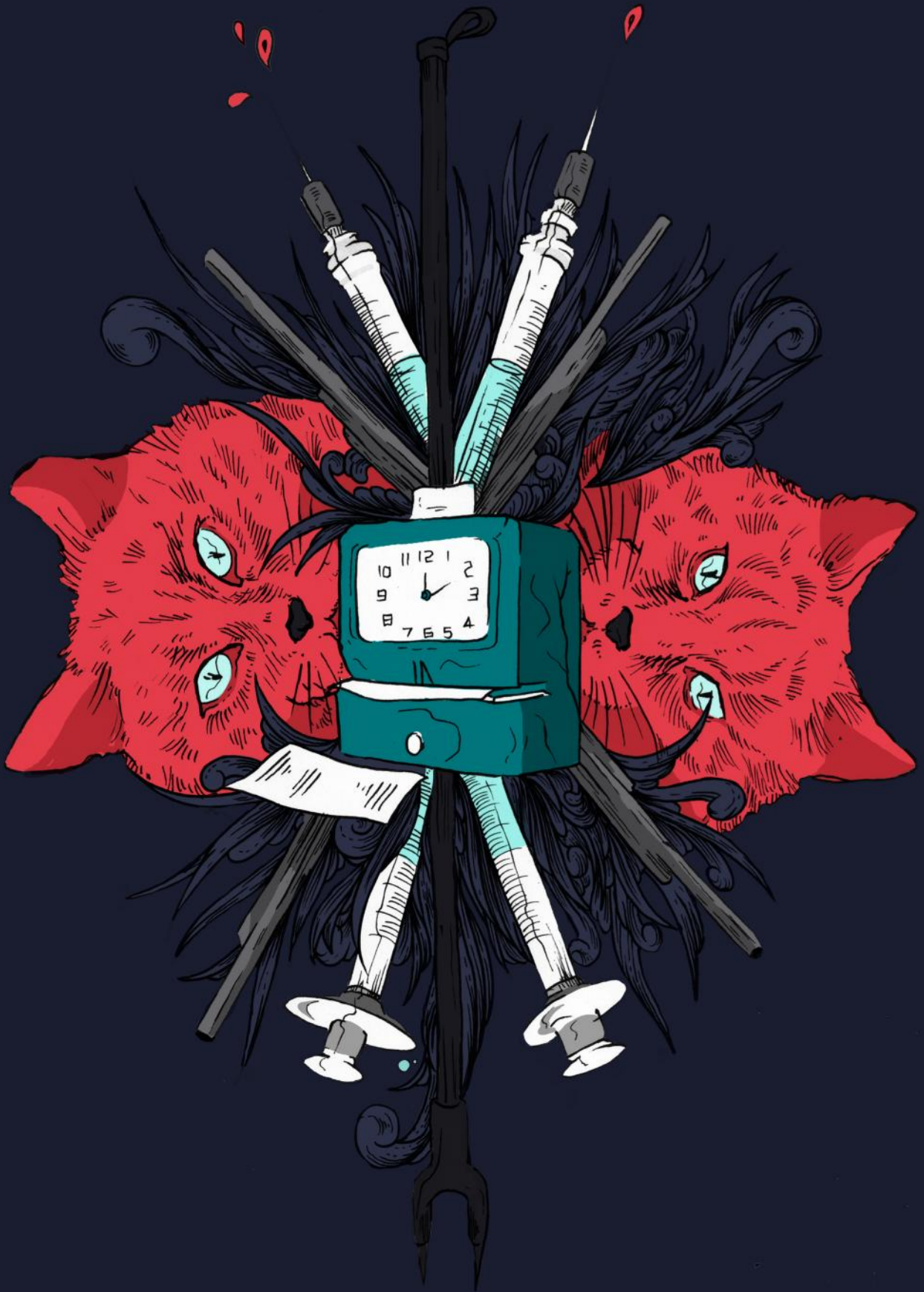
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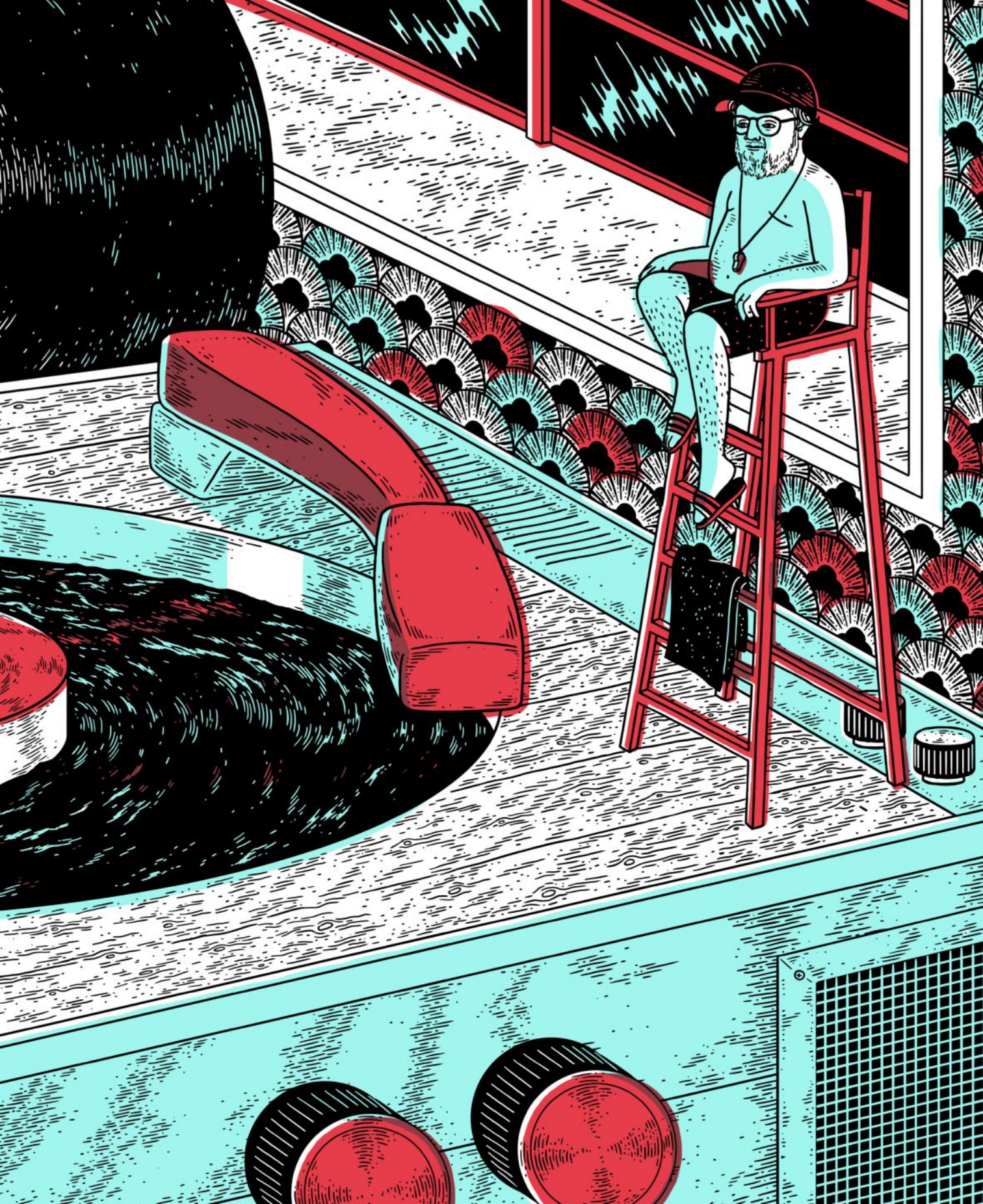
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A Conversation with

Guillermo del Toro



Words by
David Jenkins

Illustration by
Laurène Boglio

The man who adds a dash of dark whimsy to his every project returns with a cold war-era fantasy saga about the romantic pairing of a mute cleaning lady and a humanoid fish creature. *The Shape of Water* is Guillermo del Toro's remarkable tenth feature, and it has been a long and winding road since his extraordinary debut, *Cronos*, in 1993. We speak to the iconic director about his fondness for monsters, old movies and underdog outsiders.

1. ON MONSTERS

How do you define a monster?

Rather than defining a monster, let me define the monster movie. A monster movie is a movie where the monster is not hidden or hinted at, but displayed. It's right there in front of you. Not only as a creature that is a part of a story, but as the story itself. And also, this monster symbolises the creative act of making the movie. There's part of the final product that is like, 'Look, we made this gill man, or this Frankenstein, or this killer alien'. And in turn, this affects the design of the movie as a whole. The design work in *The Shape of Water* is a bullseye. You have the outer core - cinematography, production design, wardrobe, colour palette and all of that. And right at the centre, is the monster. Everything else serves the monster. That's a monster movie.

What other types of monsters are there?

The real monsters are people who are perverse about their function in life. Like a politician who is supposed to serve the people, and serves anyone but the people. A priest who is supposed to preach peace and solace and wisdom, and is an agent of corruption, brutal morality and destructive guilt. These are monsters for me. An army that doesn't protect a nation but defends the interests of the rich. A monster is also an extraordinary creature who exists above nature, or below nature. Those are the monsters for whom I have empathy. Unlike a politician, these characters suggest the possibility that there are more things in heaven and earth than your imagination can conjure. Yet the moment they step in, what you see is what they are. Giant gorilla. Giant lizard. That's what they are.

2. ON WRITING

Do you find there's a difference when you're writing male and female characters?

I write it like a human. It's a human character who is known to me through 53 years of existence. I try to put myself in a place that is not my own. It's empathy. Always. I write for the bad guy, Strickland, with great empathy. I think he is less smart than he thinks he is. I wish he was smarter. He is in above his head. All he understands is brutality. But, I write from my own experience. There's a sequence where he has a conversation with an army general. I've had that conversation with studio executives. With Sally, I see everything she has done. I look and listen, and I try to calibrate the text for her. It's like writing a song for a singer. If you think of *Over The Rainbow*, it's as if it was written for Judy Garland. But if it's written for Tom Waits, it's different.

The recreation of 1962 - what were your primary research sources?

I looked everywhere. Mainly from the late '50s to the '60s up to the death of Kennedy. It was crucial that the story happened prior to that date, even if it was months or days. It's the moment where America crystallises the notion of a dream that never came to be. It's post-war, monetary abundance, a jet-finned car in every garage, TV dinners, TV in the living room, self-cleaning kitchen, wives with hairspray and petticoats, the Space Race. There is faith in the future of America, and that's what everyone in the movie talks about. Then Kennedy is murdered, and Vietnam continues, and the dream dies. In fact, the dream lives on, but as a ghost. It haunts the nation. It fans hubris. It's that ghost which is telling people we should make America great again.

Was the main location - Elisa's apartment she shares with Giles - always above a cinema?

Yes because I always wanted the light and the dialogue to come through the floor. I thought that was really neat. She always has these movies playing. She's silent, so I've got to give you an idea of what's showing in her head. And I've got to show that she makes eggs, masturbates, shines her shoes and dreams of water. She loves musicals. She has very few possessions. Those things end up defining the characters.

Was there a particular film of Sally's that made you think to cast her? I, personally, am a fan of *Happy-Go-Lucky*.

Yes, that was key. The three key movies for me were... Actually, the first one is not a movie. I saw the series *Fingersmith*, the BBC series, which is remarkable. She falls in love with a woman and they have beautiful loving sex, and I thought, I love the way she did it. There was no titillation. There was no sparkle in the eye. It's just that she likes to have sex with a woman, and that's the way it is. It's a piece of character, it's not the point. I love that. And I love the way she handled it. I didn't want to do a beastiality movie that was perversion and schoolyard gossipy salivation. They just love each other. It doesn't matter that he's an amphibian man or any iteration of the other. The important thing is that they fall in love and they make love. Period. Then I saw her in *Happy-Go-Lucky* and I thought she can achieve this state of grace. She is blissful, but alive. Then I saw her in Richard Ayoade's *Submarine*, where she's a secondary character. The way I cast actors is not through the way he or she delivers lines, it's the way he or she listens to the lines being spoken by others. Or by the way they look at the the other actor. I just thought, this is it. If I create a great creature and she looks at it like a man in a rubber suit, the film dies. If she looks at it like a creature, it lives. She had such a massive crush on the creature. For real. Sally, not the character.

3. ON SEX

It's strange for you to say "beastiality" as, on a cold technical level, there is that element to the story.

It's not a term that's present. There's no sexual act in the world that is perverse unless you make it perverse. I think there's much more perversity in a Victorian kiss on the cheek than in a catalogue of positions involving people who care passionately for one another. I think that perversity is in the eye of the beholder. It goes beyond questions of good or bad taste. They're obviously not graphic. They're done with such love and such belief that it's the right thing to do. There is no oblique emotional titillation. And it's the same way that I treat monsters or apparitions – look, there's a ghost! Look, there's a faun! They make love. It's up to you to be scandalised or not. It says more about the person scandalised than the act itself when somebody says, 'That sexuality should not exist.' Why not? It's there. It does exist. Why is it not human? It's a position I simply do not understand. Unless it's a non-consensual, violent act or forced. If it's not that, I think everything is. Sex is like pizza. Bad pizza is still good. And good pizza is great.

In the past your films have had this erotic element to them, but it's rare that you've actually used a sex scene.

I would agree. There is a sex scene in *The Devil's Backbone*, but it's very twisted and painful. There's a beautiful sex scene in *Crimson Peak* between Edith and Thomas which I like a lot. It's different here, because to show a female character masturbating... some men have a lot of trouble with that.

Your film offers quite a damning indictment of heterosexual relationships.

Yes. The idea for me is that there is more power play and more submission in the relationship between Strickland and his wife. He's screwing her and covering her face. Zelda and her husband are in stasis. She hasn't talked to him in years. She just cooks. The question for me is: can we find beauty in the alternative possibilities that life offers us?

4. ON CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD

Jack Arnold's *Creature from the Black Lagoon* feels like an analogue to this film. Though it feels unique in the annals of monster movies for the human character to instigate a romance with the monster. She's never scared.

There's a difference between saying the monster got the girl and the girl got the monster. That's what happens in this one. She rescues him. The first time she sees him he has a wound on his left hand side, and is bleeding. Later, she has a wound in the exact same place. They rescue one another. To me, the image that is key in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* is the monster carrying the girl when she's unconscious. But that is

an image of horror. In *The Shape of Water*, that same image reflects a sense of great love.

***Creature from the Black Lagoon* is a very scary film.**

Yes, when it attacks the guys in the tent, it's brutal. But also, what I love about that movie, is the moment when the creature is swimming right underneath Julie Adams. That is beauty. Pure cinematic perfection. I fell in love with Julie Adams and the creature when I was six. I watched that film as a kid – and I couldn't put it in to words at the time – but it's a home invasion movie. The creature is happily living in his lagoon, and this bunch of hoodlums come in, invade his house and then kill him. For me it's almost a metaphor for the transnational invasion of South America. That why I have the origin element in this movie.

Shannon is almost identical to one of the guys in *Creature from the Black Lagoon*.


That was the idea! The idea of the film was to depict a super-secret government agency, but not show it through the eyes of the scientist or the people in charge, but those who clean the toilets. It is important that the people joining together to save the creature are all invisible. Sally Hawkins is a woman, a mute and a cleaner. Octavia Spencer is invisible because she's African-American. Giles because he's a closeted gay designer whose time of peak artistic worth has passed. And the Russian guy can't even use his own name. His job is to be invisible. Then you see Ken and Barbie and Ken is a dominating, brutal asshole.

5. ON MOVIES

At the beginning of the film there's a cinema owner and he's complaining that no-one goes to the cinema any more. Is there a commentary here?

That's more or less what was happening in 1962. Families weren't going to the cinema because the TV was on. I'm trying to say that we're in exactly the same world. The movie is about today. Racism, sexism, gender issues, discrimination, everything. They had it in '62 and we've got it now. It's still pretty good if you're a WASP, but the minorities, no matter who they are, they're the "other". You also had the Cold War, which is back now in a big way. And also you had cinema, which was considered dying. And it really isn't. It's transforming.

I saw it as the monster experiencing something new. Which might now be considered a rare thing in Hollywood.

Yes, he doesn't understand what he's looking at. The scene was a little longer. I wanted to have him point at the screen and ask, 'What is this?' in sign language. But for some reason, when he signed, I felt the guy in the suit. I couldn't risk it. If you do it wrong once, the whole illusion is destroyed. The one person who actually enjoys the movie is the creature. Everyone else is sleeping 

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Actor Sally Hawkins graces the screen as Guillermo Del Toro's leading lady in *The Shape of Water*, so we take a deep dive into her fascinating career.

Words by
Hannah Woodhead

Illustration by
Dani Soon



There are many paths that lead to Hollywood, but only Hawkins can claim to have arrived there fuelled by David Walliams' projectile vomit. From supporting roles in comedy sketch series, *Little Britain*, to leading lady duty in the latest from Guillermo Del Toro, her rise to stardom has been not so much meteoric as gradual, but unceasing. Her filmography is satisfyingly diverse, from parts in some of Woody Allen's worst work (*Cassandra's Dream*) as well as his best (*Blue Jasmine*), to spearheading feminist feel-gooder, *Made in Dagenham*. What remains true, as it has since her earliest screen appearances, is that there's a compelling sense of mischief and mystery to Hawkins. She brings it to every role. In *The Shape of Water*, she takes on the mannerisms of a silent screen siren as mute cleaning lady Elisa, who finds love with an otherworldly creature and resolves to save him from a grisly end. In many ways, it was a role she was born to play.

As the daughter of two childrens' authors and illustrators, Hawkins was surrounded by fairy tales growing up. It seems fitting that, in *The Shape of Water*, she finally gets to star in one of her own. Yet it would be incorrect to envisage this transformation as arriving overnight. In a Hollywood Reporter roundtable in 2008, she cited a formative trip to the circus as the catalyst which sparked her desire to perform. After graduating, she sent her CV to director Mike Leigh, who would later be responsible for gifting Hawkins with the role of the eternally cheery Poppy in his 2008 film, *Happy-Go-Lucky*.

She appeared in prestige literary adaptations of *Tipping the Velvet* and *Persuasion*, but it's the 2005 BBC adaptation of Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* that remains her most remarkable early turn. In this steamy costume drama, she plays consummate outsider Sue Trinder, a petty thief who becomes embroiled in a scheme to steal the fortune of a stifled heiress. It's a sensitive, slow-burn saga full of scandal and intrigue. What proves most compelling is Hawkins' undeniable chemistry with co-star Elaine Cassidy, and how her character copes with cataclysmic betrayal as well as a clandestine same-sex love affair.

Hawkins' Trinder is both pawn and player in the elaborate chess game which unfolds. Her restrained narration serves to connect the audience to a story that would otherwise lapse into soap opera. Her sex scenes with Cassidy are sensitive and sensual rather than sensational. Far from being a titillating exercise in outrage, *Fingersmith* is an uncommonly nuanced portrait of female sexuality, and this is in no small part thanks to the emotional complexity Hawkins brings to the screen.

Longtime champion Mike Leigh was among the earliest to recognise this talent. Of Hawkins he said in a 2008 interview with *The Telegraph*: "She's extremely witty and sharp, but she also has these great reserves of emotion." Leigh previously cast her as a troubled teenager in 2002's *All or Nothing*, and a well-to-do rape victim in 2004's *Vera Drake*. While competent in these early small roles, it was her third collaboration with Leigh which made a film star of her, and in *Happy-Go-Lucky*, she finally got a chance to play a character not mired in some form of emotional torment.

In the context of Leigh's London, Hawkins' irrepressible primary school teacher Poppy is an outsider – too keen and pure of heart for the cruelty of a city that sees her bike stolen not ten minutes into the film. She then discovers that her driving instructor, Scott (played with aplomb by Eddie Marsan) is a charmless, xenophobic misogynist, and possibly insane. In the face of these knockbacks, Poppy remains determined to carve a path on her own terms. Her unrelenting optimism and frivolity is met with suspicion by many characters, from a jaded shop assistant to a roving transient and the odious and irritable Scott.

It's a difficult task to play such an upbeat character without the performance descending into one-note irritation, but Poppy is not impervious to melancholy, glimpsed when she attempts to help a young pupil struggling at home, and in dealing with Scott. When he delivers a racially-charged rant during a driving lesson, Poppy calmly turns to him and asks, "Were you bullied at school, Scott?" Her empathy and optimism are the armour she wears to protect her from an unkind world.

Famously shy and reluctant to partake in interviews and press tours, she rejects the notion that an actor has to perform off-screen. Following *Happy-Go-Lucky*, it was a long five year wait before she garnered praise (and an Oscar nomination) for her role in *Blue Jasmine*, which marked a grand departure from the British dramas in which she'd made her name. Playing opposite Cate Blanchett, her Ginger was the Stella to Blanchett's Blanche DuBois. She held her own against the luminous Blanchett, centred as the film's glamorous heart. Woody Allen's script occasionally encourages titters at Ginger's lack of refinement that sees her favour a hideous mustard-yellow Fendi bag and embark on an unwitting affair with Louis CK's boorish sound engineer. It's typical of Allen's sneering New York cynicism – yet despite this, Hawkins brings her disarming vulnerability and wells of empathy to the role. As sisters only in name, Ginger dismisses herself in the context of *Jasmine*, saying repeatedly, "She got the good genes", and responding only with self-lacerating apologies to her sister's constant haranguing. It's a an unglamorous role, and Hawkins once again becomes an audience stand-in. She is perhaps the film's beating heart.

Despite finding success with Leigh and Allen, there have been misfires too. When she appeared in a 2010 Broadway revival of Mrs Warren's Profession, the New York Times

scathingly said "If she is the future of Britain, woe betide that once mighty nation", and her role as Slasher in Matthew Vaughn's *Layer Cake* is over-the-top even for a film about the travails of cockney geezers. There's a distinct sense that the film industry has never been entirely sure what to do with her – after all, she is not a 'movie star' in the typical sense, dainty and angular with pale skin, rarely seen on red carpets or on the pages of glossy magazines. With leading lady roles few and far between for any actress over the age of thirty, she has fallen into a rut of playing maternal figures, notably Mrs. Brown in Paul King's terminally delightful *Paddington* films. There's an inherent warmth about Hawkins that enables her to thrive in these roles, in particular her ability to not only act but react to her co-stars – quite an achievement in *Paddington*, which required her to develop a cosy rapport with a CGI bear.

Similarly, in Morgan Matthews' underrated 2014 film, *X+Y*, she plays Julie Ellis, a widowed mother attempting to come to terms with both her husband's death and her son's autism. As young Nathan retreats into himself, Julie desperately scrambles for a way to connect, and to help him understand the world around him. Protective and yet constantly kept at arm's length, there's an aching loneliness about Julie, conveyed through Hawkins' expressive eyes, and the way she finds her own sense of identity as her son finds his. She allows herself to be vulnerable and even unglamorous in these roles – there's a sense that she takes every shot in every

“She allows herself to be vulnerable and even unglamorous in these roles – there’s a sense that she takes every shot in every film to heart.”

film to heart, and feels exactly what her character is feeling, rather than simply emulating it on cue.

In *The Shape of Water*, Hawkins once more plays an outsider in the form of Elisa Esposito. Her character's muteness affords her the opportunity to demonstrate her remarkable talent for conveying an incredible range of emotions through movement and expression. Watching her, there's a distinct impression that only she could have played the part, and throughout the film you see the Hawkins of yore – her sexually liberated Sue Trinder, her whimsical Poppy Cross, and even her plucky Mrs Brown. Hawkins carries these roles with her and she evolves in front of our eyes. "Of course, I would love to have that one iconic lead role," she admitted in a 2011 interview with Ramascreen. "You do wanna find the role that defines you or that you can be really passionate about." With her remarkable performance as Elisa, Hawkins has finally got her wish 🍀

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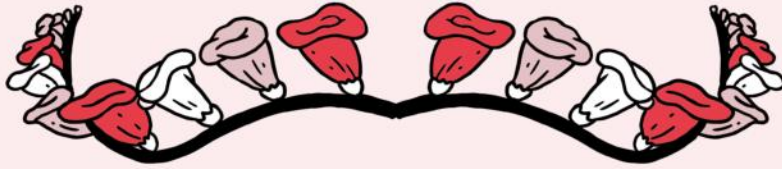
Female Beasts

*And where not
to find them*

Illustration by
Laurène Boglio

We trace the evolution of Guillermo del Toro's favourite French fairytale, 'Beauty and the Beast'.

“It is alienating to be told you’re something that you’re not.”



A beautiful woman agrees to live as the captive of a beast. He falls in love. Eventually she does too. This transforms him. Guillermo del Toro is a major fan, and was a whisker away from adapting ‘Beauty and the Beast’ for the big screen. It didn’t happen, and so he made his own socially critical version and called it *The Shape of Water*. There is an immense erotic undertow to this primal story, and so it is no surprise that there are many pornographic versions, both cartoon and live-action in nature. This classic story of interspecies love has been retold too many times in too many forms to count since it first appeared in 1740 as Madame de Villeneuve’s ‘The Story of the Beauty and the Beast’. Although this was the original, it has been sidelined in favour of a 1758 version by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, particularly when it comes to the source text for the popular film adaptations from Disney and Jean Cocteau.

Among the reams of alternative versions of this classic story there are sci-fi beauties and beasts, regency ones and a graphic novel by Alan Moore. They exist in musical form, by composers as varied as Philip Glass, Stevie Nicks and Meatloaf, but never do the Beauty/Beast roles invert. Never does she get to be hideous with deep reserves of longing and melancholy. That is *his* terrain.

To me, a woman plagued by both a sense of melodrama in relation to romance, and a desire for pretty boys who are so clean and wholesome I call them slices of cake, it seems most mercilessly untrue that the female is always the beauty, and the male is always the beast.

This exploration of the tale has, at times, felt like a knife twisting in my shame at not embodying a classical feminine beauty, capable of enthralling with looks alone. Each time I consider the story I feel only for the beast. My goal here is to put a female stamp on beastly urges as I consider the core aspects of the story.

1. THE VIRTUE OF BEAUTY

“She was a perfectly beautiful young creature; her good temper rendered her adorable. A generous and tender heart was visible in all her words and actions.” This is how Beauty is introduced in Madame de Villeneuve’s novel. She is a pure archetype of someone who is as beautiful on the inside as she is on the outside. This unimpeachable virtue, which verges on blandness, stirs jealousy in her more craven and relatable sisters. They feel like Beauty is trying to show them up. When their father heads off looking for his lost fortune, they ask him to bring them “jewellery, attire and headdresses”. Asked what she wants, Beauty responds with: “My dear Papa, I wish for one thing more precious than all the ornaments my sisters have asked you for; I have limited my desire to it, and shall be only too happy if they can be fulfilled. It is the gratification of seeing you return in perfect health.”

Beauty/Belle doesn’t have much edge wherever you look. Her major indiscretion is, having charmed the Beast, she then stays visiting her father for too long and so nearly causes Beast to pine to death. In some versions, this is her sisters’ fault. In Angela Carter’s 1979 version, ‘The Courtship of Mr Lyon’, it is Beauty’s fault. At first described as if she was “carved out of a single pearl”, her appearance changes (Dorian Gray-style) as she lives the high life with her newly minted father: “Her face was acquiring, instead of beauty, a lacquer of the invincible prettiness that characterises certain pampered, exquisite, expensive cats.”

Belle’s virtues are given a progressive spin in the 1991 Disney film via the addition of an interest in reading. Linda Woolverton was the first woman to write an animated Disney film and transposed her own childhood habit of running errands with her nose buried in a book. She successfully fought against a conservative producer who wanted Belle to be like previous Disney heroines, and changed a storyboard



“Only in the Disney film versions do the Beast’s passions manifest in violent tantrums.”

that had shown her sticking pins in a map to have her baking in a kitchen. Woolverton eventually triumphed in this battle of the wills (with help from lyricist Howard Ashman). This victory was replicated in Disney’s 2017 live-action version starring Emma Watson. However, Belle’s high-mindedness works against the humility of her origins. Instead of being contented her with her lot, “She literally walks through the streets singing about how unique she is,” wrote Glosswitch in 2017 for the *New Statesman*, “painfully conscious that there must be more to this provincial life”. “Papa, do you think I’m odd?” she humblebrags. “It’s just that I’m not sure I fit in here.”

In this context, falling in love with the Beast becomes less exactly what it is, and more a yearned for adventure. Glosswitch is right, but to me these imperfections of spirit, these selfish urges for personal fulfilment, make her a more interesting character.

2. TEMPERAMENT OF THE BEAST

The Beast is a gentleman burdened with melancholia in Jean Cocteau’s ravishing black and white gothic masterpiece, *La Belle et La Bête*, from 1946. Cocteau’s Beast (played by Jean Marais) is so weighted down in word and deed as to send shivers of moroseness into the atmosphere. When Angela Carter wrote of her beast, Mr Lyon, that, “his voice seemed to issue from a cave full of echoes,” she was channeling Marais’ performance, as she does for the majority of her characterisation.

La Bête does everything he can to mask his animal tendencies, but he is not in denial, and will not let others gloss over his condition with flattery. When Belle’s father gives him a noble address, he responds: “Do not call me ‘My Lord’. I am ‘The Beast’.” I – also a beast – will always take an engaged observation over hollow praise. An ex-boyfriend thought he was doing me a great service when he referred to me as his “porcelain doll” but, quite apart

from any inherent creepiness, it is alienating to be told that you’re something that you’re not – be it a lord or a doll. Better to call us beasts.


In Madame de Villeneuve’s original, the fairy who transformed a handsome prince into a beast imprisoned not just his body, but his mind. Temperamentally he still possesses gentleness, self-awareness and pride and is deeply humiliated by diminished wit and conversational skills. Indeed Beauty, who forebears his monstrous appearance, allows herself to be more mentally condescending about his speech. “It was not very eloquent,” she thinks to herself after he says something in the throes of passion.

Only in the Disney film versions, which have co-opted the public imagination of his character, do the Beast’s passions manifest in violent tantrums and destroying of rooms. It’s a generic addition in the name of creating drama and it erodes his more beguiling qualities.

3. REPRESSED CARNALITY

Outside of porn, no one has hinted at the carnality of the Beast as well as Jean Cocteau. The French auteur has made more explicitly sexual work than this; here the (blood) lust and the shame it causes mainly flow beneath the sophistication of the Beast’s palace and his attire. The elaborate gothic setting and the hypnotic spell it casts is spiked with displays of appetite and its messy consequences, as evidenced when Belle happens upon the *Bête* bloodied from a night’s hunting.

The physicality of Cocteau’s leads are intensely complementary: Jean Marais, with his square-jaw and hulking handsomeness, plays opposite Josette Day with her refined, almost haughty prettiness. He is lumbering, she is fleet. He is dark and furry, she is flaxen and creamy. Their names almost rhyme.



In one scene Belle and La Bête are walking around his palace grounds with smoke billowing in the background. She wears white, he wears black. Both shimmer with jewels. He has just curbed an impulse to chase and slay a deer. He is drained from the restraint. Music swells. He staggers and slumps against a tree for support.

“What’s the matter?”

“I am thirsty, Beauty,” he says, eyes closed.

Taking her voluminous skirts in hand, Belle heads towards a fountain.

“Drink from my hands,” she says, bringing cupped water down to the Beast who kneels before her.

There is a close-up of him lapping with his tongue and the sound of snuffing liquid. Once it is drained, he raises his piercing and tormented eyes upwards.

“Does it not disgust you, letting me drink like this?”

“No, Beast. I am glad to do it.”

This dialogue is literal, while it also works as a call and response for a personal kink dignified by a lover. To push the lines further, they show an identity thought by its owner to be grotesquely shameful, finding dignity in another’s acceptance.

4. A MAGICAL SETTING

Magic is part of the DNA of this story. Angela Carter’s ‘The Courtship of Mr Lyon’ is the most realistic retelling because she has Belle take a taxi to visit her father, whereas in other versions she travels by turning a magic ring, or donning a magic glove, or mounting a bewitched horse. Still, even this version – in which we have not a fantastical beast but a recognisable animal (a lion) – contains an otherworldly transformation at its close: “And then it was no longer a lion in her arms but a man, a man with an unkempt mane of hair and, how strange, a broken nose, such as the noses of retired boxers, that gave him a distant, heroic resemblance to the handsomest of beasts.”

Madame de Villeneuve’s original version is so steeped in magic that it is *almost* as much about dynamics in the fairy realm as it is the central couple. Beauty is visited every night in her dreams by a charming woman (who is a fairy)

and “a young man, beautiful as Cupid is painted” (the Beast in his true form). Once he does turn back into a Prince, the book stretches on for an additional 30 pages providing an exhaustively detailed backstory on good fairies, bad fairies and the whole damn fairy soap opera. The Disney versions replace fairies with ornaments – such as Cogsworth the clock, Lumière the candlestick and Mrs Potts the teapot – largely so there are mouthpieces for Howard Ashman’s songs, but also as a nod to the Cocteau version, in which household objects have gleaming eyes.

5. TRANSFORMATION

The transgressive appeal of this love story is neutered by an ending in which – hey presto – the Beast turns back into a handsome prince. This is a monumental frittering of the hot fact that Beauty fell in love with a Beast. If you really want to be a killjoy you could say this twist turns what came before into a sham.

The moral that shapeshifting is no great shakes once a certain level of love is attained offers a sweeping get-out. There are nods to Beauty’s lack of preference for any form her man takes in Madame Villeneuve’s original all the way to the 2017 Disney remake. At the end of this recent version Beauty asks her prince, who now appears as a clean-shaven Dan Stevens, if he would consider growing facial hair. It’s nice to imagine them folding his previous incarnation as a Beast into their marriage, perhaps even cosplaying when things get dull.

If Beauty is happy with her man however he looks, or whatever his species, why are all storytellers determined to restore him to a conventional babe? It would be dense to ignore that it’s a big deal to change an ending when creating an adaptation. It would be denser still to ignore that this particular ending functions as a symbol for the transformative power of love. Still, the idea that happiness is only possible once we all attain physical beauty is pretty fascistic. If love has to mean physical transformation, how about one that signals sexual awakening: how about *she* changes into a beast? 🐾

“The idea that happiness is only possible once we all attain physical beauty is pretty fascistic.”





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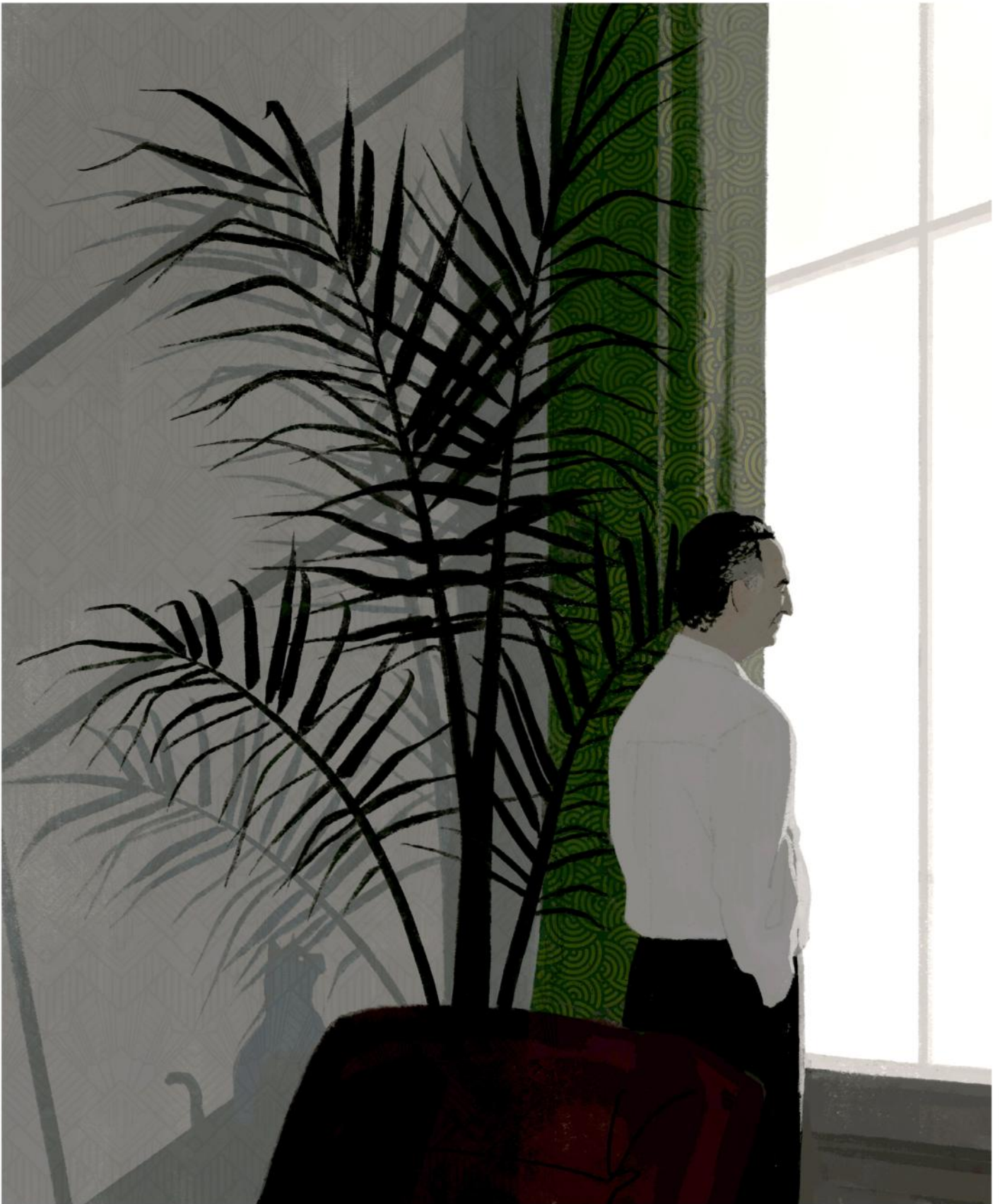
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Loners

Five tall tales of alienation and melancholy featuring some of cinema's most solitary souls.



VAL LEWTON

Mark Gatiss reveals his love of this Hollywood outsider who created a new type of horror movie.

Growing up in imperial Russia, before emigrating as a small child to America in 1909 along with his mother and sister, legendary horror producer Val Lewton identified with the role of the outsider from an early age. Working his way up from small-time author of gothic fiction to right-hand man of legendary *Gone with the Wind* producer David O. Selznick, Lewton's fresh perspective quickly caught the eye of iconic Hollywood studio RKO Pictures.

The studio, which had put all of its money behind a flop called *Citizen Kane* the year before, was nearing bankruptcy. Therefore, when Lewton was given \$125,000 to create a film called *Cat People* back in 1942, RKO was more than happy to receive something schlocky so long as it got the tills ringing. Lewton talked his way into becoming the studio's new head of horror (on a salary of just \$250 a week) and was sternly instructed that showmanship must come in the place of Welles' genius. "I am sure the *Cat People* they were expecting was just *The Wolf Man* with big cats," British actor, screenwriter and Lewton obsessive Mark Gatiss tells me. "But instead, Lewton brought all his odd European charm to create this new kind of horror, where fear was created by what was imagined rather than what was seen."

Lewton had a close-knit production team, often using the same actors, and he would give the likes of Mark Robson, Robert Wise and Tourneur their big breaks directing. Despite this, Lewton was very much the master. "Val would always write the final screenplay - he was the idealist while I had my feet on the ground," Tourneur clarifies during Martin Scorsese's *The Man in the Shadows* documentary. "He would dream up the ideas and it was our job to apply them."

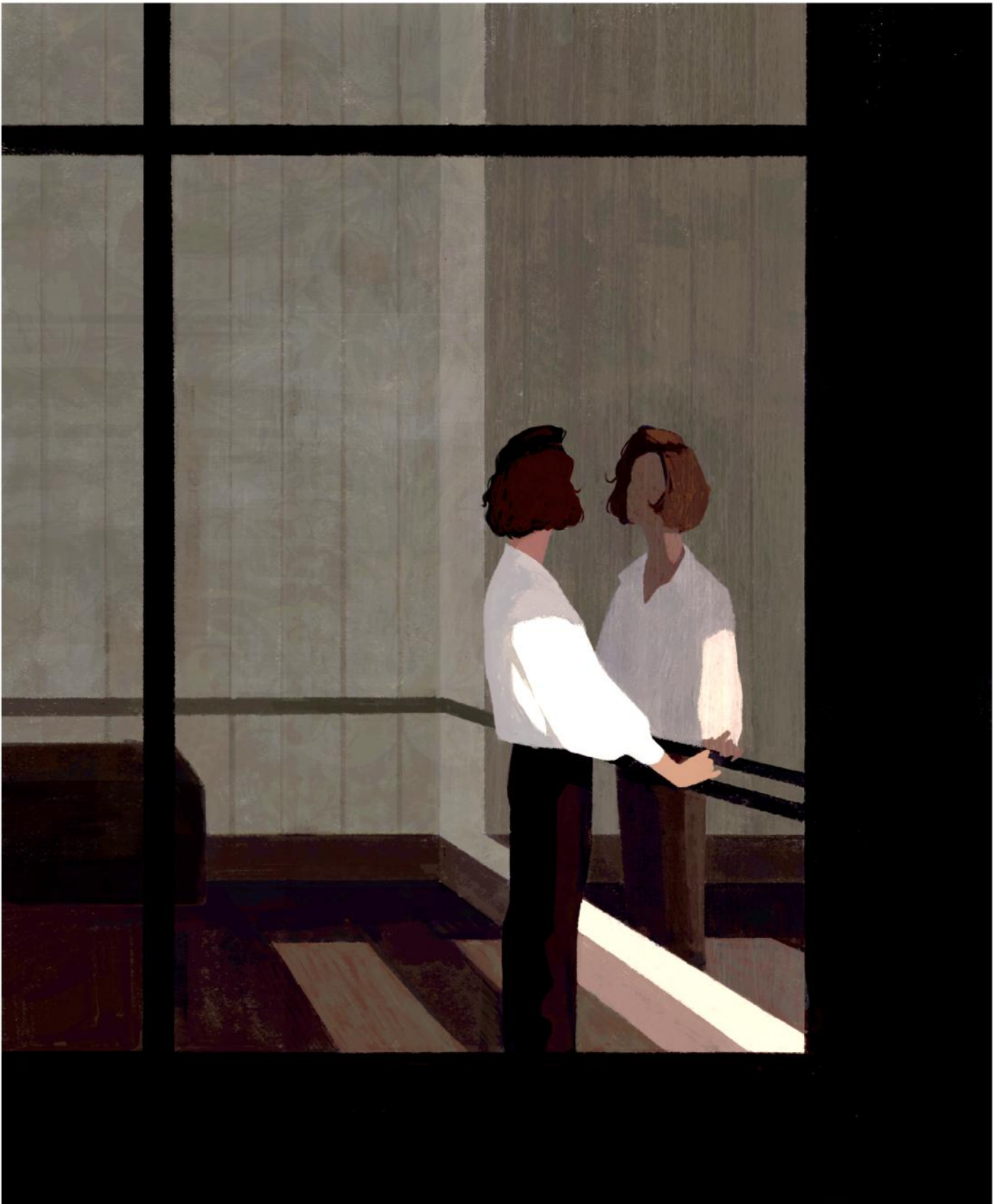
Cat People put RKO back on the map, making around \$1m at the domestic box office. Subsequently, RKO offered Lewton complete creative freedom so long as he agreed to three basic rules: each of his films had a \$125,000 budget, couldn't run for more than 75 minutes and the men upstairs would create their titles. What followed over the next five years was a prolific run, with Lewton creating complex masterpiece after masterpiece. This run was defined by his role as the outsider, according to Gatiss, who has lovingly referenced Lewton's famous stalking sequences within his writing for Sherlock's Hounds of the Baskerville episode.

"He carved this niche for himself," Gatiss explains. "He tricked you into thinking you were getting a conventional monster movie but instead presented something poetic that slowly builds this incredible sense of dread. It was a brave outsider thing to do when you consider how popular Universal's *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* movies were at the time; imitating them might have been an easier route."

A title such as 1943's *The Ghost Ship* suggests a film about a haunted boat. However, Lewton created a slow burning power trip of a movie, all about how paranoia and fear can fuel dictatorial lunacy. It's a film full of technique as well. "If the swinging hook sequence in *The Ghost Ship* had been created by Hitchcock, they'd be studying it at every film school," adds Gatiss. Meanwhile, *The Seventh Victim*, released the same year, boldly embraced themes of Satanism, existentialism and even homosexuality in a way completely detached from the social values of its era. Sequel *The Curse of the Cat People* (1944) is perhaps the best example of Lewton's subversion. It is only B movie horror in name, with Lewton instead creating a beautiful film about the loneliness of childhood and how sadness haunted wartime America. He fooled RKO completely and when some of his bosses complained that his films contained far too many intellectual messages, Lewton slyly responded: "My only message is that death is good."

His film's reliance on strong, sometimes overtly feminist, female characters and avoidance of the tropes of gore make them the antithesis to the torture porn horror that still dominates the box office. Gatiss rebukes: "The mistake is you go into a Lewton film expecting something safe and anodyne because it's the complete opposite to the *Saw* movies. The ambience Lewton creates in *I Walked With A Zombie* really makes you feel like you are walking through someone else's nightmare - it is terrifying!"

When RKO head Charles Koerner died in 1946, Lewton lost his biggest supporter and was slowly pushed out of Hollywood as execs raised their eyebrows at his 'bizarre' European sensibilities. When a disconnected Lewton prematurely succumbed to a heart attack just five years later at the age of 46, some suggested he died of a broken heart. However, I like to think he simply returned to the shadows he adored, waiting patiently to scare a new generation of filmgoers.



THE NAKED CIVIL SERVANT

This mould-breaking feature sees John Hurt deal with the solitary act of coming out.

It wouldn't be a stretch or disrespectful to say that John Hurt was born to play outsiders. With his short and unusual figure, his soulful but tortured eyes, and most importantly, his gaunt but always compelling face, the late British actor excelled in portraying characters who were heartbreaking, or terrifyingly, different.

Hurt's brief but memorable appearance getting his chest cracked open by the extraterrestrial namesake of *Alien* was brilliant casting: not only did he literally host an outsider inside himself, but his febrile appearance also set him apart from the other, more muscular and conventionally attractive male astronauts. In David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, Hurt was himself the monster, transforming his heavy prostheses into both literal and metaphorical outgrowths from his own fascinatingly bizarre body. Yet what makes his John Merrick still somewhat normal – and so moving – is that he shares his detractors' hatred of his own difference. He's an outsider who wants to belong.

It isn't surprising that it was for TV that John Hurt played his most unconventional role: a real man who was rejected by British society, like Merrick, but who also refused to fit in. There is a lovely parallel in the fact that both Quentin Crisp and John Hurt became famous when the TV adaptation of Crisp's memoir, *The Naked Civil Servant*, starring Hurt as Crisp, was broadcast on British TV screens in 1975 and in America the following year. In fact, it took these two peculiar men enjoying their own, and then each other's unique idiosyncrasies for the world to not only accept, but even celebrate them.

The film signals its playfulness from its opening sequence: the real Quentin Crisp, aged 66, addresses the camera to declare that even if the film was made to be realistic, "Any film, even the worst, is at least better than real life!" He also takes credit for the scene following this prologue: a little boy in a closet, wearing women's clothes probably belonging to his mother, happily waltzing in front of the mirror as the room around him slowly disappears into shadows. This image was Crisp's idea when the filmmakers said they wanted to portray him when he was young. From his earliest years, Crisp liked to dress up, but most revealingly, the older Crisp remembers these stolen moments with fondness and pride. He wanted this unusual and dreamlike image to open the film of his complicated, difficult life.

After this touching reverie, every scene of the film conveys this theme of living as one wishes. When a still young and clueless Crisp – now played by Hurt – claims, "I don't think anyone does [love women]", he is so sure of himself that his parents bring in a doctor to examine him. The anxious and uptight adults talk in code about the young man being "so listless" and needing "a practical lesson in the facts of life," but their son is the picture of relaxation. Lying in his bath, staring into space as the camera comically tracks back, Crisp seems as content as his parents are concerned. He's also unashamed, and with a blunt yet poetic turn of phrase, he makes clear in voiceover that his satisfied expression is the result of underwater masturbation. Director Jack Gold's filmmaking is attuned at all times to his subject's flamboyant humour.

This lightness of tone doesn't imply that Crisp's life was easy. After meeting a group of elegantly dressed and dolled-up gay men and realising he isn't "the only one in the world," Crisp goes on to wear his peculiarity on the outside – and suffer immense emotional and physical violence for it. Yet what makes him such a uniquely touching figure is his response to degradation: his exuberance and eccentricity are acts of stubborn defiance in 1930s London.

This relentlessness, combined with his verbosity and wit, could have made Crisp seem an insufferable caricature, and his representation ultimately more detrimental to the homosexual community than empowering (the significance of such a character appearing in a mainstream television production, even in the 1970s, cannot be understated). Through his detailed and nuanced interpretation of Crisp's performativity, Hurt reveals the generosity boiling under what could seem a constructed mask of confidence.

Hurt's acting is a study in humanity, which is to say the pursuit of happiness. Crisp's theatrics are always built upon a real sensitivity that shines through the actor's constant alertness. Each flamboyant motion comes with a sincere smile. And when the man – rarely, but poignantly – finds himself in too much pain, Hurt lets go of all grand gestures and allows the discrete twitching of an eye or the curving of his mouth to fully reveal Crisp's desperate striving for the right to be the man he wants to be. Although Crisp can be theatrical, he's not a clown, and Hurt always takes him seriously. As usual, he gets inside the outsider.



ENID FROM GHOST WORLD

How *Ghost World's* rebellious protagonist became one of cinema's great non-conformists.

Not all heroes wear capes, or so the social media idiom tells us. While the multiplex seems permanently stuffed with the chiselled demigods of Marvel and DC, occasionally cinema offers up an icon for a different type of audience. In 2001, Terry Zwigoff's *Ghost World* presented just such a hero - Enid Coleslaw, played by Thora Birch. Her uniform is interchangeable (although it does include a mask), and rather than fighting injustice she fights life's expectations. The combination of strong source material and a touchingly authentic performance made Enid the outsider's outsider. The patron saint of the culturally dispossessed.

The film, adapted from Daniel Clowes' graphic novel, begins with a graduation. Our sardonic heroes, Enid and Rebecca (Scarlett Johansson), find themselves caught in the nowhere land between high school and figuring out your path in life. Appalled by the all-American cookie cutter teens that surround them, they look to forge their way into adulthood while retaining their sanity. However, unlike Rebecca, who has a disdain for people but acknowledges the need to integrate, Enid's journey is one of near-total rejection.

She obsesses over the obscure, whether it's by following diners she believes to be Satanists, or her fascination with Seymour (Steve Buscemi), the lonely loser looking for love. These preoccupations are a way of delaying the inevitable - getting an apartment with Rebecca, getting a job, passing her summer school art class. She is trying to bludgeon her impending maturity into remission. Enid's mission requires almost constant reinvention. Her offbeat ensembles include a 70s punk look, a sailor outfit, a fetish mask, and a striking green hair/blue Jurassic Park shirt combination. The slightest negative feedback, or sense that she may be blending in, and everything changes once again. Like a reverse chameleon, she changes in order to stand out from her environment. She mocks those who show her the slightest bit of interest, and scraps for the attention of those who don't.

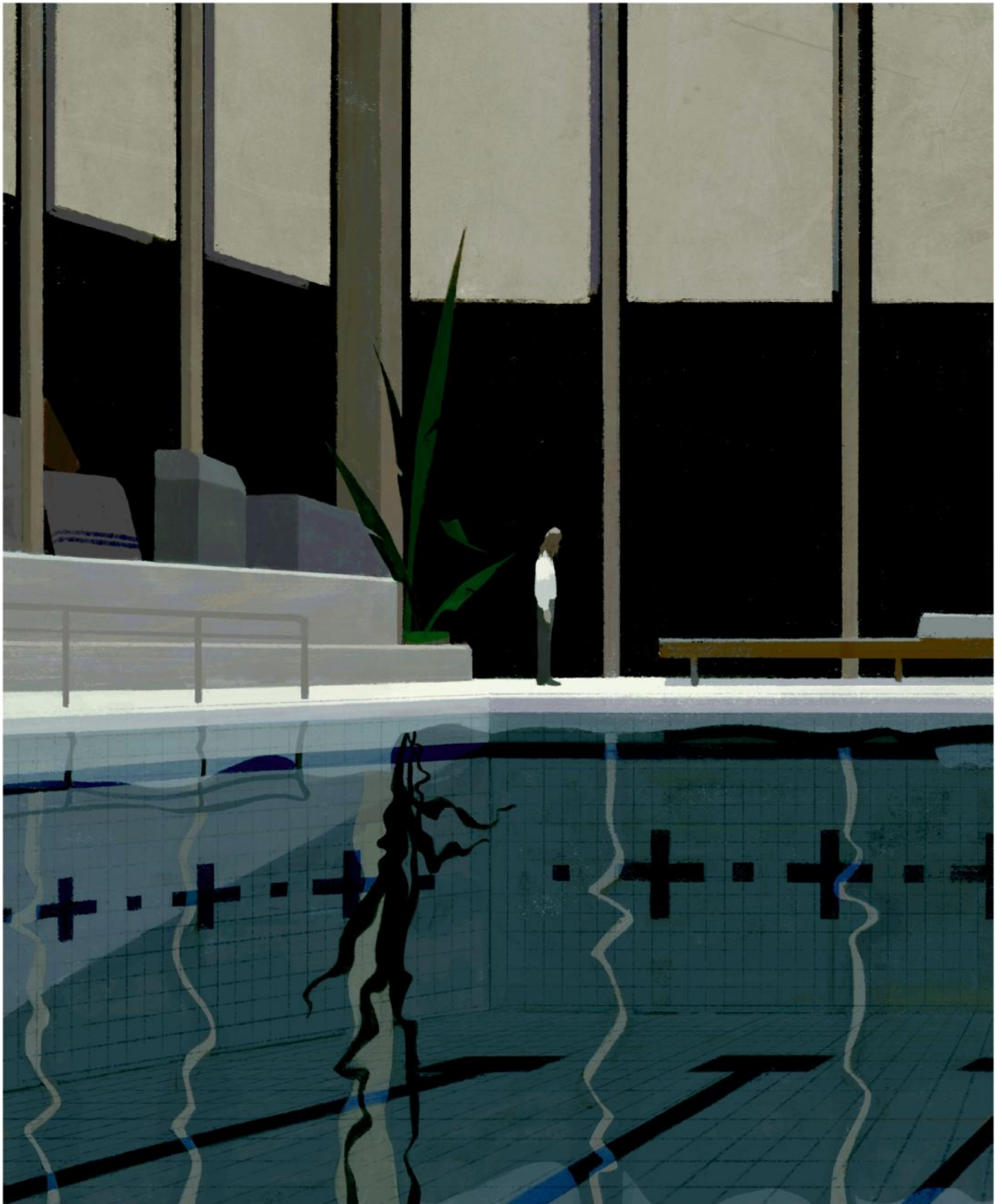
Watching her becomes the perfect antidote to life's small absurdities. Those who have worn the name tags and forced smiles of customer service will revel in the vicarious thrills of her disastrous shift in a cinema concession stand, while Birch's unspoken reactions to her off the wall art teacher (Illeana Douglas) will strike a chord with those who have ever

suspected they may know more than those in authority.

There is also a downside to being different. It's not the mocking tones of the record store snobs she clashes with, it's the increasing certainty that her bucking against responsibility will leave her abandoned. Eventually, Rebecca grows tired of waiting and follows her own path, while Enid's experiments with Seymour lead to catastrophe, costing him everything. Her attempts to shelter herself from the phoniness of life causes collateral damage, with rebellion coming hand-in-hand with isolation.

The legacy of Enid's complicated on-screen journey is one she would probably be appalled by. Both the film and the novel have earned a cult following, with Enid's situation striking a chord with so many who find themselves in a similar place, at a similar time. It's considered by many to be one of the greatest comic book movie adaptations, sticking out proudly among the corporate juggernauts. As we moved from the grungy, self-made style of '90s into the preened, phoney 'reality' culture that pervades today, angry swipe against the system feels all the more significant. It's also fitting that such an inspirational outsider would be played by an actor who herself would find herself at odds with Hollywood's norms. While Johansson ascended to Hollywood's glamorous elite, Birch has yet to replicate the success of her early 2000s performances. It's something she has attributed to not being willing to play the studio game. "I tried to walk a fine line between being alluring and somewhat glamorous but maintain a strong identity and pursue things that were a little more thoughtful" she told *The Guardian* in 2014. "I guess nobody really wanted women to do that at that time".

We finish with an ambiguous bus ride, unsure whether we are witnessing an end or a beginning for our favourite non-conformist. While we don't know where she's going, we're certain of the inspiration she's left. If you've ever felt different, if your teenage years were a symphony of awkwardness, then Enid is a role model not just to be admired, but celebrated. Meeting all rites of passage with an unimpressed stare, she comes to feel both comforted and stranded by the choices she makes, as the allies she held close eventually fold into what life expected of them. In that sense, Enid is not some glossy ideal of *The Cinematic Outsider*, but the painful, honest, and hilarious reality.



ELI FROM LET THE RIGHT ONE IN

In praise of a film about the loneliness
of being a vampire.

In Jim Jarmusch's *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), elegantly wasted hipster vampire Tom Hiddleston sends a lapdog Anton Yelchin out to fetch him a silver bullet, such is his disappointment in what mankind has become. In Neil Jordan's *Interview With A Vampire* from 1994, a young, omnipotent Kirsten Dunst cries out in dismay as her freshly cut hair grows back instantly, offering the painful realisation that she'll be a child forever. These movies demonstrate the cost of living forever and the psychological burden of endless time. Some vampires are happy to carry on killing for sport. For others, it's just too much to bear. In Tomas Alfredson's snow-swept vampire movie *Let The Right One In*, from 2008, Eli is also a child – a 12-year-old who has long forgotten how to act like one. When Oskar, a gawky neighbouring boy, first spots her in the snow, she's barely clothed and she barely cares. She sports dank, lank hair and an uncomfortably curious stare. For her, the concept of fitting in is no longer a priority.

It's a twist on the genre that's rarely seen. There are countless films about vampires where the victims of transformation are freshly turned, still clinging to some form of humanity even though they will be far lonelier for it. In Kathryn Bigelow's *Near Dark* (1987), Adrian Pasdar's clean-shaven young vampire alienates himself from the pack when he refuses to kill for food. And yet, he can't return home for the sake of his family's safety. In Park Chan-wook's *Thirst* from 2009, Kang-ho Song plays a priest-turned-vampire who attempts suicide when he realises that to survive he would have to defy his entire structure of belief. "It kills me to watch them die," he groans, crippled by guilt.

These nightstalkers roam momentarily without a place to belong before the choice of death or redemption takes hold. In *Let The Right One In*, Eli is still there, a sad and seasoned killer who has nothing to her name but an older guardian, Håkan, and nothing to do but feed. This is when the film is at its most chilling; the blood and violence are powerful, but the ease and skill with which Håkan lays out his equipment and prepares the bodies for draining are somehow more dreadful to watch.

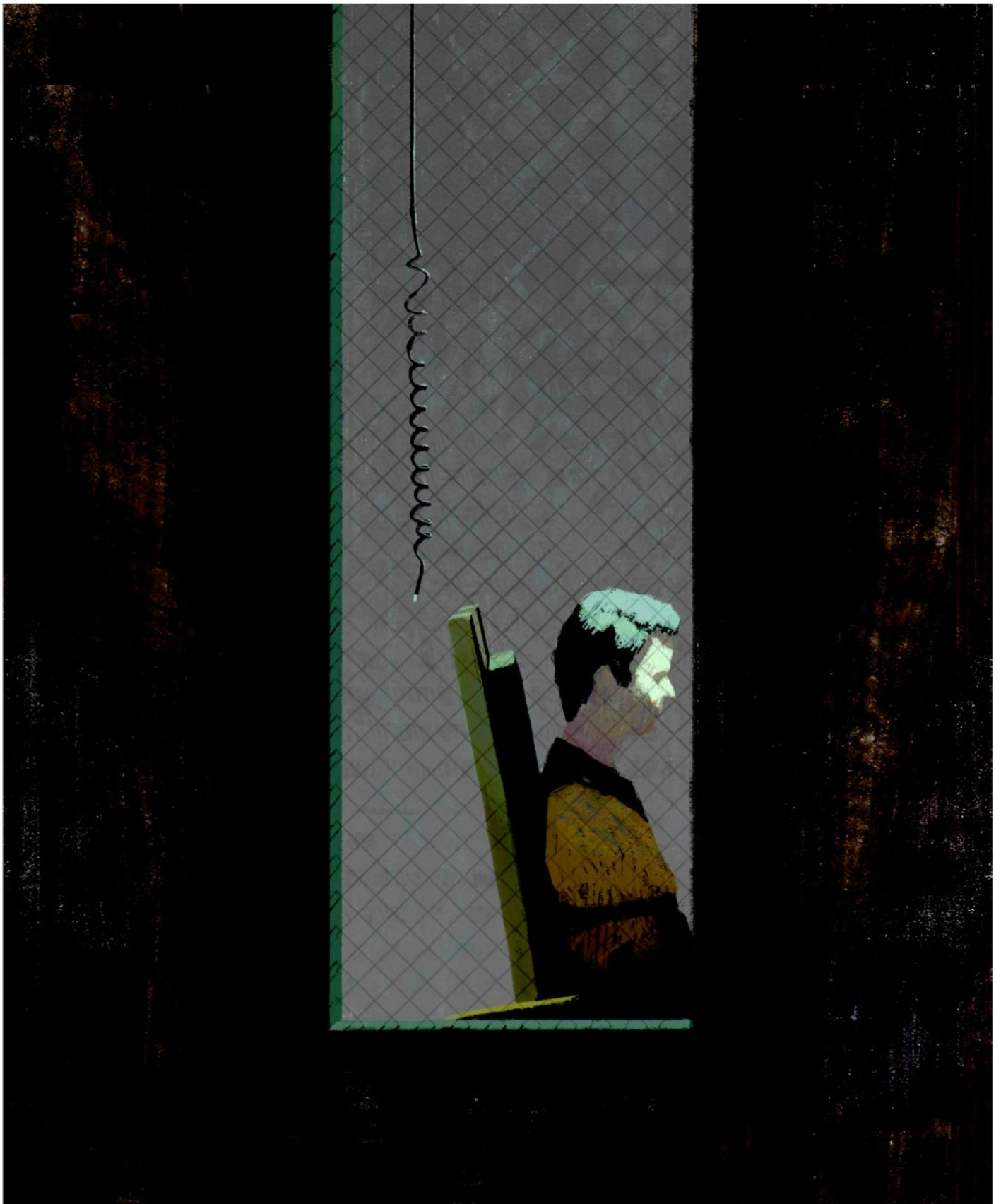
In John Ajvide Lindqvist's book upon which the film is based, Håkan is openly branded a paedophile, shunned

by society, a criminal and an outcast. The entire town of Blackberg, in fact, is littered with misfits; drunks and drug users who huddle in local bars until they are picked off by roaming vampires. They make Eli seem almost human, as her motives are somehow purer than addiction and debauchery. "Let the right one in," Morrissey croons in the song that inspired the title, "Let the wrong ones go, they cannot do what you want them to." She is the best of the worst of them.

Speaking to *Little White Lies* about the film at the time of its release, Alfredson recounts a childhood of voluntary isolation, lying to his parents about going to school so that he could spend his days playing alone in his family home. He was the same age as Eli and Oskar. "This parallel world was so soothing and so quiet and so lonely," he recalls. "I suppose there are a lot of people in the film that have their own parallel universes that they have created for their own silence, as a way to have some peace and quiet, and to survive."

In Oskar, Alfredson draws out such an appetite for solitude. The child of a broken home, bullied mercilessly at school, he wraps himself in a world of newspaper cuttings and old records, meticulously cataloguing local deaths behind a closed door. His desire for violence matches Eli's need for it. Both are misplaced. Both desperately want to belong somewhere. "I'm not a girl," Eli tells Oskar as he tentatively asks her to be his girlfriend, an answer that will manifest both figuratively and literally throughout the film. It's not forbidden love, but it's not conventional either, surpassing gender and even species.

At the time of its release, *Let the Right One In* offered a fresh take on the vampire genre – a subtle, unsentimental romance between two loners which incidentally launched within months of a certain tween vampire franchise that piled on teen angst and lusty desire with crude abandon. While the latter would prove infinitely more bankable, Alfredson's film remains an arresting and lasting favourite, hemmed into the horror category on account of its short shocks and simmering violence, but more memorable as a touching account of two lost souls, one of whom happens to be undead. All Alfredson does is create a world within which they can both survive at any cost.



TED BUNDY

This prolific, depressive serial murderer has appeared on screen under numerous guises.

What happens when the outsider is totally unredeemable? Serial killers are not sympathetic outcasts who are transgressive in ways we wish we could imitate. On the contrary – they break the most fundamental rule of all, the commandment we all dearly cling on to for our own survival and as the basis of our moral judgment: thou shalt not kill.

Most murderers kill for a specific reason. Sometimes it's greed, vengeance, or another deadly sin. Yet serial killers are considerably more difficult to understand, as they usually kill in service of abnormal psychological gratification. "The motive has become elusive" says Jonathan Groff's Holden Ford in the first episode of *MINDHUNTER*, David Fincher's Netflix series dramatising the early days of criminal profiling at the FBI in the 1970s. Serial killers are instruments of destruction whose revolt we can never understand, let alone admire. In that sense, they can be considered the ultimate outsiders.

These men (most American serial killers are male) caught the public imagination of Americans in the 1990s, in large part due to the box office and critical phenomenon that was Jonathan Demme's *The Silence of the Lambs*. Just as *Psycho* and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* drew on the crimes of Ed Gein, writer Thomas Harris took inspiration from real life serial killer Ted Bundy, a man responsible for the death of at least 30 women in the 1960s and '70s. In the same manner as *Lambs* antagonist Buffalo Bill, Bundy lured women into his tan-coloured car by keeping his unbroken arm in a sling and asking for help carrying things in and out of the trunk. Crucially, Bundy was also an inspiration for the character of Hannibal Lecter. Like FBI agent Clarice Starling seeking the help of Lecter to capture Buffalo Bill, the police interviewed Bundy to better understand the modus operandi of the then-active Green River Killer.

Although taking its roots in reality, *The Silence of the Lambs* did a lot more to steer away from it. The film's iconic villain isn't Buffalo Bill but Lecter, a brilliant psychiatrist who loves opera, literature, and the taste of human flesh. As Fincher's show demonstrates, Lecter is a pure fabrication – according to the Radford Serial Killer Database, serial killers have an average I.Q. of 94.5 (90 – 100 is the average). Yet the film would launch – perhaps inadvertently – a slew of intelligent serial killer movies.

The figure of Buffalo Bill/James Gumb – although contradictory and too hastily sketched out in the film – comes closer to reality than that of Lecter. Like Bundy, Gumb is a banal-looking man who seems nice enough at first, yet harbours profound emotional troubles which are the source of – yet cannot easily explain – his violent actions. When he wasn't killing people, Bundy was known as a charming man, and had relationships with girlfriends who did not know anything about his criminal activities. One thing that *The Silence of the Lambs* gets right is the way Gumb doesn't actually enjoy killing his victims – he refers to the women as 'it' in an attempt to distance himself from them. Bundy was genuinely sadistic, but other serial killers, such as Jeffrey Dahmer, had to be inebriated to get the courage to kill, a terrifying detail which contradicts the portrayal of most '90s movie serial killers.

The early noughties saw a robust, troubling revival of serial killer films, but this time with a focus on biopics of real life murderers. *Bundy*, released in 2002, features a few unfortunate inaccuracies that tend towards mythification (in real life, Bundy did not flunk out of school as one would expect, but in fact graduated with honours as a psychology major). Yet the film's observational stance, presenting Bundy in his everyday life rather than an elusive figure, generally restores to the man and his actions their largely inexplicable and totally sad, unspectacular nature.

Fincher found commercial and critical success with clever killer yarn *Seven*, then later returned to the subject – focusing on a dynamic of similarity and difference and steering away from myth-making. At the end of 2007's *Zodiac*, Jake Gyllenhaal's Robert Graysmith finds himself face to face with the man most likely to be the killer: an unassuming middle-aged guy, working 9 to 5 in a hardware store. A person just like you and me. Just like Graysmith and Ford, serial killer biopics constantly walk this tightrope between identification and rejection – and when they're good, so does the audience. The sequence in *Bundy* where Ted's girlfriend comes to visit him in prison perfectly exemplifies this paradox. She arrives convinced of his innocence – she knows he could never do anything like that. Yet after he insists that "the case is weak, they will never get a conviction," she realises her mistake: although she thought they were close, she never truly knew the stranger beside her.

Why...
 - Miércoles 10, Diciembre, 2014, entre 7.30 pm y 8.30 pm
 lo que venga lo decidamos
 P.R. II Chino

- Es muy extraño
 terminar una película
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A short word with

**Doug
Jones**

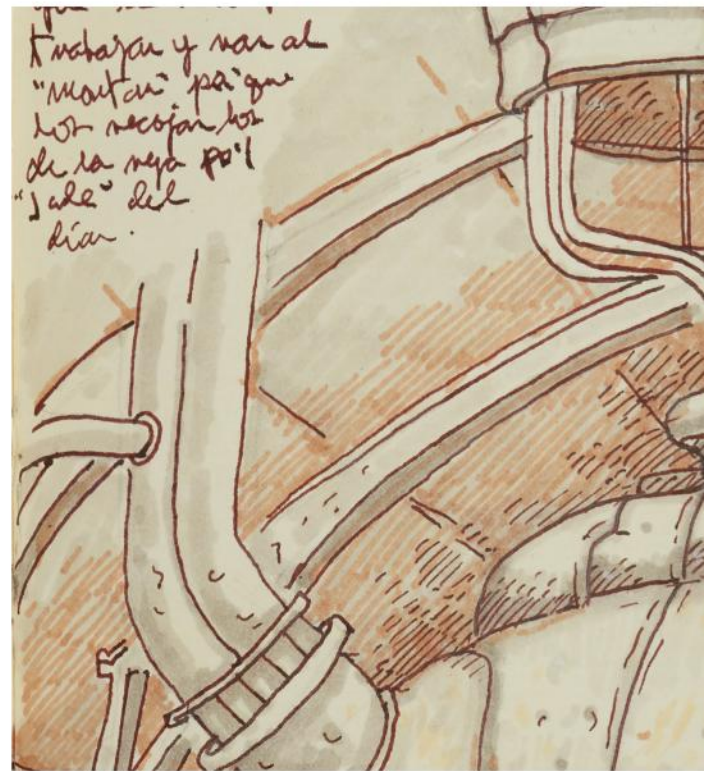
Shrine Over Water

When Hollywood needs a monster, they call Doug Jones. Over the past 30 years he's donned prosthetics to play some of film and television's most iconic (and often terrifying) creatures. In Guillermo Del Toro he found a kindred spirit, and the pair have worked together on six films and a television series.

He was The Faun and The Pale Man in *Pan's Labyrinth*, Abe Sapien in two *Hellboy* movies, but in *The Shape of Water*, Jones becomes a leading man for the first time. We caught up with him to find out how he brought "The Asset" to life.

**Interview by
Hannah Woodhead**

**Original
Illustrations by
Guillermo Del Toro**



The first time I ever saw you on screen I was about ten years old - you were the silent Lead Gentleman in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and I was absolutely terrified of you. Well then I did my job right I hope!

It definitely left a lasting impression on me. In fact the majority of the characters you play, including *The Asset*, are mute. How do you manage to portray such a range of emotions without using your voice?

My early beginnings in mime have been a huge advantage. When I was at university I was in a mime troupe called 'Mime Over Matter' - I loved that art form. It woke up my body to all the visual communication that we do, and I realised that human communication is very visual. So much comes across non-verbally, through gestures, facial expressions, posturing and body language. It all plays in so heavily, so when you take words away, you have to rely only on all of that.

What was the first thing that Guillermo said to you when he approached you about *The Shape of Water*?

We were working on *Crimson Peak* at the time and he called me into his office to tell me about the next movie he wanted to make. He said he didn't have a script written yet, but he had an idea. Then he said, 'I know you're a good Catholic boy, and it's going to get very, very romantic, so I wanted to make sure you're going to be okay with that.' I asked, 'Well how bad can it get? Are they going at it doggy style?' and

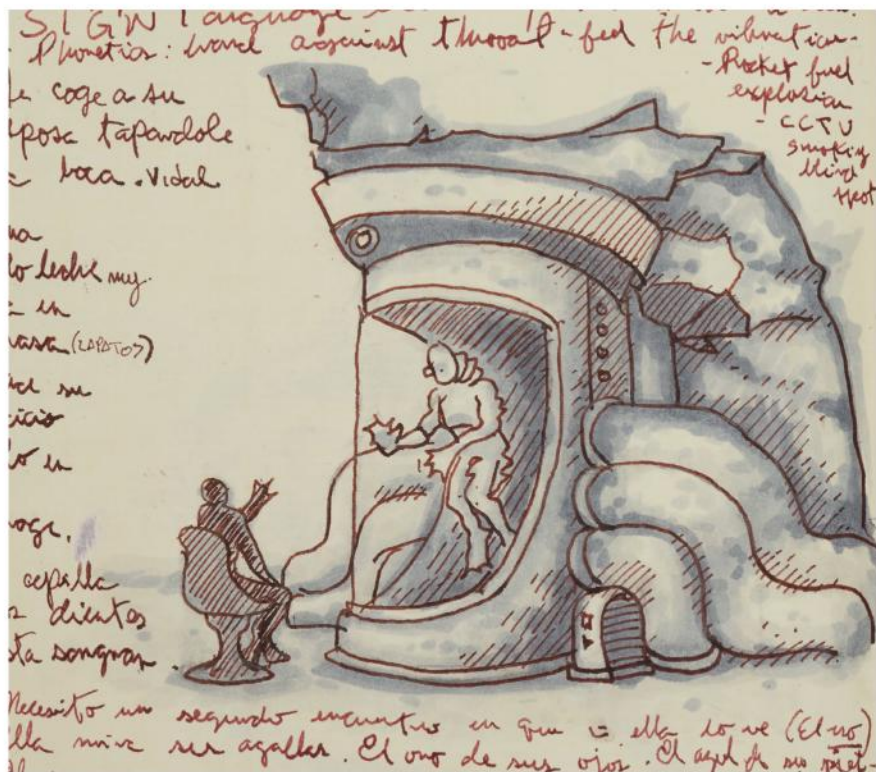
he said, 'No, that part's in a bathtub.' So I said, 'How about you start from the beginning and tell me how we get to the bathtub, so I can feel this one out?' Then he explained the entire story to me, and I said, 'Oh my gosh, this is so exciting, I'm so into the relationship, I'm listening.' Guillermo continued: 'So the place that they find refuge is in her apartment, in her bathtub.' So we got to the bathtub! The good Catholic boy in me has no problem with it, because the innocence of this relationship is just so apparent. It's beautiful and not gratuitous.

So he came to you before there was even a script and said he wanted you to do this?

Right. Normally I get pulled into his movies later in the process. Guillermo explained why a long time ago - he's prepped a couple of movies before, but they ended up either not happening or he had to pull out, and he'd earmarked a role for me in each one of those. He knows I get my hopes up and get excited when I hear things, so he'll wait until it's green-lit and the design process has started. Then I get told about it. It was very early this time because of those concerns he had about what I would be comfortable doing on film.

Did you and Sally Hawkins spend much time together before filming?

We had three weeks of rehearsals before the cameras rolled. Guillermo told me, 'I really want you to use your



acting abilities and find his heart and soul, and connect with hers. So whatever kind of rehearsal time you guys need, let's do this.' Finding that connection with not one verbal word spoken was another challenge, but having played non-verbal characters before, it was fantastic to get to play with Sally, whose character is mute and speaks with sign language. We instantly got each other, on and off film, which was great. We had a specific scene which we needed to rehearse choreography for.

That's the dance sequence which takes place in Elisa's dream. Did you film that all yourselves?

Yeah, and neither of us were professional dancers but we had to look like Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Every day we were getting some dance training in, but during that time, not only did we learn where our feet were supposed to go, but we connected on a heart-to-heart level. We giggled together, we cried together, we shared stories and secrets and our insecurities, and built up a trust. By the time the cameras rolled, we already had that deep affection for one another, which hopefully translated onto film as chemistry.

How hard was it to dance in full prosthetics?

Guillermo has actually referred to me before as 'The Fred Astaire of monsters', though in that scene I was actually Ginger, because the focus was Sally, and I was doing

everything backwards and in flippers. I did the rehearsals in a t-shirt and shorts, so I kept thinking, 'When that rubber suit's on, it could change everything' but we pulled it off. There was a dance double on hand, but it turned out in the end that he didn't quite have the endurance to be encased in rubber, so I ended up having to double for my dance double a little bit.

Are you at a stage now where you're used to it?

Oh yeah, I've been doing this for about 31 years now, so I'm used to it. But I'd never say that I love the process. I don't love the smell of toxic glue and latex, and the removal process at the end of the day. I do love the results, though. I love the wide array of magical characters I've been able to play that I never would have been able to do with my own face.

One of the things I love about Guillermo's films is that, as elaborate as his costumes are, and as beautiful as the design aesthetic is, the movement and the emotion of these creatures is every bit as important. That's my challenge. Every creature I've ever played, I need to make it look like I woke up that way. That's my ecosystem. I do have to do all that actor prep work, finding out what their needs and wants and fears and loves and all those things are, like any acting job for any actor. I need to prepare in the same way and not just rely on the costume to do that for me 🌀



FOR
PARTIES,
PROMS
&
PRIVATE
MOMENTS

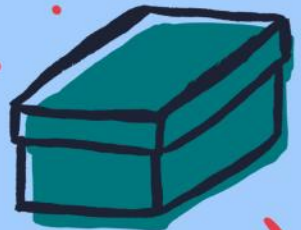
KEEP AWAY
FROM



BLACK & WHITE
FILMS

ALL
SHAPES
& SIZES

MADE FROM RUBY
FOR MAXIMUM COMFORT



RED

Shoes

FOR GIRLS...
WHO
WANT TO BE
WOMEN

Threads

Illustration by Laurène Boglio

#5: Red Shoes

Why are there so many song lyrics about red shoes? 'Put on your red shoes and dance the blues,' croons David Bowie in 'Let's Dance'. If you're Elvis Costello then 'The angels wanna wear my red shoes'. Whether they're brogues or boots, red footwear can brighten up an outfit. They're party shoes, made for dancefloors, and they crank up the aesthetic pleasure centre. In fact, the word 'crimson' itself comes from our long-held desire to wear red, in both textiles and footwear. The etymology comes from 'kermes': the insects of ancient times that produced some of the first coloured dyes for human sartorial needs.

As Goethe once theorised, colour has a psychological impact on emotion and mood, and red is not for the faint of heart. It's a power colour, a statement, an attention-grabber. It signifies passion, danger, or lust. And when red shoes appear onscreen, they are often transformative, potent symbols. In Louis XIV's court at Versailles, red shoe heels were only permitted for those considered to be in royal favour for the moment. So wearing a red shoe amounted to being in a kind of aristocratic 'members only' club. Strangely enough, the cinematic fate of the item would continue along similar lines.

Some of the most iconic footwear in screen history - Dorothy's ruby slippers in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) - ended up that way not through any colour-based symbolism, but simply for superficial purposes. In L. Frank Baum's original children's novel, those magical shoes are silver, but red sequins allowed the filmmakers to push the glittering possibilities of Technicolor, so MGM studio execs promptly changed their costuming decision.


Combine the colour red with the streamlined curves of a sky-high heel and you've got a recipe for the bombshell. Red high heels are so symbolically potent as to be an instant evocation of the sexually confident woman. Marilyn Monroe - arguably the quintessential bombshell - wears them with a matching red sequin ball gown, slinky and slit up to the waist, in Howard Hawks' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* in 1953.

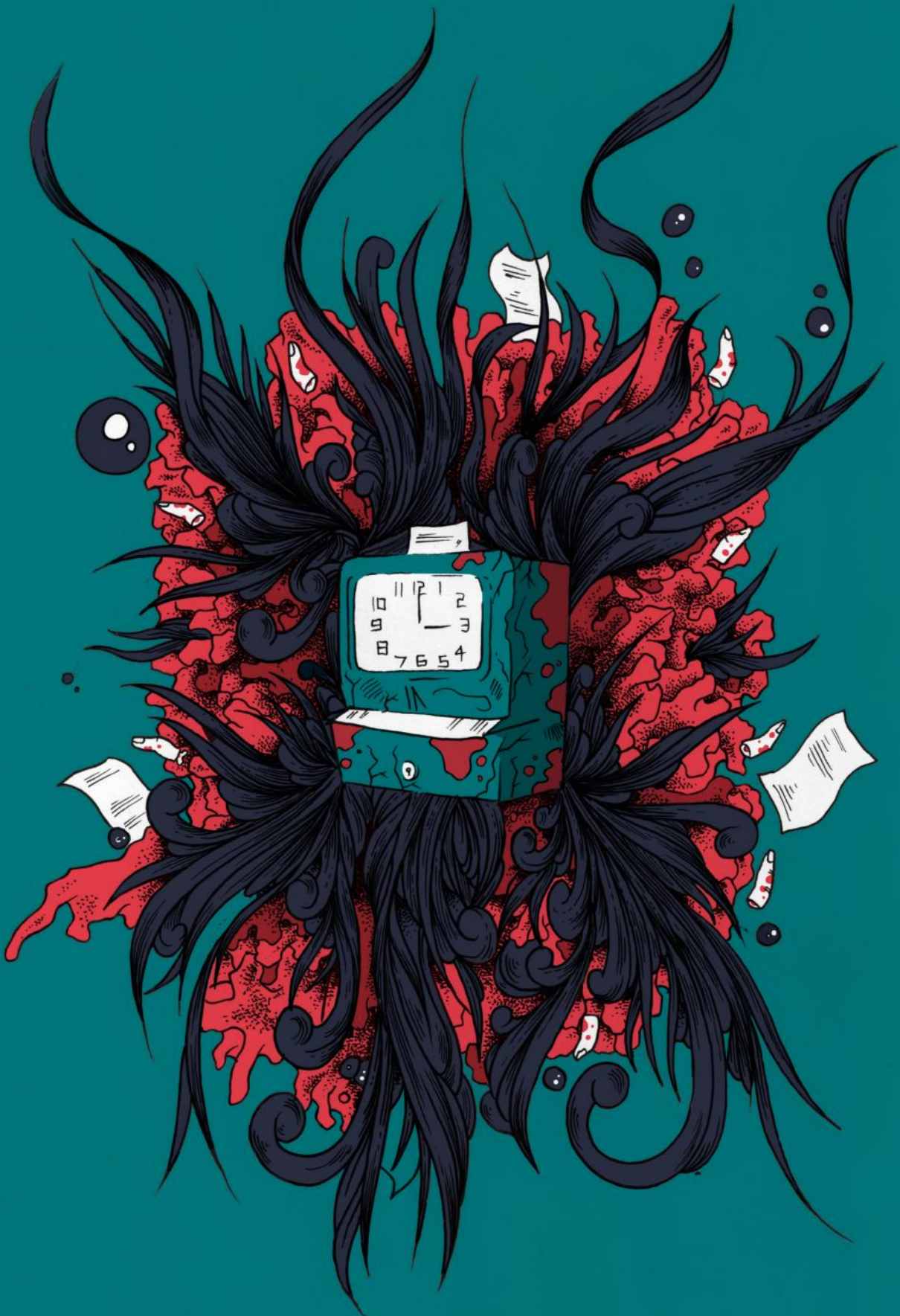
As gold digger Lorelei Lee, Monroe's performative femininity could almost be burlesque. With her hourglass figure, parted red lips, and breathy girlishness, she's more fantasy than reality. It's unsurprising,

then, that the master of queer melodrama, Pedro Almodóvar apes her look in 1991's *High Heels*. His characters seek to emulate the sophisticated womanhood of Becky (Marisa Paredes), who sports red pumps with a matching Giorgio Armani suit. Whether it's her teen daughter or a transgender woman, this ideal of head-turning femininity is exemplified by the leg-lifting sexiness of her shoes.

If a girl wants to achieve mature womanhood or confident sexuality, she can always turn to a pair of red heels. Ask Audrey Hepburn's drably-dressed book clerk in 1957's *Funny Face*, transformed into a high-fashion model during a whirlwind trip to Paris. Her subdued wardrobe of sludgy browns is forever cast aside when she emerges in a floor-length, cherry red Givenchy gown. Perfectly dyed red pumps peek out beneath the hem as she shimmies down the stairs of the Louvre. In fact, red shoes tend to feature prominently in movie makeover sequences. If they don't actually make you a woman, they create that illusion.

Good girl Sandy has a famous film transformation in the final scene of *Grease*, going from pastel-clad goody-goody schoolgirl to a cigarette smoking bombshell in a skintight black outfit and red backless mules. Sandy playfully pushes her foot against Danny's chest, red painted toenails matching her shoes perfectly. It's a sign of feminine power over insipid girlhood. Ditto one of the most iconic makeovers of '90s teen films - Laney Boggs (Rachel Leigh Cook) in *She's All That*. When she emerges from the top of her bedroom stairs in a sexy minidress and platform heels in matching red satin, she looks reinvented as a sexually mature woman. But she trips over before she gets to the bottom of the stairs, conveniently landing in the arms of Freddie Prinze Jr. Her inexperience is underlined - it's like a little girl playing dress-up in her older sister's shoes.

If the red shoe wasn't transformative enough on its own, several films contain examples that are genuinely magical. Although *Oz* may be the most obvious, a close second must be Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger's *The Red Shoes* (1948). Moira Shearer is a ballerina in a play featuring a cruelly-enchanted pair of red ballet slippers, which dance their wearer to death; a nimble and gorgeously-rendered metaphor for the feverish dedication she has to her art 





Paul Thomas Anderson

The American master reveals the secrets beneath the seams of his sublime latest, *Phantom Thread*.

What does a Paul Thomas Anderson film look like? It's hard to put your finger on, not least because in the 20 plus years since he started making movies, the American writer/director of *Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*, *Punch-Drunk Love*, *There Will Be Blood*, *The Master* and *Inherent Vice* has never really settled into a familiar groove. Yet his films are cut from the same artistic cloth, often containing recurring faces and themes. They are connected more by mood than a binding set of stylistic principles. It's there, but it's woven so finely into the fabric that it becomes almost imperceptible. Anderson's eighth feature, *Phantom Thread*, is a strange, lavish romance set in 1950s London about a master dressmaker and his sphinx-like muse. It neatly illustrates his constantly evolving creative process, and it represents both the hotly-anticipated continuation of a fruitful collaboration and a wholly unexpected step into new narrative terrain. We spoke to him about how the film – and its beguiling title – came about, as well as preparing for a post-Daniel Day-Lewis future and his idea of a perfect breakfast.

LW Lies: It's interesting to be speaking to you 30 minutes after the review embargo on *Phantom Thread* was lifted. Did you know Barbra Streisand is a fan? Anderson: I saw that she named it as one of her top films of the year. I was really excited by that! But the whole embargo thing... I'm not quite sure I understand... I guess I understand the basic premise of an embargo, but I don't know that I like it. What do you make of it?

I see why film companies do it, but a lot of the time it seems like an unnecessary evil. But if the premise is... Look, I fight battles all day long, and really it's not my fight, but the impression I have is that the idea of an embargo is to maximise interest in a film by ensuring that reviews come out close to release. That's a reasonable enough thing. But it just seems so arbitrary to me, especially because our film doesn't come out in the UK until 2 February and 25 December here in the States. Who looks at the calendar and decides that's when we're gonna lift the curtain? It's a little bit... fucking... I don't get it.

Do you not have any say in the matter? I could if I decided to stick my nose into it. But I've got enough other things to do. It's their thing, they seem to

like it, maybe it gives them some sense of power, so why not just let them do it, you know? I try and concern myself more with the stuff that really matters, the things that can make a difference to the life of a film.

How involved are you in overseeing the posters and other marketing assets? Somewhat... I like to pass an eye over that stuff, sure.

Someone pointed out that the title card for *Phantom Thread* looks a lot like the one for *The Age of Innocence*. Was that intentional? You know it's funny, that was brought to my attention as well and I've gotta say that that was not my intention at all. I've done my fair share of ripping off but that was one that went straight over my head. We kind of went with this Reynolds Stone look. He did woodcuts and the font we used is very similar to ones he made for Cecil Day-Lewis' books.

So there's a familial connection there. Yeah, Daniel turned me onto it and I thought it was great. It's very similar to that flourish that moves around the title of *The Age of Innocence*. Did Saul Bass do that one?

I think so, yeah. Right, so anyway, the Reynolds Stone stuff is amazing so that's what we were going for with that.

Let's talk about the title itself. The film was listed as 'Untitled Paul Thomas Anderson Project' for a long time. At what point did you settle on 'Phantom Thread'? It's a strong word 'phantom'. I never had a title in my mind but it was necessary to name the company, just on a practical level. During my research I came across this book that was all about Victorian-era working conditions for women who were making these fantastic gowns, where they were toiling away in shit conditions with no light, no air, 50 of them shoulder-to-shoulder in a tiny room – classic Charles Dickens stuff. And there was this phenomenon that kept happening of these women reaching for threads that weren't there, and I saw this phrase and it just looked so right to me. You know when two words just go together? For a while we tried to come up with something else but nothing else quite worked. It just sort of fit. I'm really happy with it.

“I’d be lying if I said I didn’t secretly have something in the back of my mind hoping that Daniel and I will do something else together.”

You’ve described *Phantom Thread* as a Gothic romance and even compared it to Daphne du Maurier’s ‘Rebecca’. Guillermo del Toro tweeted a passage from ‘Jane Eyre’ as his response to the title: “I have a strange feeling with regard to you. As if I had a string somewhere under my left ribs, tightly knotted to a similar string in you. And if you were to leave I’m afraid that cord of communion would snap. And I have a notion that I’d take to bleeding inwardly. As for you, you’d forget me.” Well... God, he’s a smart cat that Guillermo. I think with a title you kind of have to... I don’t know... It’s always a strange thing, they’re either very clear straight away or they emerge later on. ‘There Will be Blood’ came early on and this one wasn’t clear at all. There was an idea for a moment that we were gonna call it ‘House of Woodcock’, but that’s not the film. Giving the title of the film to one character seemed like a mistake to me. I actually see it more as Alma’s story.

The casting of Vicky Krieps as Alma is interesting. Do you think the character would have worked if she was played by a more high-profile actor? You could make it work in a different way, which would not be the right way, at least not for what we needed. The idea of having a face that you don’t know... Ah man, I can’t even articulate why... Why would that be better somehow? I don’t know the answer to that. I suppose it reflects the discovery that Reynolds makes in the story. Is it the same if he comes across Natalie Portman in that hotel? I don’t think it is. The risk was always, if you’re looking for that, how do you find somebody that hasn’t been found already? We got really lucky. We were looking for somebody who looks a certain way, sounds a certain way, and who you could believe working in that hotel and fixing that dinner at the end. Vicky could do all that, she really ticked every box. Sometimes when you’re writing a character you have a vague visual image in your head, and in Alma’s case I kind of had a cross between Joan Fontaine and Caroline Blackwood. Or like a young Mary Stuart Masterson.

How long do you typically allow a project to gestate? It varies. Some elements of *Phantom Thread* were written down really quite quickly after we finished *Inherent Vice*, which I guess was around 2014. Just the basic idea of a relationship between a man and a woman and a power struggle. The kind of thing you write down is like ‘a man and a woman’, ‘a love story’, and then ‘sister?’ You write down a lot of stuff with a question mark next to it – that’s a great indication of when an idea is starting to come together. It’s funny when you read other stories about other writers and you realise you’re not alone when you see notes in margins and on script pages, where these guys are doing the exact same thing as you. Asking yourself questions is always a good way to start building a story. So I kept adding to this idea of a strong man who gets sick and the woman in his life who recognises that in that illness he is sweet and vulnerable and in need of her. And then it all happened so quickly, which is such a good feeling. But there’s always half-baked stories kicking around somewhere.

Are you someone who has 10 ideas on the go at any given time? Oh God no! That’s too many. Generously I’d say two or three tops. And that’s feature films, you know, although some are bigger than others and sometimes you break things up and you’re left with spare parts which end up being used for something else.

Can you give an example of that? There was a lot of things that I wrote and researched around *There Will be Blood* that became *The Master*.

There’s an interesting link between *The Master* and this film I think. I think so too. That wasn’t evident to me initially but there’s something in the bizarre central relationship between the protagonists. That push

and pull, that intense dynamic between two people who have a great amount of affection for one another but find it hard to communicate. Yeah, chalk that up to 'bag of tricks: limited'.

Is *Phantom Thread* a love story? It is, but then I guess it depends on what you expect from your romance movies. I tried to make a romance movie that I'd like to see. I don't know... I watched *The Big Sick* the other day which I thought was really good, and I was wondering whether people consider it a romance movie. It's funny but it's got a strange title, it's certainly not a romantic film title. Obviously *Phantom Thread* is a very different film but I think we could sit on the same shelf, don't you?

If you were controlling the algorithm, what would come up in the 'if you like this...' column next to *Phantom Thread*? Oooh... Well, the ones that we've already talked about... You would hope that some Criterion stuff would come up. *I Know Where I'm Going!* is a favourite of Daniel and I, we *obsessed* over that movie. Um... *Passionate Friends* is another one that we really love. I suppose if you could get anywhere near the same ballpark as *Brief Encounter* I'd be happy. *Dragonwyck* is another great one...

The Vincent Price movie? Yeah, Joe Mankiewicz did it I think. That's a really good one. It's based on a book by Anya Seton which is also pretty great.

As someone who's both a big Adam Sandler fan and a staunch advocate for 35mm, does it make you sad that he seems to be making films exclusively on Netflix now? A little bit because I feel like things happen on Netflix and I don't even know they're happening. They've certainly made their presence known. To be fair though my Netflix is co-opted by my children so everything that comes up on my menu is kid-related. But they don't really have the stuff that I wanna watch, honestly. I don't know what the selection is like where you are...

Not great if you want to watch anything made before about 1985. Right, well I like a lot of older, weirder stuff and it's pretty limited on that front. But I can't really complain because I've never paid for it, I've always used someone else's account. I'd love to work with Adam again though. We talk all the time, we talk about dreaming something up together but just haven't come up with anything yet. I really wanna see *The Meyerowitz Stories* but it only got a tiny, tiny release over here. I feel so old for saying this but I just want my movies to be movies. I wanna see it big and I wanna see it loud.

Obviously there's been a lot of talk about Daniel's retirement. What was your initial reaction to that announcement? My initial reaction was, 'Oh my God!' I was surprised. He'd spoken to me about it over the years but I foolishly didn't take it that seriously. I can only back up what he said in that press release and say that it's a decision that had been pulling him for some time. My take is just to embrace whatever it is he feels he needs to do, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't secretly have something in the back of my mind hoping that we'll do something else together.

You first worked together 10 years ago, so maybe in another 10 years. Well, you never know... But you know that would make him 70 and me 57, so it would have to be a real serious reassessment of what the hell we're doing. I think it's good to properly pause and wait and think about what's going on and what's next.

Do you see yourself making movies when you're that age? Yeah, I mean I hope so. I don't know how to do anything else. I'm relatively hopeless when it comes to anything that's not making movies. I know I'd probably be very unhappy if I wasn't able to do this. But, you know, I don't have a

crystal ball. I fucking love doing this. I can't see losing that love. I feel so fulfilled by it. There's only two places I want to be and that's with my family or making a movie.

I was in Venice when *The Master* premiered. That was a great, great night. It was so joyous, just the feeling that we had done it. We'd worked so hard at getting that 70mm projection which no one had done in such a long time. We moved mountains to make it happen so to be there in that beautiful city and to see it through and for the response to be so overwhelmingly positive was just an unbelievable thing. It was fucking great.

I mention it because I interviewed Philip Seymour Hoffman the next day, and he said something about your relationship which has stayed with me. He said: "My working relationship with Paul doesn't matter; it's my friendship with him that does." Is that a rare thing, and is it the same with Daniel? It's... This is all gonna just come tumbling off my tongue in a peculiar way because it's hard to describe how entwined and separate those two things can be... You always value the friendship because the friendship is also the work, or the hope or the dream of work. But there's also just times when it's not about the work and you're just sharing your lives intimately. When that goes away and you're in the blender of making a film together, I don't think it's ever taxing on the relationship but everything is so heightened that it becomes a different thing. I wouldn't know how to work with anybody that I couldn't be friends with. As I've gotten older I've found that I just don't have the inclination to work with people that I don't care about or wouldn't want to spend loads and loads of time with. There's no point in making movies if you can't have some fun doing it.

Does Daniel retiring limit you creatively in any way? God, you know, it makes me melancholy to hear you even talk about him retiring. Honestly, in the midst of making and now promoting this film, that thought hadn't even occurred to me. That's the kind of thing you size up once the smoke has cleared, I guess. I mean you're right of course, it completely changes things. But look, I shared *The Master* with Daniel just as a friend, to help get his ideas about the screenplay and what the film was. Same thing with *Inherent Vice*. So we can still have a creative relationship amid the friendship as well. But I get your point, you're opening my eyes to that reality in way that I'm fully unprepared to deal with right now.

Sorry about that... No, no, you know what I mean... It's a strange thing – for the first time in a long time we've gone straight from finishing the film to putting it out, and so there's still that feeling of skiing downhill fast. There's very little self-reflecting happening right now, which is probably a good thing.

What's your version of a perfect breakfast? Oh my God... I'll tell you: I personally prefer my eggs over-easy; toast kinda crispy; loads and loads of butter – I'm the opposite of Reynolds, I mean I really just fucking lather it up – chives on top; not too much salt; avocado; black coffee. I don't eat meat but in the old days I'd probably throw some bacon and sausage in there. I could go on and on about breakfast.

What does a typical breakfast on set look like? Well, unfortunately that looks like cold breakfast burritos in a field. Just standard set food really. I have to say I'm not really a big porridge guy. When we were over in the UK shooting everybody was eating porridge. It's a more native thing I guess.

And there we were thinking you'd made a quintessentially British film. I know, I know... Talk about lifting up the veil. What can I say, as a Californian it just doesn't ring my bell ☹️



Phantom Thread

Directed by

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON

Starring

DANIEL DAY-LEWIS

VICKY KRIEPS

LESLEY MANVILLE

Released

2 FEBRUARY

5

ANTICIPATION.

Next question.

5

ENJOYMENT.

A challenging watch, but also jaw-dropping on more levels than it's possible to count.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

Yet another contender for the hotly contested title of PTA's best film.

Peel back the exquisitely lacquered layers of Paul Thomas Anderson's 2012 puzzle movie, *The Master*, and you'll find a funny thing. It's less interesting as an exposé of the inner workings of Scientology, than as a fascinating study of the giddy brinksmanship between two very different men. Though it carefully eludes a finite reading, the film talks about the difficulties of building and maintaining an institution through observing the bombastic emotional contortions within a single, highly combustible relationship.

In his new film *Phantom Thread*, Anderson is at it again, but this time he's shifted camp

from his California comfort zone to a sparsely decorous, lightly gothic London and its leafy environs during the 1950s. His specific focus is a prestige couture house managed by reedy-voiced dressmaker, Reynolds Woodcock (Daniel Day-Lewis). The fairer sex are, for the maestro Reynolds, little more than bewitching chattel. They are mannequins to be moulded, shifted and disposed of as is his want. All except for his mother, who was and will always be close to his heart. His mind is rigidly compartmentalised, like a fine antique chest of drawers, disallowing sustained romantic love when the urgent business of artistic creation beckons.

Desire, for him, absolutely cannot be a constant – it fades in and out, often appearing as a care-blanket of relief which fits around his punishing work schedule. Order, too, is paramount when it comes to pressing on through the day. He inhales ironware kettles full of Lapsang Souchong at breakfast, but woe betide anyone who serves it to him unasked for. He is fastidious to a near-psychotic degree, but cannot comprehend why others might decode his catty refinement as mania. His sister Cyril (Lesley Manville) is his manager, confidante and henchwoman. She is a terrifying back room operator who chooses her words with venomous precision. As the first order of business, she posts Reynolds off to his seaside bolthole while severing ties with his most recent plaything. Yet far from luxuriating in his newfound independence, Reynolds literally falls for the first woman he sees – a simple, sweetly pretty Mittel-European hotel waitress named Alma (Vicky Krieps). His masterful chat-up technique involves having her memorise one of cinema's most gargantuan fry-up orders. (The manner in which Day-Lewis intones the words "Welsh Rarebit", where he somehow gives hard emphasis to every letter, is one of the film's simpler pleasures.)

And so the pair float off into the wispy English clouds, their hair-trigger enchantment buoyed by Jonny Greenwood's rhapsodic score, which combines the dainty strains of 19th century chamber music with the melodic comfort of

British light classical. There is music humming in the background of nearly every scene, though Anderson never uses it to enhance or sculpt emotion, but as a constant reminder that this is a movie – a dainty, gorgeous fabrication of real life.

From this moment on, the film is about Reynolds and Alma. The phantom thread of the title could refer to the imperceptible tie that binds them. Neither seem to know why they have chosen to remain locked in the other's orbit, particularly as the dark times appear to outweigh the light by an uncomfortable margin. As with *The Master*, the film plays like an obscure psychoanalytical case study, and Anderson forces you to excavate (like Day-Lewis at the beginning of *There Will Be Blood*) for meaning.

Though this is very much a PTA original in the way it playfully fudges the line between fastidiousness and spontaneity, the film it recalls the most is 1964's *Gertrud*, the dour final work by the Danish director Carl Theodor Dreyer. Both films are concerned with the mysteries of love, but employ a unique (and uniquely austere) dramatic approach that manages to drill right down to love's masochistic core. In these stories, love is mutable and indefinable. It's tragic too – they say we must physically chop a bloody sinew from ourselves to make space for an ad-hoc connection. Reynolds sews secret messages into the hem of his garments, and this phantom threading could be read as his way of imbuing an inanimate object with life or a spirit. He makes miniature statements that no one sees or even knows about. His concept of affection is a private, unreadable inscription on his soul.

The thread is also a lifeline that keeps a person connected to sanity. Alma eventually tethers out the thread as far as it will go because she has nothing left to lose. This is Anderson's most sedate and humane movie – it chills you in the moment and then destroys you over the long haul. The film's eccentric and darkly magical conclusion frames love as a wilful act of hurting another so you can relearn to pity them. Each scene melts into the next through a languorous cross-fade and this cyclical expression of bruising romance plays on until death's day. **DAVID JENKINS**





Darkest Hour

Directed by

JOE WRIGHT

Starring

GARY OLDMAN

LILY JAMES

KRISTIN SCOTT THOMAS

Released

12 JANUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

The nation's great leader gets an Oscar-bait biopic.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Oldman is sheer joy in a role which transcends an otherwise uneven affair.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Anxiety that the film's historical breast-beating Churchillian spirit will get unjustifiably co-opted by today's Brexit apologists proves an unwelcome distraction.

If nothing else, this historical drama offers a workable companion piece to this year's *Dunkirk*, delivering the key political exposition that Christopher Nolan's relentless pursuit of visceral impact left off-screen. And even though we sorta know who's going to win, there's still a certain amount of juice left in this moment-of-decision narrative, as the spring of 1940 sees Parliament swithering over a decision whether to negotiate with Hitler or stand and fight alone. Swither too long, and the Nazis, who already have British forces encircled at Dunkirk, could very well be goose stepping down Whitehall.

Cometh the hour, cometh the awards season performance, as Gary Oldman dons latex and padding, chomps that cigar, and absolutely relishes the Churchillian rhetoric, ably grasping his opportunity to intone some of the most famous speechifying of the 20th century. However much the complexities of socio-political flux should teach us not to set too much store by the 'great man' theory of history, it's hard to resist the temptation, especially when Oldman is on form like this. It's not too much of a spoiler to hint that the 'fight them on the beaches' showstopper will have its time in the spotlight here, as Joe Wright's camera looks on adoringly. Yet, however much Churchill's virtuoso command of the language remains thrillingly persuasive, Anthony McCarten's screenplay also makes an effective point that his serial past calamities made this tyro PM more likely a disaster-in-the-making than a Great Briton to be lionised for decades to come.

As a movie, it's best when the drama is confined to small rooms, where Oldman's generosity of presence is allowed to shine and is ably off set by Kristin Scott Thomas's sinewy-yet-softie spouse, Clemmie. Also there's the ever-reliable Stephen Dillane as defacto antagonist Halifax, who holds up the pragmatist's case for sparing us another global conflict and cutting an empire-sharing deal with Germany. As in his 2007 film *Atonement*, director Wright can't help but over-decorate with self-conscious tracking shots and CGI aerial views, though you can understand his determination to make something which looks more like cinema than Sunday evening TV.

More problematic, though, is something which can't really be laid at his door, since a drama about a defining moment in British history – where standing alone and embattled proves a vastly superior option to negotiating with those fiendish continentals is inevitably ripe to be unfairly co-opted as ballast for the Brexit cause. Wright himself even pitched up at the press screening to make it clear that he'd started out on the project before the Brexit vote and aimed to craft a purely self-contained historical saga.

The timing of its release makes it unlikely audiences and commentators will all respond in that same hermetic spirit. Such potential distractions aside, it's fair to report that the movie itself avoids any implications that the national resilience and courage shown in 1940 necessarily also apply in 2018. And Oldman is stonking, however you look at it.

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You Have No Idea How Much I Love You

Directed by **PAWAL LOZINSKI**
Released **16 FEBRUARY**

On paper, it sounds like something close to punishment, but the reality is quite different. Polish director Pawel Lozinski adopts a bold approach to chronicling the slow and complex healing process of a damaged relationship between a mother and daughter. Three camera angles, each a single a close-up portrait of a face, capture the confessions of mother, daughter and a male therapist who fires out questions and lightly interprets answers. The result is immersive, intimate and revealing, a naked torrent of pure emotion and a paean to the power of verbal self-expression. The film – named after a line uttered by the mother as tears stream down her cheek – operates as a loud endorsement for diplomacy when it comes to matters of the human heart, and it’s also representative of how, even when we can’t find the words to match our sentiments, there’s always alternative and roundabout way to communicate our true feelings.

Even though this is a very specific case, and the session we’re watching takes place across a number of different time frames, Lozinski gives the impression that these are unexpurgated confessionals, and the impact they deliver is universal. There isn’t much interest in the domestic tensions that exist between these two people, more the diplomatic act of attempting to patch up the evident rifts. As a viewer (or voyeur?) you are forced to search for nuance in the words used to try and untangle the mystery of why this war was waged in the first place. Or maybe it isn’t a war – more a slowburn crumbling of relations across and undetermined period. And if the words don’t help, look to the eyes or the facial expressions.

It’s a film about talking as a form therapy, espousing the notion that sometimes by simply saying something out loud you are able to take ownership of it. Although some mild detente is eventually met between these two strangers, the note of climatic hope is fleeting. Maybe they started tussling again by the time they reached the car park? **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Watching other people going through therapy. Is this torture?*

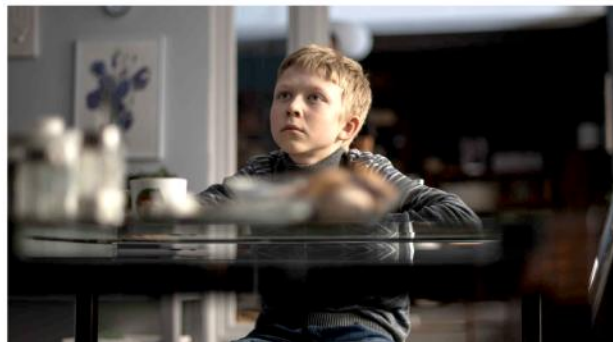
2

ENJOYMENT. *Takes a good while to synch with the film’s unique rhythm.*

3

IN RETROSPECT.
Revelatory by the time of its emotional closing scenes.

4



Loveless

Directed by **ANDREY ZVYAGINTSEV**
Starring **MARYANA SPIVAK, ALEKSEY ROZIN,**
VARVARA SHMYKOVA
Released **9 FEBRUARY**

There’s a piercing moment at the beginning of *Loveless*, the fifth feature from Russian director Andrey Zvyagintsev, where the end of a marriage quickly unravels in a darkened apartment. As Boris and Zhenya (Aleksey Rozin and Maryana Spivak) bicker over the future of their 12-year-old son Alyosha (Matvey Novikov), a turn of the camera reveals the boy eavesdropping just out of sight – sobbing silently as he discovers that he’s a “mistake” no one wants to be saddled with.

Alyosha is about to fall between the cracks of two diverging lives – just not in the way his parents expect. While the pair are away spending time with their new lovers, their son disappears. It takes a concerned call from his school before they even notice. What follows is not a story where dispicable characters find redemption in the face of tragedy. Instead Zvyagintsev offers a brutal indictment of society at large.

The search for Alyosha unfolds across a series of dark, inhospitable locations and through people entirely lacking in empathy. *Loveless* is set in 2012 – against a backdrop of political turmoil and apocalyptic portent – but its sombre, metallic hues make this feel like a foreboding vision of the future: one where the only thing beneath a surface of consumerism and corruption is self-interest.

In less capable hands, this could all feel clumsy or sneeringly cynical. The pacing, cinematography and performances, however, coalesce into something magnetic. There may not be a single likeable character but Zvyagintsev pans out just enough to conjure a sense of inherited malaise. (Zhenya’s own mother, a bitter recluse, tells her that she was a mistake too.) As the story skips forward in time, history begins to repeat itself – another unwanted child, another empty relationship – masterfully rounding out a parable of disconnection in a hyper-connected world.

CIAN TRAYNOR

ANTICIPATION. *Zvyagintsev’s first since Leviathan won the Jury Prize at Cannes.*

4

ENJOYMENT.
A bleak but captivating vision of a society without empathy.

4

IN RETROSPECT. *Expertly executed with a message that will echo in your ears.*

4



Lies We Tell

Directed by MITU MISRA

Starring GABRIEL BYRNE, HARVEY KEITEL, SIBYLLA DEEN

Released 2 FEBRUARY

A trusted driver, a dead rich white man, his mistress with a traditionalist Muslim family and her pantomimic “gangster” cousin-cum-ex-husband: it’s not a Jeremy Kyle line-up, just the characters who fill out a grating, corny series of events in this faltering first-time feature. A story of loyalty, betrayal and pride is stifled in Mitu Misra’s debut film *Lies We Tell*, which bites off far more than it can chew.

The wannabe thriller is buzzword heavy and promises high stakes and devastating dramatic results. In reality, it’s laden with hammy tropes and misogynistic (comical, but not determinedly self-aware) theatrics that just make you wince. Is it really acceptable to call someone “bitch” repeatedly without a hint of irony?

It doesn’t feel like unacceptable stereotypes are being mocked or exposed, rather just being allowed to exist in the sad, blissfully ignorant reality in this film. The music doesn’t help either, as the seeming parody of *Doctor Zhivago*’s theme is just a reminder that imitation might be the sincerest form of flattery, but that doesn’t always mean it’s any good.

The title provides a warning of the myriad of generic stereotypes to follow, offering little in the way of original or remotely enjoyable content. A heavily melodramatic tone makes it even more unlikeable with flimsy, so-bad-they-might-be-funny characters.

Lies We Tell insists on its identity as a British thriller, in the hope of achieving a similar legacy to the crime classic *Get Carter* or Mike Figgis’ intense noir, *Stormy Monday*. But here, the city of Bradford is just boring. Without any believable performances or a trace of authenticity in anyone’s convictions, this film feels like a mockumentary someone from London might make about the dangers of walking alone home at night in “the North”. **ELLA KEMP**

ANTICIPATION. *A generic title and plethora of buzzword-happy characters do little to stir excitement.*

2

ENJOYMENT. *The warning signs were correct: at the same time actively offensive and hugely boring.*

2

IN RETROSPECT. *Nothing to reflect on, nothing to question and nothing to care about.*

2



Makala

Directed by EMMANUEL GRAS

Starring KABWITA KASONGO, LYDIE KASONGO

Released 2 FEBRUARY

If you think Sisyphus had it bad, then you may want to check out Kabwita Kasongo, the subject of Emmanuel Gras’ horribly dispiriting doc-fiction hybrid, *Makala*. The film begins as a mystery, following a gaunt young fellow as he wanders across a barren rural landscape in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, through tremendous strain and using only primitive tools, eventually fells a large tree. He hacks back its branches and then begins to portion up the trunk. He digs a ditch, lugs the wood into it, cakes the wood in a mound of mud and then, using an intricate system of air holes, burns the wood to a literal cinder. It’s not until half an hour into the film that it becomes clear what we’ve witnessed – unless, that is, you already have detailed knowledge on backwoods charcoal production techniques.

Gras’s camera patiently documents every aspect of the process, almost as if attempting to emulate an instructional manual. He allows each shot to linger as a way to emulate Kabwita’s toil. And yet, we still know that this is just a highlight reel. The impossible precision demanded for this industrial endeavour to work is akin to a pastry chef piping cream swirls onto a choux bun. It’s at once tedious and miraculous, an expression of pure human ingenuity and survival. In its second half, the film dispenses with any sense of observational wonder as it transforms into a three-wheeled horror road trip. Anything that can go wrong does, despite Kabwita’s consummate professionalism and preparedness. He has just enough resource to make a sale happen, but all of his (wood) chips are precariously stacked against the odds that nothing at all goes wrong. As he nears the city, we see that he is one of a giant flock of men with the same cripplingly bleak occupation. It’s beyond comprehension how people are able to live this way, and Gras is in no way looking to offer an easy answer. **DAVID JENKINS**

ANTICIPATION. *Ever wondered how to make charcoal in your back yard? This is the film for you.*

3

ENJOYMENT. *Puts you through the ringer as you watch the film’s hard-suffering hero.*

3

IN RETROSPECT. *Tough, tough going, but rewarding.*

3



The Commuter

Directed by
JAUME COLLET-SERRA

Starring
LIAM NEESON
VERA FARMIGA
SAM NEILL

Released
19 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Jaume Collet-Serra has delivered quite a few joyous action films already.

4

ENJOYMENT.

From the incredible Godardian opening sequence to the final cheesy resolution, this is a total delight.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

That's entertainment.

Self-aware superhero blockbusters are all but dominating Hollywood action cinema. Meanwhile, mid-budget, cheesy and self-serious action films, of the variety which made the 1990s so much fun, have barely space to breathe. Success stories such as the *John Wick* films have hinted at a desire for old school, concept and character-driven action stories, but even those movies have been a little too knowing to truly recall the cream of that bygone era.

Spanish director Jaume Collet-Serra has made his name as a modest master of these boilerplate genre flicks, and in turn has come closest to reviving this dearly missed tradition. He made waves with the ludicrous and brilliant 2016 film *The Shallows*, in which Blake Lively goes head-to-head with a shark. He impresses again with his new one, *The Commuter*, the most fully realised and rewarding of his collaborations with star Liam Neeson (*Unknown*, *Non-Stop*, *Run All Night*).

In this tight, fun and astonishingly choreographed new work, Collet-Serra once more demonstrates an intuitive understanding of his star's image as a decent man who will always play by the rules – until someone else breaks them and attacks his family. He plays Michael Woolrich, a married man in his 60s who has worked, for most of his life, at an insurance company. On the cusp of sending his son to an expensive university, he is unexpectedly laid off. Seeing a star like Neeson troubled with such mundane problems is already thrilling in and of itself, but the story does not stop there.

Aboard the commuter train Woolrich has taken every day for the past 20 years, a mysterious woman (Vera Farmiga) approaches him and offers him a chance to make a lot of money in return for doing one simple task which would mean nothing to him, but a lot for somebody else. This straightforward metaphor for ruthless capitalism turns even more bizarre when our hero refuses to obey: the woman then holds his family hostage and threatens to kill everyone on the train if he doesn't follow her orders. Caught up in a criminal conspiracy, he is forced to do what she asks: find the commuter she is looking for, and whack them.

Nodding to Agatha Christie's 'Murder on the Orient Express', the film follows Neeson as he trudges from carriage to carriage, investigating an eclectic ensemble of characters and pointing out the faces he does not recognise. The comparison becomes beautifully obvious when the driver is killed. As the train nears its destination, the stakes amp up, and the strange woman becomes more impatient. The film itself also becomes less and less realistic. In its most audacious and, eventually, explosive moments, the film directly references both Tony Scott's wonderful *Unstoppable* and Jan de Bont's classic adrenaline rush, *Speed*.

The Commuter would not be half as much fun if it explicitly pointed out those references or acknowledged its own ridiculousness, in the manner of other contemporary, self-aware Hollywood action movies. This surface seriousness, and a refusal to fall into postmodern line, make it a film that functions as a latter-day continuation of '90s action movies, rather than an homage to them. It is never afraid of being fun.

ELENA LAZIC



Danai Gurira

The playwright and star of TV's *The Walking Dead* is set to go nuclear in Marvel's *Black Panther*.

It's been 25 years in the making, but *Black Panther* looks worth the wait. Directed by *Fruitvale Station* and *Creed* wunderkind Ryan Coogler and featuring an all-star cast, the latest instalment in the MCU is set to dominate the box office and set things up nicely for May's *Avengers: Infinity War*. We spoke to Danai Gurira, who plays Wakandan warrior Okoye, about being inducted into superhero history.

LWLies: *Black Panther* feels like something completely new from Marvel. Was that how you felt while making it? Gurira: Absolutely. There's a beauty and epic quality that Marvel brings to all its products, and it was combined with telling this beautiful story coming from the African perspective. I'm from Zimbabwe, where storytelling is very important, so right down to the culture in the film, we worked hard to get it right. From the language and the accent to the cultural nuances and traits, and the perspective of the characters and the history of the story, it felt very unprecedented and at the same time very universal, which is what great storytelling is.

Of course it was a lot of hard work, and we gave our entirety to it, but simultaneously there was a great reward coming, in how we felt such a connection to what we were doing.

Did Ryan Coogler ask you to read the original 'Black Panther' comics as part of your research, or was it more of a new imagining?

It was definitely a culmination. There are new imaginings in it and there are things that fall back into the comic books at the same time, and it's all connected to core components of the storyline.

Marvel films are occasionally criticised for their lack of character development. Being a playwright yourself, did you approach this role differently?

I do approach everything first and foremost as a storyteller. For me it has to be about keeping the integrity of a story, being the right vessel for that story, and bringing it to its fullest fruition as best I can. The beauty of what we were doing with this movie was that it was a very powerful story to tell, and one that I was excited to be a part of telling. It's the same in terms of research and preparation, and bringing all you can – that, to me, is all a part of storytelling. There's a different gear you're in mentally when you're writing versus acting, but there's elements of storytelling which are the same.

Who inspires you as an actor and performer?

In my Atlanta condo, the only thing I have on my wall is this massive, beautiful framed photo of Cicely Tyson. I watched her quite recently on Broadway and she pulled out this extraordinary performance, in her 90s. There's something amazing about her longevity as well as the grace

and performative power that she's brought to the world for decades that definitely nourishes and inspires me. I'm inspired by Nelson Mandela, by Maya Angelou, by the woman who fought for the Liberian peace movement. It's just about really seeing the spirit of somebody pouring all they have into the world with truth and integrity, and really trying to do their thing. The idea of stories that really need to be told is something that really drives me, like the story of the Liberian women which inspired me to write my play *Eclipsed*. There are so many sources from which I get inspiration, and they don't always have to come from my field, but Cicely Tyson is definitely always going to be someone I look up to as a legend.

What do you love about movies? I think they can give order and track what people felt in different places, but at the same time they can help people heal and open up their hearts to things. They can bring people to a different place, and there's something so powerful about telling these stories. Y'know, movies are stories told in an epic fashion – it's the most epic way to tell a story, and so it makes movies a very powerful medium. Storytelling is such a crucial part of how we communicate, human to human, society to society. It breaks down walls, it breaks down barriers, opens hearts, desolates individuals and creates collectivism. I was just in Brazil and I saw the amount of *Walking Dead* and Marvel fans out there, and how these stories just cut through all types of things. That's their power. And they're a very important part of how we connect across the world 🌐

Black Panther is released on 16 February.



A Woman's Life

Directed by
STÉPHANE BRIZÉ
Starring
JUDITH CHELMA
SWANN ARLAUD
YOLANDE MOREAU
Released
12 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Maupassant was an expert in the disturbing contradictions of life. This could be major.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Some formal vigour, but not enough insight to maintain interest for two hours.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

A respectful adaptation, yet one that fails to translate the intensity of Maupassant's writing.

In his first novel, French author Guy de Maupassant set out to tackle nothing less than the nature of life itself. A new film version called *A Woman's Life* tells the story of one particular woman, Jeanne (Judith Chemla), during the late 19th century, but its exploration of the themes of youthful innocence, love, betrayal, forgiveness, motherhood and aging makes it an epic and always-relatable text. After all, the book's other title was 'L'Humble Verite' – the humble truth that life is full of such contradictions which defy binary definitions of good and bad.

Adapting this work to the screen is an ambitious enterprise, yet director Stéphane Brizé feels like a natural fit. His previous films – in particular the delicate *Mademoiselle Chambon* from 2009 – although not period pieces, have focused on individuals going through rough patches and learning about the beauties and cruelties of life. Yet his soft, lightly removed approach here makes for an emotionally detached work that fails to hit the stoical, life-accepting (neither life-affirming nor depressing) note that Maupassant's novel so beautifully attained.

Brizé isn't a filmmaker of flourishes. Instead he finds power in simplicity. He is faithful to the period's fashion and decor, but his film doesn't linger on superficial details. The camera focuses on the behaviour of the characters, which it captures in all its fleetingness: an expression; the way a person works a shovel in the field; words spoken with an almost contemporary casualness. These details amount to rough and raw portraits of humanity. This attentive nonchalance distances the film from

the usual heft of literary adaptations, and is in line with Maupassant's ambition to witness life as a process. A subtle demeanour is more important than communicating ideas in big, clear statements.

Where the film is more adventurous – yet not entirely successful – is in its attempt to translate Jeanne's thought process. Brizé transmits her inner life through occasional and beautifully phrased voiceovers, but his main tool is the elusive flashback or flashforward. Never signalled, these stark temporal jumps are placed as counterpoints to whatever tragedy Jeanne is experiencing in the moment. They reveal how her brain works through the conflicts of her life. When her husband Julien (Swann Arlaud) becomes patronising, memories of happy, sunny days with her parents suddenly flood back. The superimposition of past and present, enhanced further through the careful sound design, emphasises her confusion and the way memory makes time malleable.

At first this sensitive playfulness with time is genuinely exciting and allows for a direct line into our heroine's heart and mind. Yet it quickly turns phoned-in and mechanical. These increasingly obvious and tedious shifts clash instead of compliment the film's general casualness, and do not add up to a full picture of how Jeanne deals with her rich history. The inconsistency of her experience appears in Manichean terms, a struggled between light and darkness, with little space left for nuance or uncertainty. Jeanne seems unknowable and her life vaporous, which is too disappointing and underwhelming a payoff for a two hour movie.

MANUELA LAZIC



Lover For a Day



Directed by
PHILIPPE GARREL
Starring
ÉRIC CARAVACA
ESTHER GARREL
LOUISE CHEVILLOTTE
Released
19 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

No one is doing intimate relationship dissections like Philippe Garrel.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Another great addition to one of the director's strongest runs.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Packs a whole lot of nuance and romantic consideration into its bracingly curt run time.

Sveltely constructed, starkly monochrome, and fervent in its treatment of amorous matters, *Lover For a Day* completes what feels like a perfect triptych of miniatures from post-Nouvelle Vague auteur Philippe Garrel. It follows *Jealousy* (2013) and *In the Shadow of Women* (2015), and is another 70-odd minute film that's tightly constructed while always conveying the emotional messiness of the tangled relationships at its core. These late films may superficially resemble the average Gallic *divertissement* in terms of content, yet Garrel's own aphorism that "cinema is Lumière plus Freud" holds truer than ever.

The opening scenes establish a setup that's markedly more high-concept than usual for him. Middle-aged teacher Gilles (Éric Caravaca) and his much younger student and lover Ariane (Louise Chevillotte) make off to a faculty-only area to have a breathless quickie against a bathroom wall. Then we are introduced to Gilles' daughter Jeanne (played by Garrel's daughter Esther – his films are frequently family affairs), crying while dragging a noisy roller suitcase through an empty Paris street at night. It's the kind of economy of gesture that's common across Garrel's extensive filmography; before learning that Jeanne's boyfriend has broken up with her, we feel the loss acutely through the sharp contrast of intimacy and loneliness, narrow corridors and expansive streets, ecstatic gasps and convulsive sobs of heartbreak.

Jeanne's discovery that her father has a new lover the same age as her (23) initially exacerbates the pain, but soon both her and Ariane form a gentle

alliance rather than a bitter rivalry. "You'll get over it. We always do," the more experienced Ariane tells Jeanne, and it's these terse words of hard-earned wisdom that encapsulate the emotional tenor of the film, which might be best described as 'depressive screwball'. Garrel doesn't wring a lot of drama from the premise, and when he does, it's deliberately subdued. With its diaristic second-person narration and clipped, staccato rhythm, the film has the fleet-footed essentialism of Robert Bresson, minus the fatalism and intentionally blank performances. Indeed, both Garrel and Chevillotte are luminous physiognomic opposites, and each display a natural expressivity that's enhanced by Renato Berta's lush 35mm black and white cinematography.

In such a crystalline context, moments of discrepancy stand out, particularly a scene involving Jeanne and her friends gathered at a bar debating the Algerian war with an older bartender. In a less rigorous film, the scene would be a throwaway, but in this case the digression from psychodrama serves as a reminder that introspection shouldn't come at the expense of political consciousness and a sense of history.

Lover For a Day eventually offers a concise overview of Garrel's aesthetic and thematic gestalt in a brisk and compact package, and as such, it's an ideal entry point for newcomers to the director (this is a long way from the literal and figurative desert of 1972's *The Inner Scar*, for instance). It's a modestly scaled and eminently approachable addition to his filmography – as ephemeral as its title suggests, but just as lovely. **IAN BARR**



Dark River

Directed by
CLIO BARNARD
Starring
RUTH WILSON
MARK STANLEY
SEAN BEAN
Released
23 FEBRUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

*The third feature from the director of *The Arbor* and *The Selfish Giant*.*

3

ENJOYMENT.

Plenty of intrigue, paid off in bleak shrugs.

2

IN RETROSPECT.

A muddy misstep from an otherwise notable talent.

Call it the New Ruralism: a recent run of lowish-budget homegrown features that have broadened British cinema's horizons by returning to the soil. Practical winds guide these projects; there may be less competition for Screen Yorkshire funding than there is at Film London. Yet this grassroots initiative also speaks to a growing empathy between our creatives and the nation's farmhands, toiling long hours at society's fringes for scant recompense. Clío Barnard's *Dark River* forms the third born-in-a-barn movie to open inside a year, enough to convert eminent anomalies *The Levelling* and *God's Own Country* into a movement of sorts, even if, dramatically, it is by far the slightest of the three.

Barnard's agricultural homecoming particularly suffers from arriving so soon after *The Levelling*, compared to which it seems both familiar and more flimsy. The minute protagonist Alice (Ruth Wilson) re-enters her family's dilapidated farmhouse on the Moors, we again sense major work needs doing. Her time and attention will subsequently be split between wayward livestock, a bluff brother (Mark Stanley) plotting to sell the land, and a raft of phantoms in flashbacks. The most looming of these: the siblings' just-deceased father (Sean Bean), whose presence suggests Alice has returned to confront some lingering childhood trauma.

That process ensures *Dark River* emerges as Barnard's most explicitly feminist work yet, centred on a woman determined to fix up a property in the face of masculine indifference or aggression, and thereby fix up herself. The director has a fierce ally in the begrimed Wilson, whose harassed gaze and air

imply someone with a hundred more sheep to dip before sundown. "Your mother were a hard-nosed bitch an' all," jeers an auction-house cowpoke, and this director-star combo clearly intends to reclaim that insult as a badge of honour. Yet Alice's headstrong progress towards something like independence is undermined by Barnard's shakiest screenplay to date.

Narratively, *Dark River* feels both underdeveloped and overwrought, its mystery trauma guessable the first time Ghost Dad Bean hovers a beat too long in a bedroom doorway. Much of the supporting characterisation is similarly spectral. Set against *God's Own Country*'s subtly shaded Yorkshiremen, Stanley's Joe is an arrant bastard, slashing and burning rather than putting in the physical and emotional labour required to rebuild – yet Barnard is heavily reliant on his tantrums to seize drifting viewer attention. A wordless inter-sibling coda proves far more effective, but also a reminder of what might have been.

Barnard's acclaimed first features *The Arbor* and *The Selfish Giant* positioned her as an industry figurehead overnight, which perhaps explains why her third film feels so rushed: these cramped 90 minutes have no time to notice the scenery, and are caught straining to make the accidental death of a day player tragic (even then, the fallout hardly convinces). It's not Barnard's fault that *Dark River* rolls in behind two bar-raising films in a similar field; yet it was entirely her call to lay hackneyed thunderclaps over her plot's more melodramatic troughs. Fingers crossed she'll get back on track – this time, her realism feels oddly, disappointingly inorganic. **MIKE MCCAHILL**



Lady Bird

Directed by

GRETA GERWIG

Starring

SAOIRSE RONAN

LAURIE METCALF

TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET

Released

16 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

We have faith in Gerwig to make it across the actor-director no man's land where many friends have fallen.

4

ENJOYMENT.

How is this a first film?!

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A perfectly formed delight.

As an actor, the sensibility that Greta Gerwig brings to the screen is a tonic. She is entertaining and pained by life's difficulties. She is energetic and earnest. She does not affect coolness, cleverness or any aloof state that people who are less secure about their humanity grasp to save face. No. Whether working with Joe Swanberg, Noah Baumbach or Whit Stillman, Gerwig brings an endearing, rounded presence. What a joy, then, to discover that she is equally capable at flooding a film with twisted livewire complexity. Years spent co-writing movies with Baumbach has clearly paved the way for her fully-formed solo directorial debut, *Lady Bird*.

This coming-of-age story, set in 2002, takes the broad details of Gerwig's upbringing in Sacramento, California and uses them to create a story full of spiky humour, all the while sketching a family set up loaded with struggle. Gerwig's avatar is one of the most versatile young female actors working today. Saoirse Ronan's characterisation of 17-year-old Christine "Lady Bird" McPherson has the forceful momentum of a natural disaster and the hot-blooded passion of, well, a teenage girl. *Lady Bird* is "from the wrong side of the tracks", which means that unlike the rich kids at her Catholic school, her family is scraping by on mum's nurse's salary. But Christine has no interest in being defined by her socioeconomic status and clashes with her mother over everything. Ronan whirlwinds through every scene, bristling with a feral but eloquent desire for experience.

A standard growing pains set-up is imbued with originality by a glorious script, written with relish

for odd vocabulary choices and attuned to the faux casual way some teenagers present. "You're very dexterous with that," says Lady Bird complimenting the boy about to take her virginity as he puts on a condom. The boy is Kyle (*Call Me By Your Name's* Timothée Chalamet) who styles himself as a dreamy intellectual artist by draining his voice of all feeling. Of mobile phones he says things like: "The government didn't have to put tracking devices on us, we bought them and put them in ourselves".

Laughs come fast and are generously distributed among the cast. Abrupt editing creates an enjoyable momentum. Ronan spins the film around her mood which can switch in ten different directions in the space of a scene. She ping-pongs between the relationships that nurture her and pursuing upward mobility with the rich kids. The most memorable moments are with the nurturers. Tracey Letts is heartbreaking as Lady Bird's dad, an unemployed computer programmer trying not to advertise his depression.

Laurie Metcalf as her mum bookends the film, as well as adding her weight to its centre. With her obsessive focus on survival, she cannot brook her daughter's impractical urges. The arguments between the two are real, familiar, and irreconcilable in the philosophical distance between the two opponents. Gerwig nails how mothers and daughters argue – always at each other's throat. Because of the tonal breadth of the film, different shades of feeling are found in each grudge match. Love as a combative war of words is an energising force. **SOPHIE MONKS KAUFMAN**



Greta Gerwig

The *Lady Bird* director espouses filmmaking as a team game and writing scripts inspired by personal memory.

It maybe wasn't until we saw her as the lead in modern rite-of-passage classic, *Frances Ha*, that we truly accepted Greta Gerwig as the indomitable screen talent that she is. She rose through the ranks of the 'mumblecore' revolution in films such as *Hannah Takes the Stairs* and *Nights and Weekends*, has dipped her into the clammy pools of mainstream Hollywood, and has also fallen in with hyper-literate New York comedy director Noah Baumbach. Now, she's moved behind the camera for her delicious feature debut, *Lady Bird*, the story of a outspoken teen (Saoirse Ronan) awkwardly (and often amusingly) transitioning into adulthood.

LWLies: *Lady Bird* received its world premiere at the Telluride film festival. Has it been non-stop for you since then? Gerwig: It has been non-stop since Telluride. Every time I show it, I have nerves, but it's been very meaningful to give it to an audience. The film really stops being yours at that point, because they start owning it. Then people start coming up to me and telling me their stories about dropping their son or daughter off at college, or telling me about fights they had with their mother. It feels like it literally starts belonging to other people.

That sounds very bittersweet. It is, but that's why you do it. You want to let people own it themselves and you don't want to keep it as your own secret. I love Emily Dickinson, but I'm not Emily Dickinson. I'm far too social. I can't imagine making a bunch of art and never really showing it to anyone. I like the process of how a film, at each step, is owned by more people. You find a producer, you bring that person on. You find your crew, you bring those people on. You find your cast, your editor, your composer. By the time you give it to the public, you've shared your dream world with all these different people.


How do you translate that dream world to other people? It's a lot of work. But I was very lucky, my cinematographer Sam Levy is someone I've worked with as an actor and he's photographed things that I've co-written with Noah Baumbach. I knew that he had a way of shooting cinema that was driven by words, yet he could make it cinematic. I'm a word-driven writer. I love dialogue and have a very precise script that I don't change when we're shooting. He is a person who can collaborate with me to make it something that feels like it exists in the world of film. So we spent a very long time creating shot lists and storyboards, but also just hanging out and talking about movies and photographs and paintings and looking at references. You find these kindred spirits, but then you lay all this groundwork which is both directly talking about the project, but also just spending a lot of time with each other.

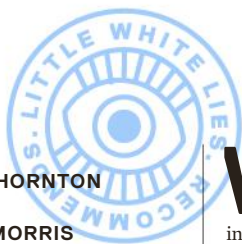
Did you reach a point where you thought, 'Everyone gets it, we can go now?' Yeah, pretty early on. We did a ton of tests, with cameras and lenses - because we were using old lenses - and did all this work with the post-production colourist who was messing with the footage in New York and trying to establish what we wanted the film to look like. Sam looked at some of the lenses, and I went through a ton of them too, but then he said, 'OK, here are my top five, and I'm not going to say anything. Tell me which one you like'.

Top five lenses? Yeah. So I looked through the lenses and looked at the sample footage from each and picked number three. And he said that was the exact one he liked. When things like that happen you feel like everyone is on the same page. Then everyone looks at the screen test together to see it, and when every department says, 'Yes that's the right kind of lighting,' or, 'that's the right location', you feel like everyone is together. Also, when my costumer brought me a particular sweater that she used for *Lady Bird*, the sweater was almost a Proustian memory for me. I said, 'I'd completely forgotten about this sweater, but it's completely right'.

How much of *Lady Bird* is, for you, a Proustian memory? Well, none of it literally happened. It's not a documentary, it's completely fictionalised. But at the same time, there's a core of emotional truth at the centre which resonates very deeply with what I know to be true. I'm interested in memory. I'm interested in the cinema of memory. I think about Fellini's *Amarcord* a lot, and the way you get this sense when you watch it of, 'No, that's not what happened, but that is what that moment felt like'. The way he saw everything is heightened, but it also feels somehow correct. I think I'm interested in personal cinema. Not autobiographical cinema but personal cinema.

Is it difficult to build truth into fiction that isn't autobiographical?

It's interesting. I'm always interested in the way fiction - and, in a way lies - can serve a greater truth in art. I guess one way to see it is fiction, and another way to see it is lies. But, to go back to Fellini, he says, "All art is autobiographical. The pearl is the oyster's autobiography." I thought that was a great way to explain it. In a way, and maybe it's because I make films, I don't have too much of a fascination with whether or not something is quote-unquote 'true'. When I watch movies I don't think of it that way, I don't want to go to Wikipedia and see what matches up 



Sweet Country

Directed by

WARWICK THORNTON

Starring

HAMILTON MORRIS

SAM NEILL

BRYAN BROWN

Released

9 MARCH

Warwick Thornton was the first Indigenous Australian to win the Cannes Caméra d'Or, with his debut feature *Samson and Delilah* in 2009. He was the first Aboriginal man to direct a film selected for competition at the Venice Biennale, where *Sweet Country* won the Special Jury Prize and Venice Critic's Award in 2017. Those tidbits may seem trivial. But given Australia's historical, systemic and continued oppression of its First Nations peoples, the significance is epic – as is this film.

Set in Alice Springs during the 1920s and inspired by real events, *Sweet Country* charts the story of Indigenous stockman Sam (Hamilton Morris), who shoots station owner, drunkard and abuser Harry March (Ewen Leslie). When Sam and his wife Lizzie (Natassia Gorey-Furber) flee, they're pursued across the Northern Territory by Sergeant Fletcher (Bryan Brown) and his posse. Among the crew is godly neighbour Fred Smith (Sam Neill) and shady neighbour Mick Kennedy (Thomas M Wright), lead by Mick's 'black stock' tracker Archie (Gibson John). This sunburnt saga of justice, endurance and toxic masculinity is Thornton's first feature drama since his debut. The prolific filmmaker has been busy as a documentarian and cinematographer. Casting several fledgling actors, Thornton draws a soft, empathic performance from Gorey-Furber in her screen debut. Morris' sense of pathos is similarly moving, and he holds his own opposite veterans such as Neill and Brown.

With Thornton himself behind the camera, the film cuts to the heart of isolation and displacement. Trekking across the frontier, the characters often resemble little plastic figures, soldiering into the

distance. Trekking across the frontier, the characters look like little plastic soldiers. They march toward the mirage of a lucky country.

Much has been said and written of outback Australia's 'harsh beauty' and 'arid terror'. Most of it wreaks of imperialism. It's hard, perhaps impossible, to describe the gravity of land to which you don't have 60,000 years worth of emotional connection. But as Brown's Sergeant Fletcher remarks, "There's some sweet country out here." He speaks to the weathered cliffs, lush waterholes, stark plains and infinite sky. *Sweet Country* showcases this natural splendour (that which earned the Territory 2.6 billion tourist dollars in 2016). It's notable that, during the era in which the story is set, Indigenous Australians were – by law – classed among this flora and fauna. Aboriginal people weren't recognised as 'people' until 1967. The consequences of white invasion endure in present day Australia. *Sweet Country* dramatises an historical (though not historic) anecdote, and it's infused with tragic familiarity. If it weren't for Australia's restrictive firearm legislation, the incidents depicted here could still lurk within the realms of possibility. The attitude of characters like Harry March and Mick Kennedy definitely ring true. Fortunately, filmmakers like Thornton, Larissa Behrendt, Stephen Page and Tracey Moffatt are making tracks toward decolonising Australian cinema.

This review was written on the stolen lands of the Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains. I acknowledge their ongoing relationship to the land and pay my respects to Kurna Elders – and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – past and present. Sovereignty was never ceded. **AIMEE KNIGHT**

5

ANTICIPATION.

I can't get through the trailer without crying.

5

ENJOYMENT.

Wept so much I got a migraine.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

A painfully real portrait of racism in Australia.



Journeyman

Directed by

PADDY CONSIDINE

Starring

PADDY CONSIDINE

JODIE WHITTAKER

PAUL POPPLEWELL

Released

16 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Paddy Considine's long-awaited follow-up to 2010's Tyrannosaur.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Heartfelt tale physical recovery, but the boxing element feels entirely superficial.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

The great performances don't quite make up for the functional storyline.

As with its pugilist hero, Paddy Considine's second feature as writer and director is scrappy, appealing and wins the day not with a knockout, but scrapes through on points. Middle-weight mainstay Matty Burton (Considine) is a father, husband and perma-grinning gent – a little at odds with the knowingly vulgar world of British boxing. When opponents resort to cruel taunts as a way to whip up a sense of drama, he demurs, allowing laser focus and old school sportsmanship to win out.

Yet *Journeyman* isn't a boxing movie. It isn't even a sports movie. With a final bout under his belt and a life of domestic bliss neatly laid out ahead of him, one more unexpected (and giant) hurdle reveals itself as Matty returns to the family nest and collapses, suffering the brutal initial effects of a serious brain trauma. For a while, the focus is split evenly between the tragedy of Matty's sudden disorientation and the efforts of his stoical wife Emma (Jodie Whittaker), as she tends to both their baby daughter and a husband who's having to re-learn basic functions from zero. There can be no argument that Considine is a world class actor, and he relishes the opportunity here to deliver a meticulous and respectful portrait of a man who loses vital contact with body and mind that never once looks like a mere technical exercise.

There's a hint early on that, even though the film's title refers to Matty, the film might in fact be telling Emma's story, as some of the strongest material involves observing Whittaker exuding a maternal kindness as she internally tangles with

this harsh new reality. She knows that pining for the Matty she once knew would be to deny her love for the man she married – in sickness and in health. She believes that his condition is a mere blip, that rehabilitation is an inevitability and normalcy will return. But Considine decides to present a darker side to Matty, riffing on the idea that, while he might be damaged up top, physically he's still as strong as an ox.

Looking specifically at the performances and the moment-to-moment interactions between actors, the film sparkles. The emotions are big and bold, and the tone always errs on the just right side of syrupy sentiment. Where it falters is in its unconvincing storyline, where Matty and Emma are essentially left alone directly after the accident with no apparent help or guidance on hand. Matty's training team scarpers, and their fear of having been complicit in the accident never rings true. It's the series of contrived situations that prevent the film from soaring.

It also employs some fancy footwork to retain a cordial relationship with the world of boxing. The chronic health risks posed by boxing are neatly chalked up as a necessary evil, as Matty sternly refuses to blame either colleagues or opponents for his ailments. He doesn't seem to mind that he has been tossed to the gutter and left entirely alone. But Considine doesn't appear interested in offering a critique of this world, instead focusing entirely on the difficult recovery process. On that front, it feels like a bit of a cop out.

DAVID JENKINS



The Nothing Factory

Directed by

PEDRO PINHO

Starring

JOSÉ SMITH VARGAS

CARLA GALVÃO

NJAMY SEBASTIÃO

Released

23 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

A big prizewinner on the festival circuit.

4

ENJOYMENT.

Very much its own thing, but in the best possible way.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

A film which proves that you can fight the power while dancing at the same time.

If there's one surefire way to alleviate the sense of drudgery that comes from working in a factory, it's to kick up a song and dance. It's tempting to describe Pedro Pinho's quietly outraged UFO as a three hour proletarian musical, but that doesn't quite skim the surface of reality. Making understandable waves as part of the 2017 Directors Fortnight sub-strand at the Cannes Film Festival, it's a work that, while perhaps not entirely fully formed, heralds an exciting new voice in European cinema. Much like his Portuguese wingman Miguel Gomes, whose own mammoth *Arabian Nights* saw him pay little heed to narrative convention or commercial viability, Pinho's intuitive epic loosely details the struggle faced by workers of a recently shuttered lift factory in the Lisbon suburbs.

Anyone who's ever been involved in, or witnessed, staff redundancies will recognise the film's chilling prelude, as oily bureaucrats patronisingly attempt to appease workers with faux-positive spin and empty promises of progress. They try to seduce their employees with words, but it's not enough. The anger is righteous and instant. Hardware is smuggled out at night, but the workers know what's up. What begins as a strike swiftly evolves into an occupation, with the workers trying to figure out if they can keep this schooner afloat without the domineering powers that be. It sounds like a ripping revolutionary yarn, but that's not the case. Though Pinho clearly yearns for the economic self reliance of the little man, he's unromantic when it comes to depicting the realities

of a dim situation. He is also interested in exploring both theory and practice. One mid-section chunk comprises a fascinating (if comically inscrutable) discourse on how leftist political theory relates to physical circumstance. Elsewhere, the film offers hushed digressions into the home life of the sweet natured though conflicted Zé (José Smith Vargas) as he tends to his young son and moonlights as the vocalist in a local punk band. It is a film that boldly goes where it needs to go, and it feels like Pinho and his team are working through the material on pure instinct. It's fascinating to see a film about what a revolution might look like during the Portuguese recession – there are no ramparts stormed or flags waved. It is almost accidental, as collective power quietly assumes control and the management eerily drifts off believing that nothing constructive can occur without their guidance.

Yet the new, slightly shambolic methods do work, and the business survives (rather than thrives) as other revolutionary units from across the globe begin to form their own ad-hoc trading channels. It's a utopian vision of the 21st century labour market, but also, it seems, an achievable one. Aside from the occasional expressionist interlude, such as the late-game musical number in the management office, the film maintains a starkly realist mode throughout. It's more interested in process than drama – how a decision is made rather than the ramifications of the decision itself. It pushes the theory that everyone reaches a point, economically, where they know they need to agree in order to survive. **DAVID JENKINS**



Pedro Pinho

***The Nothing Factory* tells the eccentric tale of workers taking over a lift factory. We meet its maker.**

Strange things are brewing on the outskirts of Portugal. A lift factory is on the cusp of closure, but instead of shaping up and shipping out, its workers decide to carry on regardless. Pedro Pinho's *The Nothing Factory* is a meandering epic which offers a unique vision of shop floor management, leftist ideology and the poetic family life. We spoke to him about finding a place to shoot and how his country is faring since the economic crisis of 2010 to 2014.

LW Lies: How did you pitch *The Nothing Factory* to people before you made it? Pinho: It was very hard. In fact, this film only exists because of a very specific genealogy. It was born from an idea by a theatre director who asked me to adapt a children's play for cinema. I wrote the script for him, and at a certain point, he had to depart. We had the money in place to do it, but we had to find a solution. I was involved in the project for the longest time, so I got the role of director. We tried to pick some basic ideas from the initial project, which was about a factory that's going to close. Somehow it has a musical element, and

also looked at the intimate relationship between a couple. We had to create a new object, and we had a massive sense of freedom as the money was already in place. We weren't obliged to think about an audience or a funding strategy. That drew us towards experimentation.

That seems like a very unique situation. This was public funding, so for them, we had to solve the idea of the changing of the director. Then we had to accomplish a work that exists within certain loose parameters.

It's hard to imagine that this was based on a theatre play. It feels very cinematic. The thing is, there is not a theatre version. We changed it so much that only the title and the fact that it happens in a factory is similar to the original text. In the play, it's about a kid and his cousin and their relationship with a hobo in the factory.

This is based on a real example of a factory being occupied by workers. Have you long known about this story? No, that was a coincidence. We chose this area, the industrial outskirts of Lisbon. We went there, we rented an apartment and we held a casting to look at the local workers who were in this situation of conflict. They were without work, and they had their own enterprises. From the stories we heard in this casting, we started to write the script. We tried to assimilate these tales into a film. We were, at the same time, looking for a location. In 2013 there were 57 working factories in this area, and by the time we were writing, there were only 11 left. So there were lots of empty factories. We approached the administrations of

these factories to ask if we could film inside, and when they read the script, they all said no. It was because the film was too political. Eventually we found someone who was open to the project, and we went there and we started to tell the story very carefully so as not to scare him.

When you had a failure, did you change your pitch? In the first pitches, I didn't really tell the story. I would say it's a film about these harsh times and about the closures and the angst of the workers and their families. I never said that they take over the factory. Later, when we'd had a few failures, we decided to send the whole script. And they still said no. But this one guy was different. He said to us: 'This is exactly the story of this factory.' He told me that the American administration who ran his factory – a factory for Otis, the lift company – were scared of the revolutionary process so they went away. Their 300 workers then proposed to buy the factory for one dollar. So the factory went into self management in 1975. And we didn't know at that time that there was such a factory in Portugal. And that was magic. And they then gave us total freedom inside.

Has Portugal changed since you made the film? It was shot in the period of deep crisis in Portugal. It was a very dark period in terms of perspectives. There was a feeling of impotence and humiliation – no-one knew what to expect from the future. Somehow, we felt that those had some kind of non-conformist sensibility back then didn't know how to propose an alternative – a new society or a new way of living. The political heritage of the 20th century wasn't ready to deal with this reality 🌀



I, Tonya

Directed by
CRAIG GILLESPIE
Starring
MARGOT ROBBIE
SEBASTIAN STAN
ALLISON JANNEY
Released
23 FEBRUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Big story, bigger hair. Gillespie has providence, and Robbie is a delight.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Skates around some dark subject matter with a bizarre amount of whimsy.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

An attempt was made, but Gillespie botches the landing.

There was a time, as strange as it might seem today, when figure skating was a sport that America took very seriously. Throughout the '80s and '90s, the likes of Brian Boitano, Kristi Yamaguchi and Michelle Kwan were household names – but no skater ever achieved infamy like Tonya Harding. Following an assault on her Olympic rival Nancy Kerrigan, allegedly planned and carried out at the behest of Harding's bumbling ex-husband Jeff Gillooly, she was banned from professional skating for life. After fascinating the public for years and spawning documentaries, books and Simpsons parodies, Harding's story has found its way to the big screen thanks to director Craig Gillespie and star/executive producer Margot Robbie.

Based on conflicting interviews, contemporary video footage, and a healthy dose of conjecture, *I, Tonya* is a biopic interlaced with present day mock-interviews which leans heavily on the idea of an unreliable narrator. Taking overt stylistic cues from previous Robbie projects *The Big Short* and *The Wolf of Wall Street*, there's a brash dynamism to the film, which examines Tonya's turbulent upbringing and personal life, "The Incident" which ended her career, and the lasting impact for almost all parties involved. Conspicuously absent from the story is Tonya's alleged victim Nancy Kerrigan, which doesn't come as a surprise considering the title of the film and the unapologetically selfish nature of its subject, but it seems strange to silence such a key voice, and the trend within cinema to focus more on the perpetrator of a crime than the ramifications for the victim is problematic.

Even so, Robbie does a solid job of capturing the complex character of Harding, pirouetting from vulnerability to volatility on a dime. Yet she is trumped by Allison Janney's marvelous turn as the machiavellian matriarch LaVona Golden. Her performance as Tonya's chain smoking, negligent mother – who is utterly devoid of warmth even in a film where the ice is a central character – might be cartoonish, but it's compelling in its unpleasantness. Robbie and Janney are joined by playing-against-type Sebastian Stan as Tonya's useless husband Gillooly, and Paul Walter Hauser as Jeff's even more inept best friend Shawn Eckhardt, as well as a perma-tanned Bobby Cannavale who pops up as a reporter to provide context and outsider conjecture on the Harding case. The casting feels like the most realised aspect of the film, but it's not enough to carry the weight of such a complex story.

The flashes of interesting commentary about the inherent classism in the professional ice skating world, as well as the cult of the true crime celebrity in the 1980s, point to the darkness that lies at the centre of the story. But Gillespie's flippant biopic leans too heavily into lightness. Not only does it remain oddly silent on Kerrigan, but it feels flippant about domestic abuse, with Harding's violent relationships with both her mother and husband frequently played off as pantomime slapstick. It's a mishandled attempt at finding order in chaos, leaning heavily on sympathy for an unsympathetic lead. It's ultimately confused about what it wants to say about the consequences of Harding's actions.

HANNAH WOODHEAD



The Final Year

Directed by

GREG BARKER

Starring

BARACK OBAMA

JOHN KERRY

SAMANTHA POWER

Released

19 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Offers the promise of unprecedented access into the West Wing.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Occasionally illuminating insights into diplomacy, international relations and the cultivation of self-image.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

An attempt to write history quickly and cleanly is destabilised by sour reality.

Barack Obama's final year in office already feels like a long time ago, so much so that Greg Barker's documentary on the subject seems to recall a simpler time. Despite containing material shot as recently as January 2017, it is immediately apparent that *The Final Year* depicts a considerably different administration – and indeed a different America – to the current reality.

In the first scene, Ben Rhodes – one of Obama's speechwriters and closest advisors – explains the unexpected presence of the camera by saying to other West Wing staffers that Barker is making a film, “about our administration's diplomacy”. Tasked with condensing an entire presidential year into 90 minutes, Barker is wise to restrict his observation. His documentary is a mix of fly-on-the-wall material and to-camera interviews with both staffers and the 41st president himself which is structured by department. Looking almost entirely at the field of diplomacy, Barker's interest is in the ways that Obama's administration sought to close their term by reaching out internationally. This arrives in the form of big gestures (Obama speaking in Hiroshima, or meeting diplomats in Vietnam) and small ones (UN ambassador Samantha Power meets the mothers of girls kidnapped by Boko Haram, then later barbers with her children using doughnuts).

There is a problem with starting a documentary with a clear intention. In this case, it's to celebrate one of America's most progressive and (comparatively) peaceful presidencies. But there are also a set of assumptions in place, namely that the president at the time of the film's release would

be a democrat. The unpredictability of reality ends up intervening. It seems odd to fault a filmmaker for his failure to rearrange his film to match a fracture in reality, but the valedictory line Barker perseveres with rings false, his hopeful conclusion is wilfully naive. Granted unprecedented access and the kind of candour afforded by the participant's awareness that they will be out of office by the time the film appears, Barker had an incredible opportunity to create something revealing. The end result sadly falls slightly short.

Barker observes the administration's final attempts to create a legacy that endures. He arrives at the latter stages of the last leg of any term in office. Any work undertaken – especially that which is incomplete – may be reversed or undone by the subsequent president. There is a rush to tie up loose ends, to polish the developing relationships and push through planned policy. This drives a documentary that might otherwise feel ambling, and also provides it with its most cutting and painful irony. From the moment that Trump first appears in the film, as a tangerine glow on a CNN monitor, he remains a spectral presence that threatens to overshadow it. As news anchors debate candidate Trump's rising popularity, Rhodes refuses to hear it. On election day, for the first time in his life he's speechless. “History doesn't follow a straight line” proclaims Obama in the film's closing moment. His legacy has been set utterly off course, and with it, Barker's attempt at a pre-written summation falters.

MATT TURNER



Coco

Directed by

LEE UNKRICH
ADRIAN MOLINA

Starring

ANTHONY GONZALEZ
GAEL GARCÍA BERNAL
BENJAMIN BRATT

Released

19 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Step aside all the animated crap made to fill up Half Term. Pixar are back in town.

3

ENJOYMENT.

It's almost lovely – a shaggy dog ride into the afterlife that never kicks into top gear.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

Not top-tier Pixar. But decent enough.

Having already dealt with such existentially weighty topics as chronic depression (*Inside Out*), the nature of artificial intelligence (*WALL-E*) and the perils of physical decay (*Up!*), the crazy kids over at Pixar have landed on their latest family friendly discussion point: impending mortality. With this being a digitally animated adventure epic, the whole concept of merging with the infinite is repackaged in a way that's cheerful, amusing and super fun for kids of all ages.

Young scamp Miguel shines shoes by day and worships at his secret hand-built shrine to peacocking troubadour Erenesto de la Cruz at night. By strange quirk, his family abide by a strict no music policy, down to a romantic altercation from a few generations past. For reasons that are not altogether clear, Miguel is transported to the Land of the Dead on – coincidentally – the annual Day of the Dead, where he must learn a few lessons about pride and the importance of memory before he's able to return back to the nest. The team behind the project (as Pixar's film are rarely the product of a single mind) have parlayed years of Mexican tradition and superstition into a light-hearted fantasy about how life is extended for as long as people are able to keep our spirit alive in their hearts and minds. Photography – and, by extension, cinema – are the tools used to keep that flame burning.

This time around, the intellectual underpinning isn't quite served by a story which is too often hampered by lazy contrivances and lots of lucky escapes. The design is as pristine as we've come to expect from this outfit, although at times feels

like it's been pushed a little far. Subtle patterns are etched onto the skeleton faces of the denizens of the Land of the Dead, but the cute spirit animals are painted in garish neon and their purpose within the plot is largely functional. There is a barking mad mutt named Dante, yet any deeper literary allusions begin and end there. But if Pixar have a certain special touch to their work, it's the tactile quality they achieve through the rendering of skin and the textures they build up on every surface. Even though the film is very much a cartoon in the traditional Disney, its makers employ every trick in the book to make you question whether you're watching an organic object implanted within a digital backdrop.

It's a weird one, though... On one side, you have to be thrilled by the fact that there are filmmakers out there willing to nudge the boundaries of family-oriented animated fare. Yet on the other, it's appears increasingly clear that Pixar are becoming a victim of their own success. The issue isn't down to what the films look or feel like – it's more that they're all starting to feel awfully similar. With a few lone exceptions, the very idea of a sequel appears to directly contravene Pixar's constant push for originality. *Coco* isn't a sequel, but its eccentric quest narrative in which a young person learns a valuable life lesson is starting to feel careworn and unsurprising. This film positively pops with ideas, and there's more value in a single frame of this than in an entire air hanger's worth of *Emoji Movies*. And yet, it's not quite up there with the golden greats of this vaunted animation behemoth. **DAVID JENKINS**



You Were Never Really Here



Directed by

LYNNE RAMSAY

Starring

JOAQUIN PHOENIX

EKATERINA SAMSONOV

ALESSANDRO NIVOLA

Released

9 MARCH

4

ANTICIPATION.

Phoenix and Ramsay and Greenwood, together at last. Oh my!

5

ENJOYMENT.

A cinematic sucker punch.

5

IN RETROSPECT.

Ramsay delivers a devastating blow.

Lynne Ramsay likes to take her time. In the space of 18 years she's only made four feature films, the last of which – *We Need To Talk About Kevin* – was released what feels like a lifetime ago back in 2011. She almost made a female-fronted western called *Jane Got a Gun*, but considering how that one turned out, it was probably best that she scarpereed early on. Finally our patience has been paid dividends, as Ramsay teams up with Joaquin Phoenix for the first time to deliver a brutal masterclass in sensory overload. Based on the novella of the same name by Jonathan Ames, *You Were Never Really Here* might have taken its time, but it is unequivocally worth the wait.

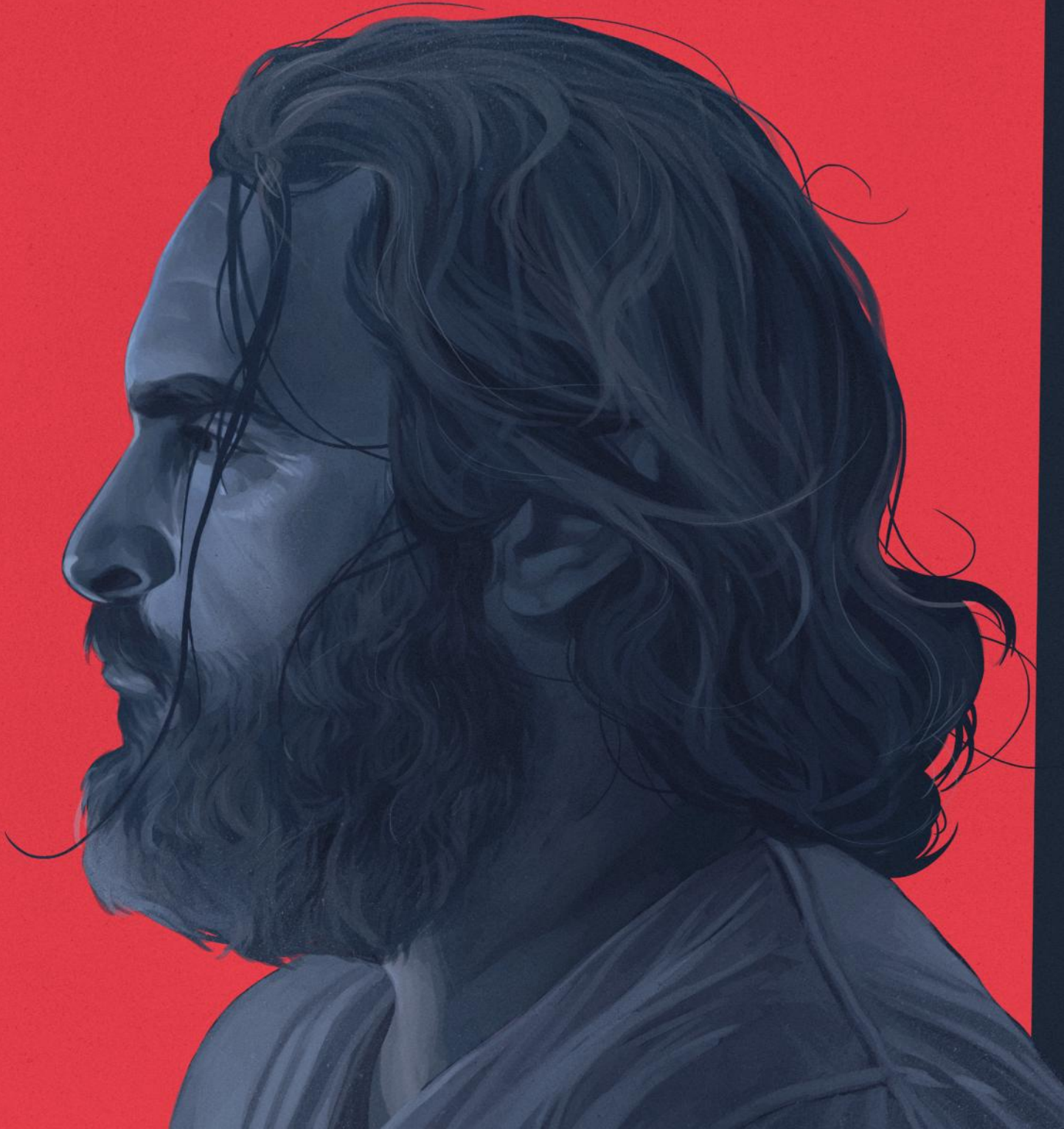
Marrying brutality with a curious gentleness, Phoenix's Joe is an ex-marine turned hitman who carries out retrieval operations across America, periodically returning to New York to check in on his elderly mother. Tasked with rescuing a teenage girl from a sex trafficking ring, things take a turn for the worst when he realises how deep the rabbit hole goes. Joe leads a solitary life which we glean through glimpses. His demons are nestled deep but claw constantly beneath his skin. He's unflinching and harsh, yet seems somehow afraid to disturb the atoms that surround him when he doesn't have a hammer in his hand and murder on his mind. There's no better fit for the role than Phoenix, who presents Joe as simultaneously vulnerable and impervious, a solid mass riddled with keloid scars that tell a story his voice cannot. Far from being a Dolph Lundgren-esque hired hard man, Joe's a fully-realised vision, the embodiment of

internalised trauma cast adrift in a world he's come to see only in black and white.

In contrast, the film sings with colour; the siennas and ochres of a city skyline at sunset; the purple halo of a fading bruise; the lush green lawns of a suburban mansion. Everything is amplified only to the extent of fine tuning, inviting you to notice details that might otherwise escape the eye. Ramsay's violence is never gratuitous or overstated, and beautifully rendered shots of Joaquin's weathered body remind the audience the film is much more a character study than anything else. It's a haunting glimpse into a frayed psyche shaped by years of relentless horror, from childhood abuse to wartime hell.

With a lean runtime of 85 minutes, Ramsay has shaved all possible fat from the bone, leaving behind only the raw, sinewy morsels. A lingering moment of softness amid the chaos shows Joe fussing over his cat, providing a glimpse of something gentle peeking out from behind the brute force, but the moment is fleeting. Respite is only ever temporary before you're thrown face-first into the concrete, sent reeling by Jonny Greenwood's electrifying, unsettling score, a different animal from the searing strings of his past composition work.

There's always been a sense about Ramsay that she doesn't pour half measures. Being selective with her projects ensures each one is a perfectly-crafted visceral experience that shoots straight for your gut. You don't watch a Ramsay film – you're consumed by it. *You Were Never Really Here* is the greatest testament to that. **HANNAH WOODHEAD**



Joaquin Phoenix

It's hammer time for the famously intense leading man ahead of his starring role in Lynne Ramsay's extraordinary *You Were Never Really Here*.

It's a headfuck trying to reconcile Joaquin Phoenix with his character in *You Were Never Really Here*. The former is at pains to joke and pierce the idea that acting is a serious job. The latter – Joe – is just piercingly in pain. Like a bleeding warhorse with arrows protruding from his side, he lumbers on rescuing underage girls from New York brothels, killing those in his way with a whack from his weapon of choice: a hammer. Joaquin Phoenix was the only actor Ramsay wanted. She moved the production forward to fit his schedule. In return, she got a performance of trauma that seeps out of the frame and into the audience's bones. Phoenix is so sought-after partially because he loads quiet reactions into extremely physicalised characters. Joe is muscular but running to flab. He is powerful but slowed down by violent memories that won't quit. Phoenix occupies this physique with searing pathos, and (to his surprise) he won the Best Actor prize at the Cannes Film Festival in 2017.

LW Lies: This is a very brutal part. Does it take you time to get into it or is it something you can switch on? Phoenix: I started working out two months before we started shooting. When you're preparing for something, it's all you think about. Like, right now I'm getting ready to do *The Sisters Brothers* (by Jacques Audiard). I was just taking a walk along the water, and found myself saying lines out loud. But sometimes you show up and then you're eating a fucking sandwich and bullshitting with the director, then you go and do the scene and at some point, if you're lucky and if you've done the work, it's easy to kind of slip into. Sometimes it's not! Sometimes you get there and you do a couple of takes and you go, 'Fuck, I couldn't care less about this. I'm not feeling this.' So I'd talk with Lynne, go through the story, skim through the script again, and think about, 'Okay, what's led to this moment?' and hopefully you find it. But it's not always there.

What drew you to Lynne Ramsay? I was talking to Darius Khondji, a cinematographer who I've worked with a couple of times, trying to find what to do next. I said, 'Who are the good directors that you like?' He said 'Lynne Ramsay'. Then, a couple of weeks later by chance, Jim Wilson, who's the producer, who I've known for 20 years, he called me and said, 'I'm doing this thing with Lynne, do you want to meet and talk to her about it?'

Do you know why you gravitate towards projects that are all-consuming? I guess because it's enjoyable, right, to work hard. I don't even know if I work hard. This is bullshit. Maybe I don't even like that. I don't know what I like. I just say shit, man! I just say things. At its best every once in a while – and sometimes it's one take for the entire movie and sometimes it *never* happens

– there's a fucking feeling that you get. I imagine you can get it in anything you do. If you play sports, or maybe if you're writing something and trying to figure something out, and a sentence comes together fucking perfectly and you go, 'Where did that come from? It just happened!' It's such an exciting feeling. You feel it all through your body. It's so joyful. I'm always hunting for that feeling. I love that moment. It's worth all the days when you search and nothing happens and you feel like, 'I'm just fucking... this is terrible...' You have that one moment where, I don't know what it is, you're just in your flow and that usually happens, when you work hard at something and you're really dedicated to it. The times where I go, 'Ah this is an easy scene, no big deal' are always really dissatisfying and I regret it. So, I always look to work with people that are pushing themselves, and pushing me, because it's more enjoyable, and you have a chance to touch that thing, whatever the fuck that is.

Do you prefer playing outsider characters to more social roles? I liked this role, because it was mostly just me on set, and I need the director's full attention constantly. If you have to share it too much with a bunch of other actors, I find that difficult. *Her* was probably the best experience I had as an actor. That was perfect for me. I told Spike [Jonze], 'It'll never get better than this'. I like a lot of the time to walk around set and figure things out. I'm selfish.

How do you do when you don't have enough attention? What are you trying to get at?

I'm just interested. I think that I'm fine. Please, you know I'm fucking joking, you know that 90 per cent of what I say I'm trying to have a laugh.

I think you're being sincere when you say you like the director's full attention. No that is true, I do. I do. I like the option of it. I don't like a hovering director, I like to feel like when I'm in the space I'm not performing for somebody's approval, right. That would be wrong. But I like the option of having them there, mostly just because I like to talk about things a lot.

You kind of flirted with the Marvel Cinematic Universe for a while. Is that something that you regret not doing? I think they make some great, fun movies. There's nothing wrong... I'm not a fucking, like, cinephile. I'm not a snob and I'm totally fine with... I enjoy those movies sometimes, and I think they keep the fucking industry going in some ways, so I don't have a problem with it at all. I think that everybody was, is... I'm trying to figure out how to say this most diplomatically, okay... I think everybody was really happy with how things turned out. All parties were satisfied 🍷



The Post

Directed by
STEVEN SPIELBERG

Starring
MERYL STREEP
TOM HANKS
BOB ODENKIRK

Released
19 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

A new Spielberg's a new Spielberg.

3

ENJOYMENT.

A film about rushing to meet a deadline that feels like it was made that way.

2

IN RETROSPECT.

Stop the presses, it's his worst in years.

It's unclear whether Steven Spielberg still believes in America, or if he just needs to. His latest film *The Post* dramatises the heated days leading to the Washington Post's decision to publicise highly classified documents on US involvement in the Vietnam War, and Spielberg seizes this chapter of history for a clear Commentary on National Themes. The terms of this conflict will not be unfamiliar to anyone with even a passing knowledge of current politics; it falls to the brave journalists to out the President's malfeasance while he throws the full power of the White House at them, even threatening them with jail time. It's a Trump-era motion picture, and not incidentally; Spielberg signed on in March 2017 and production began in May, blazing through photography and editing to make the Academy Awards' end-of-year consideration date.

But in his hurry to make a relevant movie, Spielberg may have forgotten to make an honest one, or even a good one. Here, the proud patriotic spirit that seemed a little cornball when *Bridge of Spies* got Tom Hanks monologuing about "the rules" fully overreaches into irresponsible sentimentality. Hanks and co-star Meryl Streep portray the newspaper's fiery editor and untested publisher and portray these characters as pillars of morality during a trial by fire. They're not entirely untarnished; the film's most meaningful scene interrogates the close personal relationships they had with sitting Presidents involved in the Vietnam cover-up. But that the scene concludes with both characters simply resolving not to do that anymore is but the first in a series of increasingly frustrating cop outs.

The narrative surrounding the acquisition and publication of the damning Pentagon Papers just doesn't conform to Spielberg's hopeful worldview, and his attempts to force it into that shape end up disingenuous. Before an astonishingly dumb final scene at the Watergate Hotel, Spielberg gives his people the catharsis they crave when Hanks and Streep pull the trigger and their controversial report goes whatever the pre-viral name for of viral was. The triumphant music informs the audience that our heroes have won, and not to give any thought to what a Pyrrhic victory this is. Never mind that nobody implicated in the Papers faced jail time, or that the government has continued its sketchy overseas meddling elsewhere, or that moneyed newspaper owners — a position inexplicably placed at the fore of the film, while the leakers and writers who assembled the story get scant minutes of screen time — represent the greatest threat to journalism in America. Don't worry about it, just keep watching the footage of bustling printing presses and people handing off files.

There's some more pedestrian incompetence at play: horrendous costumes and worse wigs; a glaringly and at some points literally phoned-in performance from Streep; dubbing of real archival audio to a fake Nixon's mouth like an embarrassing ventriloquism routine. But it's Spielberg's attachment to an America that no longer exists that ultimately becomes his undoing. He wants to believe that justice naturally follows truth. Look at where that's gotten us. **CHARLES BRAMESCO**



Last Flag Flying

Directed by
RICHARD LINKLATER
 Starring
BRYAN CRANSTON
STEVE CARELL
LAURENCE FISHBURNE
 Released
26 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.
If anyone can pull off a belated sequel to a New Hollywood classic, it's surely Linklater.

5

ENJOYMENT.
"You just gotta keep livin' man. L-I-V-I-N."

5

IN RETROSPECT.
Linklater's hottest streak continues.

From *Chinatown* to *The French Connection*, *Saturday Night Fever* to *The Last Picture Show*, many of the era-defining American films of the 1970s spawned unusual, low-key sequels, each concerned with the notions of legacy and transience. Where the great New Hollywood masterpieces were nihilistic, their sequels, like Jack Nicholson's *The Two Jakes* or Sylvester Stallone's *Staying Alive* are fatalistic. They are gentler, more melancholic films, preoccupied with a sense of longing for the past. Richard Linklater's *Last Flag Flying*, a "spiritual sequel" to Hal Ashby's 1971 classic *The Last Detail* (the names and a few facts have changed), recalls the greatest of these sequels: Peter Bogdanovich's *Texasville*. Both are works of generous, compassionate Americana which revisit the characters of the originals at middle age, and each is concerned with the passage of time, with missed connections and paths not taken.

Last Flag Flying is set in 2003 and sees former Navy man "Doc" Shepherd (Steve Carell) reunite with ex-Marines Sal Nealon (Bryan Cranston) and Richard Mueller (Laurence Fishburne), 30 years after they served together in Vietnam – to help transport the body of Shepherd's son, recently killed in Iraq, to be buried at home in New Hampshire. In the classic Linklater tradition, it's a profound reflection on American values played as a hilarious and profane hangout film. It's an American road movie where the sense of America is not in the places they visit, but in the tenor of the conversations between the central trio; the way

they bicker, joke and reminisce about everything from their time in the forces to the merits of Eminem – think *Slacker* among the Marines.

The sharp edges and bleak loquaciousness of *The Last Detail* have been modulated by age – these men were once fighting the future, now they're negotiating with their past. It's a call and response to *The Last Detail*, treating the events of Ashby's film like a half-formed memory, a piece of history plucked from the recesses of the national consciousness. It's a film about a changing country, about what's been gained and lost in the gulf between Vietnam and Iraq, between New Hollywood and the contemporary American cinema. Time is the unifying theme of Linklater's work, and his sequels and remakes feature some of his most perceptive takes on the topic, from ageing in the face of love's ever-fixed mark in the *Before* films to the precarious boundary of adulthood in *Everybody Wants Some!!*.

It feels disorientating, even uncanny, to see the recent past treated as a bygone era, but it provides a different angle from which to consider a war that dominated the public discourse in the first decade of the 21st century. In this sense, it is closer in essence to the great home front movies of the 1940s than to contemporary Iraq movies like Kathryn Bigelow's *The Hurt Locker* – a step removed from the fighting, but right at the heart of a more spiritual conflict. *Last Flag Flying* may feel like a film out of time in the present moment, but it's a terrifically funny, deeply moving picture whose time will surely come. **CRAIG WILLIAMS**



The Mercy

Directed by
JAMES MARSH
Starring
COLIN FIRTH
RACHEL WEISZ
DAVID THEWLIS
Released
9 FEBRUARY

3

ANTICIPATION.

Hopefully *The Theory of Everything* was a “one for them” for director James Marsh.

3

ENJOYMENT.

Yes, it seems so. But this still isn't Marsh back to his best.

3

IN RETROSPECT.

A noble attempt to fictionalise an impossible story.

In 1998, the British visual artist Tacita Dean produced a small volume of photographs and text entitled ‘Teignmouth Electron’. It contained a selection of artefacts from her trip to the island Caiman Brac, the final resting place of the eponymous trimaran built and piloted by a mythical figure in the annals of modern sailing: Donald Crowhurst. Through sombre images of the crumbling vessel, Dean evokes the shattering plight of a dizzy-headed dreamer who, in 1968, disappeared at sea while competing in the Sunday Times Golden Globe solo around-the-world yacht race. The stark simplicity of the pictures – the mottled hull, the smashed windows, or merely the tragedy of seeing a boat gathering moss on dry land – are haunting, even if you have no knowledge of Crowhurst’s watery fate.

The Mercy is a new work from director James Marsh, who seems to be teeing himself up as the British Werner Herzog. His films tend to focus on men who overcome massive logistical odds to envisage their fantasies, men such as the charismatic wire-walker Philippe Petit who danced between the Twin Towers in *Man on Wire*, or Stephen Hawking, whose physical impediments proved no barrier to intellectual pathfinding in *The Theory of Everything*. With the latter film, he managed to apply his formula to the awards circuit, and was duly rewarded for his saccharine efforts. This new one feels like a return to the flinty, morally ambiguous terrain of superb IRA thriller, *Shadow Dancer*. Yet Crowhurst is cut from a different cloth to Petit and Hawkins, as he is someone whose can-do demeanour is cut through with a cloying, fatalistic arrogance. The

story is, in many ways, about a man who accidentally commits suicide.

In Crowhurst, Colin Firth is saddled with a nice, rangy role. In the film’s first half he is a paragon of English spark and self-reliance, deciding on a whim that he wants to break the record for circumnavigating the globe non-stop, and he intends to do so in a new type of boat. He smiles cheerily, he connects with his precocious kids, he is affectionate to his wife, who is played by the always-impressive Rachel Weisz. Yet she is deeply sceptical of his scheme. She is concerned with the simple economics of life and survival. Who will feed their children while he is gone? And, God forbid, what if he doesn’t make it back? Crowhurst’s first big mistake is attacking this task like it’s a cakewalk, that fame, glory and cash will be theirs in a heartbeat. It is a film about mis-judging the size and scale of the world from the vantage of the cosy English provinces. *The Mercy* also feels a lot like Steven Spielberg’s *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, but instead of reaching a musical intergalactic epiphany, there’s nothing but loneliness, confusion and an expanding web of lies.

It’s a fascinating story, yet Marsh tries way too hard to maintain dramatic interest when his subject is literally lost at sea. The film begins as a meticulous and lightly objective retelling of the Crowhurst saga, yet takes a major wrong turn when it decides to plunder the acrid state of his inner psyche. As this jauntily edited phantasmagoria on the high seas angle falls flat, you can’t help but think back to Dean’s simple photographs, which say everything by saying nothing at all. **DAVID JENKINS**



Brad's Status

Directed by
MIKE WHITE

Starring
BEN STILLER
AUSTIN ABRAMS
JENNA FISCHER

Released
5 JANUARY

2

ANTICIPATION.

A film about a privileged white man bemoaning his lot?

4

ENJOYMENT.

It's consistently funny and perceptive, if painfully awkward.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

Cheer up, Brad. You're doing okay.

Brad Sloan (Ben Stiller) should be happy. He has a good job, a nice home, a loving wife and a son on the verge of going to Harvard. He is comfortable. So why does *Brad's Status* open with its protagonist lying awake at night, consumed by a gnawing sense that his life has gone wrong somewhere along the road? Brad's problem is envy, provoked and exacerbated by the fact that his contemporaries from college have all gone on to achieve ridiculous levels of wealth and fame, leaving him feeling like an outsider with his nose pressed up against the glass.

Much of *Brad's Status* takes place during a trip to Boston, where Brad's son Troy (Austin Abrams) has a couple of college interviews scheduled. While he is initially excited to have this precious time together with his offspring before he leaves the nest, his insecurities threaten to scupper everything. He can't go five minutes without letting his mind wander into a fantasy of what his life might have been like. What if he hadn't been so quick to settle? What if he had taken more chances? Couldn't it have been Brad frolicking on the beach with two bikini-clad beauties whose combined ages don't match his own? Or getting away from it all on his own private jet? What if...what if...

In many ways *Brad's Status* is a more effective Walter Mitty movie than the overblown boondoggle Stiller directed in 2013, but writer-director Mike White is walking a far more difficult tightrope. By aligning us with Brad's embittered point-of-view, he's leaving himself open to accusations of indulging the whiny navel-gazing of a middle-aged white man,

beset by first-world problems. Crucially, White does give us some alternative perspectives, primarily through the bewildered Troy – who fears his father is on the brink of a nervous breakdown – and Troy's friend Ananya (the scene-stealing Shazi Raja), a talented student and musician who becomes the unfortunate recipient of Brad's self-pitying spiel. "You're 50 years old and you still think the world was made for you," she marvels, puncturing his blinkered sense of entitlement. "Just don't ask me to feel bad for you. You're doing fine. Trust me. You have enough."

Mike White isn't interested in validating Brad or tearing him down; the film is simply about his gradual realisation that, yes, he does have enough, and the grass is not always greener on the other side. That other side is represented by a few choice cameos (a frazzled Luke Wilson and a wonderfully supercilious Michael Sheen), but *Brad's Status* is Stiller's movie, with the actor delivering one of his most impressive performances. Stiller has played many of these neurotic, man-on-the-edge roles over the years, but here it is augmented by a nuanced characterisation and a depth of emotion that is genuinely affecting; he even gives us a close-up reminiscent of Nicole Kidman in *Birth*. Whether audiences will still be invested in Brad's journey when he has this moment of epiphany is an open question. He's certainly not an easy guy to spend time with, and many of White's perfectly pitched scenes of social embarrassment are agonising to watch. For those who stick with it, however, *Brad's Status* is an unusually thought-provoking and rewarding comedy.

PHIL CONCANNON



Downsizing

Directed by
ALEXANDER PAYNE
Starring
MATT DAMON
CHRISTOPH WALTZ
HONG CHAU
Released
24 JANUARY

4

ANTICIPATION.

Payne is the reigning master portraitist of contemporary America.

3

ENJOYMENT.

A shaggy-dog affair which follows its own nose.

4

IN RETROSPECT.

It's a state-of-the-nation address by stealth, wry and wide-reaching.

After a whole string of wry, relatively small-scale, character-driven movies like *Sideways* and *Nebraska*, writer-director Alexander Payne goes all high-concept with his latest offering, seemingly pitched closer to the multiplex than his usual arthouse audience. It's a slightly goofy conceit for our era of impending environmental catastrophe, in which Norwegian scientists discover a way of shrinking humans to pocket size so they're rather less of a drain on the planet's dwindling resources. A decade or so later, in Payne and regular co-writer Jim Taylor's extended timeline, the process has become a commercial reality for an increasing number of Americans who've decided downsizing is the way to go. Saving the planet isn't necessarily their prime consideration however, since for hard working, financially over-extended middle income types like Matt Damon and his wife Kristen Wiig, the attraction is clear. When you're five inches tall, your dollar buys you so much more.

First though, you have to take out all your fillings. Otherwise things could get real messy when you shrink down but your dental-work doesn't. It's a telling detail as the movie makes the whole reduction procedure blandly industrialised yet weirdly unsettling. It has a kind of daffy momentum, sustained as Damon settles into his tiny and irredeemably naff new surroundings. Which is where Payne wants to get to. Like so many time-honoured sci-fi fables, this future vision is very much about the here and now, with an essentially chiding take on how our obsession with feathering our own nests has overtaken so many other considerations, whether it's our whole world's uncertain prospects, or the rights of those who service our prosperity to live

decent lives themselves. There are definite shades of *It's a Wonderful Life* here too, when Damon's everyman protagonist suddenly finds himself exposed to human nature at its worst, whether it's Christoph Waltz's slick wheeler dealer making a packet by shrinking down luxury goods for the *nouveaux mini-riches*, or the grim surroundings for downsized Hispanic servants and cleaners. Where once we had sight-gags about oversized roses and Saltine crackers, now we're in some looking-glass version of Donald Trump's America – not exactly where the Saturday night movie crowd expected to find themselves.

It's a mazy, unexpected trajectory which zig-zags between farce and seriousness in a way that never quite feels fully controlled. What's more, the portrayal of the plucky Vietnamese cleaner (played by terrific Thai-born actress Hong Chau) who takes befuddled Damon under her wing and helps him understand the value of caring for others, will doubtless prove deeply divisive – some suspecting that her pidgin English is being used for patronising comic effect, others seeing this whole plot strand as mere liberal smuggerly. To be fair to Payne, though, such an individual is unlikely to have a perfect command of a second language, and at least the plot pulls a reverse on the usual white-saviour angle. And while the movie is undoubtedly something of a ragbag, it is also good-hearted and endearing throughout, genuinely inventive, and commendable for using the full digital resources of contemporary fantasy cinema not just to console or parcel out empty CGI spectacle but also to throw a few urgent question-marks in with our entertainment.

TREVOR JOHNSTON



Alexander Payne

Nebraska's finest muses on his dystopian, effects- driven sci-fi satire, *Downsizing*.

Alexander Payne's succession of sly, insightful, modestly-scaled 'people' movies, have made him a critics' darling, essentially the go-to observer of contemporary American mores. The likes of *Election*, *Sideways*, and *The Descendants* have deserved all the plaudits heaped upon them yet, through no fault of his own, also perhaps left Payne somewhat enclosed. Undeniably fine on its own terms, 2013's gristly black-and-white character study, *Nebraska*, looked about as artisanal a product as you could still hope to get financed by a major studio. So it's not hard to read his latest offering *Downsizing* – an effects-driven, high-concept fantasy, no less – as a way of breaking the mould of industry and audience expectations.

LWLies: It's on record that you started writing this after *Sideways* in 2004, so why did it take so long to come to fruition? Payne: It was difficult to finance. Studio heads kept telling us – and this is not my word, but theirs – it was too quote-unquote intelligent for its budget. And it also took us a while to corral the premise into

a story. It's a big idea you could take in myriad different directions, and we did. It might actually be more suited to eight hours of TV, but where we've ended up is with one everyman individual taking us on a – and I hate the J-word – 'journey' of his own, and thence touching on all the political ideas that the theme allows us to touch on.

Structurally then, not so dissimilar to the road trips taken in *About Schmidt*, *Sideways* and *Nebraska*? Yep. It's another goddamn road movie. I don't know why so many people tell me it's a departure, and I thank you for not being one of them. Not only is it not a departure, it's disappointingly like my other pictures, with some schnook from Omaha going on a series of adventures and coming out the other side. Actually, I'd like it if *Downsizing* were actually a summation of a certain phase of my film-making career. I'm starting to feel I want to do something genuinely different. Get away from the heavy machinery, leap a bit higher.

Still, *Downsizing* is unusual, in that the world it creates seemingly denies Matt Damon's protagonist the realisation of his dreams, instead pointing up the problems of our own current socio-political malaise. That's the situation we're in now, where the industry and public have been trained to see adult, human, 'people' movies as combatants girding their loins to contest against one another for awards season spoils, as opposed to just being seen as movies. I talk about this stuff a lot with my director buddies, and it's like the Roger Corman B-movies of yore are now the big-budget studio tentpoles, and what used to be the prestige projects are now these

precious items with shrink-wrapped budgets. Thankfully we still get to make a dozen of them a year, but I'm well aware I'm a rare bird in that.

What does it say about humanity if the shrinking process designed to save the planet ends up demonstrating some unpalatable truths about human nature? Hmm. If human nature is immutable regardless of circumstances, is that a good thing or a bad thing? I guess the cynicism of the film would suggest it's a bad thing. Because no matter what we do, we're fucked.

You also have Christoph Waltz's Eurotrash wheeler dealer trying to make a buck out of our impending doom. I suppose the movie has a lot of imagery sketching out the prison of materialism, and all that crap. But I guess people from the Midwest aren't hugely impressed by -isms of any kind. We just sorta stand back and look at everything. We hate everybody, essentially. But hopefully in a nice way.

So if this is the end of a certain chapter in your career, do you look back on your achievements to date? No, never. *Election* is not so bad. It's the one I get the most compliments about from film geeks. Bourgeois people, they like *Sideways*, because they know about wine, and there's a whole cult attached to that. From my perspective, *Election* is the only film I've made which isn't too long. It succeeds with a certain cynical bite and holds to a crisp rhythm. The other ones, you never want them to get so unwieldy, but you need this scene to get to this place, and somehow you're stuck with it. What can you do? 🍷

THE BEST 30 FILMS OF 2017

Some have said that 2017 was a less-than-vintage year when it came to the movies. Yet, looking at the full breadth of the landscape, that adjudication is simply untrue. Sure, there were more films to see than ever (thereby making it tougher to mine out all the gems), but if you were willing to put in the hard yards, then pleasure would, more often than not, be your reward. Here, we present to you, our thirty finest film works of 2017, and nudging into the top end of 2018. Our number one pick is, we feel, a film less for the moment, but one for the ages.

1. Call Me by Your Name

Luca Guadagnino

2. Phantom Thread

PT Anderson

3. The Florida Project

Sean Baker

4. Lady Bird

Greta Gerwig

5. The Levelling

Hope Dickson Leach

6. Logan Lucky

Steven Soderbergh

7. The Shape of Water

Guillermo Del Toro

8. Paddington 2

Paul King

9. Get Out

Jordan Peele

10. Good Time

Josh and Ben Safdie

11. Mudbound

Dee Rees

12. The Work

Jairus McLeary, Gethin Aldous

13. Song to Song

Terrence Malick

14. My Life as a Courgette

Claude Barras

15. The Beguiled

Sofia Coppola

16. Star Wars: The Last Jedi

Rian Johnson

17. The Post

Steven Spielberg

18. Dunkirk

Christopher Nolan

19. Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

Martin McDonagh

20. God's Own Country

Francis Lee

21. Baby Driver

Edgar Wright

22. The Death of Louis XIV

Albert Serra

23. Raw

Julia Ducournau

24. The Killing of a Sacred Deer

Yorgos Lanthimos

25. Wonder Woman

Patty Jenkins

26. I Am Not Your Negro

Raoul Peck

27. Okja

Bong Joon-Ho

28. Girls Trip

Malcolm D Lee

29. I Called Him Morgan

Kasper Collin

30. Logan

James Mangold

THE
BEST HOME ENTS
OF 2017

You would literally have to live ten parallel lives simultaneously to be able to ingest all the sweet fruits currently emerging from the UK's bustling Home Ents industry. Blu-rays are now no longer just contractual obligation releases which serve to extend the lifespan of a movie. No, they are individual artworks - miniature shrines to cinematic innovation. Here we have collected 30 notable releases from across the year, for those who have some spare Christmas money burning a hole in their pocket.

1. Eight Hours Don't Make a Day

Arrow

2. Housekeeping

Indicator

3. Belladonna of Sadness

Anime Ltd

4. Daughter of the Nile

Masters of Cinema

5. Street Trash

88 Films

6. The Iron Rose

Black House

7. The Eric Rohmer Collection

Arrow

8. One-Eyed-Jacks

Arrow

9. The Fabulous Baron Munchausen

Second Run

10. El Sur

BFI

11. Bring Me the Head of Alfredo Garcia

Arrow Films

12. Celine and Julie go Boating

BFI

13. The Tree of Wooden Clogs

Arrow

14. Two Rode Together

Masters of Cinema

15. Variété

Masters of Cinema

16. The Story of Sin

Arrow Films

17. Two Films by Lino Brocca

BFI

18. Multiple Maniacs

Criterion

19. Fat City

Indicator

20. The Cremator

Second Run

21. Rita, Sue and Bob Too

BFI

22. Cover Girl

Masters of Cinema

23. Vampir Cuadecuc

Second Run

24. The Thing

Arrow Films

25. In a Lonely Place

Criterion

26. Montparnasse 19

Arrow Films

27. Bunny Lake is Missing

Indicator

28. Daughters of the Dust

BFI

29. The Beyond

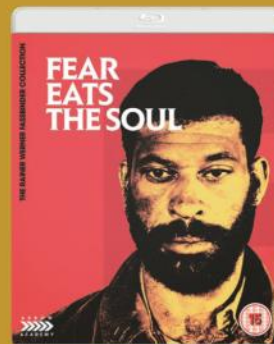
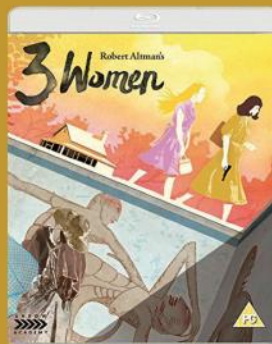
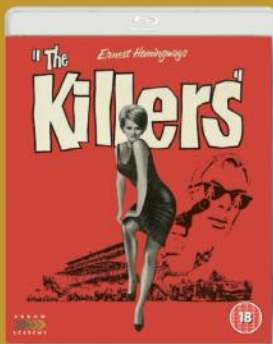
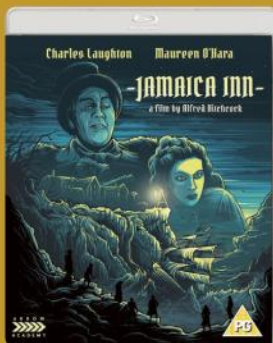
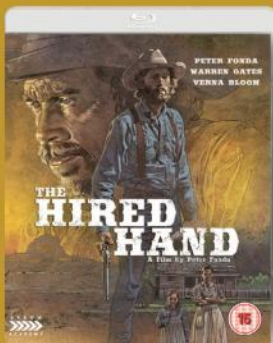
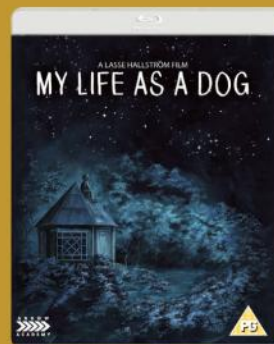
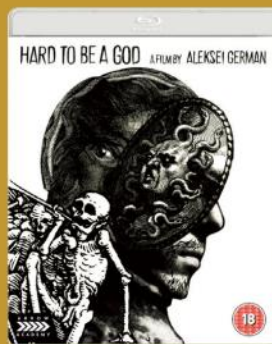
Arrow Films

30. Tampopo

Criterion

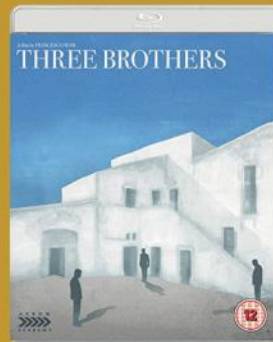
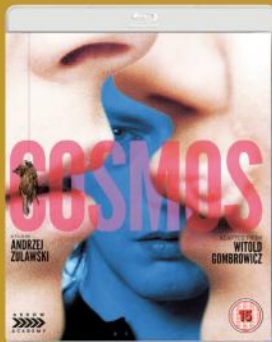
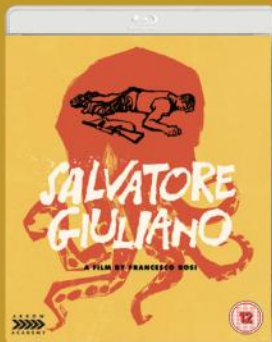
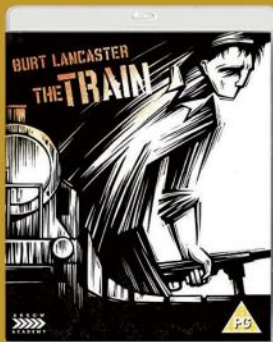
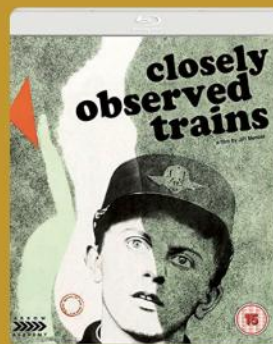
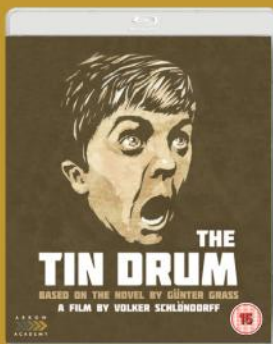
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Kings of the Road

<i>Directed by</i> WIM WENDERS	1976
<i>Starring</i> RÜDIGER VOGLER HANNS ZISCHLER LISA KREUZER	<i>Released</i> 22 JAN
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

Two men travel across Germany with the help of a hulking truck. They make stops in various hokey towns. One bee-lines to the local cinema and helps to repair any busted projectors or faulty exhibition hardware. The other just kinda skulks about and waits for him. Wim Wenders' fly-blown road movie epic is a breathtaking allegory for life's dawdling, episodic sprawl, but it's also a social realist survey of a country on the cusp of... something? There's almost a post-apocalyptic ambience to proceedings, as the two men – Bruno (Rüdiger Vogler) and Robert (Hanns Zischler) – hole up in gutted, decrepit factories and movie houses that appear to be crumbling to pieces. It's never quite obvious whether they are in a country about to begin a new chapter of technological wonder and progressive values, or whether the dream of a new and advanced post-war Germany has long died, and things are slipping back to the bad old ways.

The pair remain cordial and chummy, but never intimate. They drift together when the depressed Robert comically totals his VW Beetle in a lake and Bruno offers him a ride. Later, they drift apart, and then drift together once more, before finally heading their separate ways, almost but not quite connecting in the lovely final scene. In the spirit of the characters' wayward journey, this is a film to get lost in, to explore, and maybe even take a little break from and return to at a later date. Wenders, whose filmmaking is sadly on the wane these days, makes bold decisions with regard to scene length and camera placement (ably assisted by the maestro Robbie Müller), and much of the dialogue was improvised on the day. It maybe shouldn't work, but it does, often astonishingly so. **DAVID JENKINS**



When the Wind Blows

<i>Directed by</i> JIMMY T MURAKAMI	1986
<i>Starring</i> JOHN MILLS PEGGY ASHCROFT	OUT NOW
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

What do you get if you combine the whimsical illustration style of *The Snowman* with a harrowing 1980s public information broadcast about the threat of nuclear holocaust? The answer is *When the Wind Blows*, which finally makes its way to Blu-ray and DVD thanks to the BFI, 31 years after its original release. Adapted from Raymond Briggs' book of the same name, this animated drama tells the story of retired couple Hilda and Jim Bloggs, who go about their daily lives in rural Sussex whilst waiting for the bomb to drop. So it's a slice of cheery and prescient viewing for the wild times in which we live. Directed by Jimmy T Murakami (himself interred as a child in an American concentration camp towards the end of the Second World War) the film was intended as a stark commentary on nuclear war and its devastating consequences, and it succeeds massively in this aim.

It's a macabre examination of a very British reaction to this type of devastation, combining poignancy with absurd humour – in one memorable scene, the elderly couple sit down to a sandwich lunch in their kitchen, which has been devastated by the blast. It is at once angry and melancholy, offering an insight into the human casualties of a type of warfare that it's all too easy to distance ourselves from. The soundtrack feels suitably jarring too, composed by Roger Waters with David Bowie providing the film's haunting lullaby theme song. It's a forgotten treasure in the proud history of British animation, combining hand-drawn illustration with stop-motion and live-action to create a uniquely intimate look and feel. The new Blu-ray release also features the endlessly fascinating original public information film, *Protect and Survive*, designed to be broadcast in the event of an imminent nuclear blast, which makes for an excellent (if not bleak) double feature. **HANNAH WOODHEAD**



Charley Varrick

<i>Directed by</i> DON SIEGEL	1973
<i>Starring</i> WALTER MATTHAU JOE DON BAKER FELICIA FARR	<i>Released</i> 22 JAN
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

There's a generation of cinephiles who know the name Walther Matthau for two reasons: when he played cantankerous neighbour Mr Wilson in the pitiful American film adaptation of *Dennis the Menace*, and as one half of the *Grumpy Old Men*. Dial back a couple of decades and you'll see his immaculate comedy chops displayed as a male gold-digger in Elaine May's *A New Leaf*, and as a wily crim with a knack for self-preservation in Don Siegel's wonderful *Charley Varrick*. The latter is released on Blu-ray through the Indicator label, and it's a slick, idiosyncratic expression of the notion that, whichever way you slice it, crime really never pays. Yet, it dispenses with any soft moralising and watches as Matthau's cool customer Varrick plans a clean getaway from a smalltime bank robbery which included in its haul a large stash of resting mob money.

The film is a rough diamond forged in Hell's mouth, as within minutes of starting, good ol' Charley is forced to bid a lacklustre adieu to his wife and accomplice, Nadine (Jacqueline Scott), after she's clipped during a police shootout. He knows that sentiment has no place in a life on the lam, and after a brief melancholic repose, he's on to the next part of the plan. As Charley scabbles towards freedom, Joe Don Baker's smirking mafia hitman Molly makes fast gains, and a showdown is imminent. Director Siegel offers a fresh take on the honour-among-thieves routine, and whips up tensions with the ease of a master. It's the tale of perhaps the ultimate practical thinker, but also refuses to kowtow to any romantic notion that Charley should come out on top because he's essentially a better man than the really bad dudes. The film was all but remade in 2007 by the Coen brothers as *No Country for Old Men*.

DAVID JENKINS



The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes

<i>Directed by</i> BILLY WILDER	1970
<i>Starring</i> ROBERT STEPHENS CHRISTOPHER LEE COLIN BLAKELY	OUT NOW
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

The Polish emigré director Billy Wilder spent much of the 1940s and '50s gifting Hollywood with some of its most cherished classics: titles such as bitter insurance fraud noir *Double Indemnity*, Tinseltown satire *Sunset Blvd* and sunny comic caper *Some Like it Hot*. Where his commercial stock may have fallen in the late '60s, the films he made stand as some of most impressive and quietly radical. *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* from 1970 is a case in point, as it strips Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's master detective of his indelible mystique and mixes personal crisis with perplexing casework. Robert Stephens makes for a perfect Holmes, nudging the character a little towards tragic camp, but retaining enough of a heroic edge to keep the odds just tilted in his favour. An opening narration from Colin Blakely's Dr Watson frames the story as a macabre and subversive tale that would've scandalised readers during his own lifetime.

Questions regarding Holmes drug habit, as well as the true nature of his sexuality, bubble underneath a strange expedition to Loch Ness in search of what parties believe to be a monster. Among their crew is amnesiac damsel Gabrielle Valladon (Geneviève Page), to whom Holmes takes a romantic shine, while Christopher Lee makes an appearance as the detective's brainiac brother Mycroft. There's a looseness to the film which lends it great appeal, and the main plot doesn't actually kick off until 45 minutes in – to make way for a bizarre, prolonged comic adventure to the ballet. Wilder and regular screenwriting partner IAL Diamond push the material in a variety of odd directions, and while the central plot is silly in the extreme, the underlying themes burst forth as the raw meat of the film.

DAVID JENKINS



The Eric Rohmer Collection

Directed by ERIC ROHMER	1976-93
Starring MARIE RIVIERE PASCALE OGIER FABRICE LUCHINI	OUT NOW
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

The dazzling mid-period films of French director Eric Rohmer are collected together in this vital Blu-ray collection which is being released as part of the Arrow Academy imprint. The main bulk of the set is made up of the director's "Comedies and Proverbs" cycle, with such copper-bottomed classics such as *The Green Ray*, *Full Moon in Paris* and *The Aviator's Wife* in the mix. For this capsule, however, it's worth offering specific focus on the four outlier titles that the director made in between his series projects. The wonderfully titled *Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle* from 1987 traces the fast friendship between a city girl and a country bumpkin. In its final scene, which takes place in a small Parisian art gallery, the actor Fabrice Luchini turns up to deliver what might be the greatest cut-to-credits punchline in the entire history of cinema. *The Marquise of O* from 1976 offers an austere conundrum regarding a mystery pregnancy, with Bruno Ganz forced to recalibrate his entire value system as a way to "get the girl". Then there's perhaps the director's most singular film, *Perceval*, his staggering take on Arthurian legend ripped from the text of 12th Century poet-historian Chrétien de Troyes. Production designer Jean-Pierre Kohut-Svelko made the rolling hills and bustling townships of medieval England and Wales look like a children's playground, offering a playfully impressionist take on how cinema can deal with stories from the past. Finally, as a delightful bonus, the set also contains Rohmer's little-seen 1993 comedy *The Tree, the Mayor and the Mediatheque* about a provincial socialist apparatchik attempting to parlay his political capital into the building of a swish new media centre. If you like movies and someone didn't buy you this for Christmas, this is what you need to divert all those loose Christmas card tenners towards. **DAVID JENKINS**



The Cremator

Directed by JURAJ HERZ	1969
Starring RUDOLF HRUSÍNSKÝ VLASTA CHRAMOSTOVÁ JANA STEHNOVÁ	OUT NOW
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

This was one of the earliest releases from ace, long-running boutique DVD label Second Run. Although it was met with modest fanfare by cultists and collectors way back when, the film's fanbase has expanded considerably in the intervening years, and so it has been given a rebirth on Blu-ray with some new bonus material. It is perhaps the most famous work from the Czech director Juraj Herz (83 years old at time of writing), and it's not difficult to see why it has accrued this cloudburst of latter-day curiosity. It's the story of a rotund and intimidating man with the bizarre name of Kopfrkingl, played by Rudolf Hrusínský. When not adjusting his immaculate side-parting with a comb, he runs a crematorium and seems to take a poetic glee in the notion that, in just 75 minutes, he is able to transform human remains into ash. The lure of the flame – buoyed by an obsession with Tibetan mysticism – leads him to question his life choices and shift towards a darker state of being.

This singular, incantatory work fuses hard political history in the post-war period with experimental horror, as our anti-hero convinces himself that the tenets of Nazism are actually rather in line with his own outlook. It's an extremely cold movie, as Kopfrkingl is a man who displays no visible emotion. There's no internal struggle, as in Istvan Sztabo's *Mephisto*, where an actor reluctantly decides to tread the boards in the name of the Third Reich. This is a man who takes great pleasure in political purification (as he sees it), and does whatever it takes for him to live by his chosen creed. It's a fascinating and frighteningly realistic film about how politics often defies rational thought, self preservation and, most of all, idle sentiment. **DAVID JENKINS**



The Cat O Nine Tails

<i>Directed by</i> DARIO ARGENTO	1971
<i>Starring</i> JAMES FRANCISCUS KARL MALDEN CATHERINE SPAAK	<i>Released</i> 8 JAN
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

You haven't experienced the sight of a man being decapitated by an oncoming commuter train until you have caught up with Dario Argento's 1971 slasher/procedural, *The Cat O Nine Tails*. The set-up is pretty decent too: a sharp-suited scientist anxiously waits on a platform, and he's just a little too far in front of the yellow line. A POV shot from behind a nearby pillar signals that someone is watching him, waiting for the right moment to pounce. We see the hulking engine roll into the station, not terribly swiftly, but fast enough to do some supreme damage. And just at the right second, when two rhubarbing businessmen have turned their heads away, the killer strikes. In a flash-ory of edits we see the scientist lunge face-to-train buffer in visceral close-up, and then, as his head is detached from his torso, his arms and legs are given a spin-dry as they're chewed up in the wheels. As a nice extra touch, a group of paparazzi photographers run directly past the incident so they can snap a glamour model as she disembarks from the train, oblivious to the bloody mayhem.

The film is part of a neo-gialo trilogy by Argento which also includes 1971's *Four Flies on Grey Velvet* and 1970's *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*. As in those films, a contrived, over-elaborate and (frankly) highly unlikely plot is used to string together a series of eye-scorching set pieces, most of which here are synched with the doom-prog strains of Ennio Moriconi's slap bass-driven soundtrack. As with most of the director's work, you've got to have a tolerance for high style over low substance, but when the style is this good, who's complaining? This new Arrow release arrives with a host of extras as they continue to serve this director's wild back catalogue with enviable care and attention. **DAVID JENKINS**



Something Wild

<i>Directed by</i> JONATHAN DEMME	1986
<i>Starring</i> JEFF DANIELS MELANIE GRIFFITH RAY LIOTTA	<i>Released</i> 5 FEB
	<i>Blu-ray</i>

If you wanted to pay homage to the late, very great American director Jonathan Demme, you could do a lot worse than pick up this Criterion release of one of his early funny ones. And when we say "funny" we mean that's it's very amusing and extremely off-beat – it channels the energy of the classic screwball comedy, but doesn't look or feel like anything before or since. This dippy one-off begins with Jeff Daniels' depressed stockbroker Charlie deciding to walk out of a cheapo New York sandwich bar without picking up his tab, and he's nabbed by Melanie Griffiths' Lulu – an impulsive hipster decked out in a black bob wig and various African trinkets. She lures Charlie away from his humdrum office job and onto the road. They hightail it to New Jersey, rob a liquor store and go say hi to Lulu's mother, Peaches, before reaching their final destination: a high school reunion.

By this point, Charlie has managed to suppress his qualms and play along, having fallen madly in love with his alluring kidnapper. And at this point, the film swiftly transforms from a carefree American jaunt awash with eccentric colour, into something far more terrifying (involving a mad-eyed Ray Liotta as Lulu's jailbird ex-husband). It feels like a day-glo *Blue Velvet* as the pair find themselves with a maniac in the midst, and all the ebullience and joy in their relationship desiccates in the wind as they are forced to fight for survival. The film's freewheeling vibe is enhanced by production design which favours garish, primary colours, silly patterns and as much on-screen clutter as possible. Demme's trusty cinematographer, Tak Fujimoto, allows the camera to rest on scenes just a little longer than necessary, all the better to soak up the wealth of glorious detail.

DAVID JENKINS

Glasgow Film Festival



I work at the Glasgow Film Theatre all the year round. For the festival, I look after Sound and Vision, which is the music programme. I also deal with a lot of the Crossing the Line experimental programme too. I've been doing this job for about five years now and in various guises. I first came on board as a festival programme assistant and, at that time, I just kind of took charge of the music programme because there wasn't really anyone else doing it. One event in particular that I was really proud of that first year was getting this Scottish band called Admiral Fallow to create new live scores to a collection of short films. We held it at this at a huge venue in the city centre called the Old Fruit Market. We ended up getting about 600 people along to it. It was a really fantastic evening. Since then, we have always tried to have one or two large scale events within the music programme. Our audience really respond to that.

For my job, I have to keep constant tabs on both movies and bands. The films are the focus, and then you work in the music. Sometimes we'll commission a band, other times a band will want to work with us. We mainly focus on bands from within Glasgow or Scotland. If we're commissioning something you need a lot of face-to-face time. If we're working with someone in the south, it means you're having to constantly travel to see them.

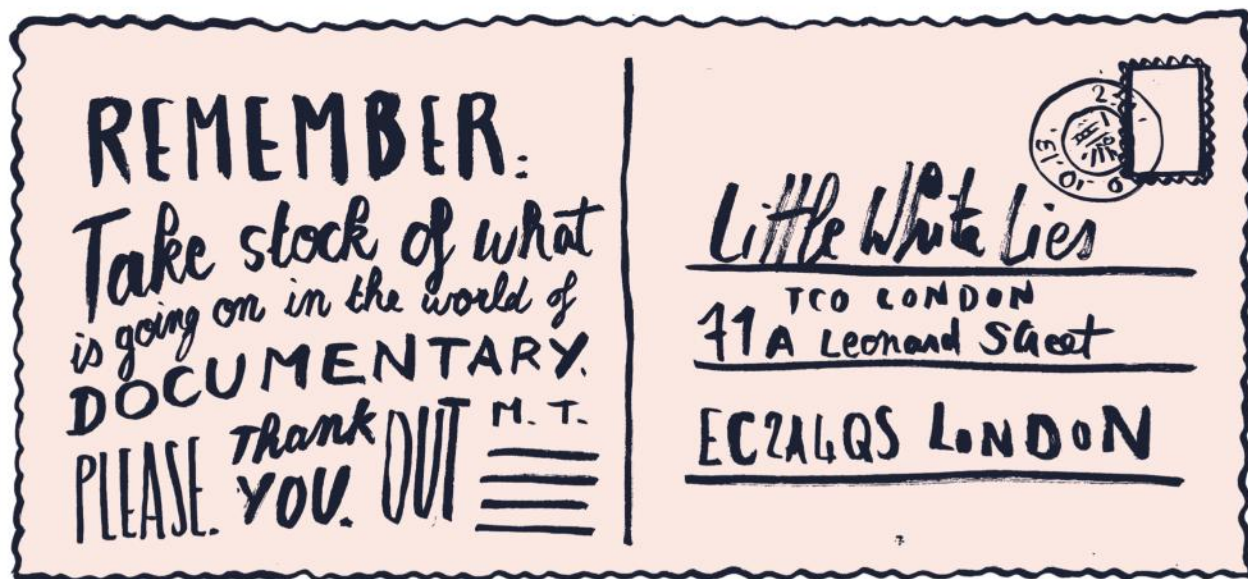
Commissioning a band to do a score can vary in complexity. We did a thing with a musician called Ela Orleans. She scored a film called *Lucky Star*. In that case, the film came first because it fitted in with our retrospective that year, and then we were thinking of somebody who might fit with the themes and the atmosphere of the film. And Ela was just right. We got in touch with her, we had a meeting, we all watched the film together and she just said yes. Last year, our big event was a film called *Lost In France* – a documentary about the Glasgow indie music scene in 2000. It just meant getting those musicians involved. In most

instances, it is the film that comes first. I have proposed things to people that they've not been keen on doing, but they're always polite to me when they turn me down. It's understandable: you can't force someone to feel that they have a connection with something that they don't have a passion for. After the initial commissioning process, things don't stop there. We want to know that things are moving in the right direction. It doesn't quite work if we're just being sent audio files, so we share little clips of the film with the new score so we can see how it looks in context. It means they don't have to perform it live in front of you ever time, which would be a hassle.

There's quite a few music events tee'd up for the 2018 festival. Two are tentpoles for the music strand. One is called *The Unfilmables*. Mica Levi, who did the scores for *Under the Skin* and *Jackie*, has a sister called Francesca who has created a British adaptation of *The Colour of Pomegranates* called *The Colour of Chips*, and Mica is doing the score. It's about 45 minutes, and after that there's another 45 minute piece by a band called Wrangler. That's one of the members of Cabaret Voltaire – his new band. They're doing a live score to a lost sci-fi script that was never made. Ever year my remit expands for the strand, as do my ambitions. We always want to push it further and further. And this year, we had far more people coming to us with ideas. Word has gotten out about that, and people want to be a part of it. Musicians tend to like being involved with film festivals as it's a bit out of the ordinary for them. You get that extra passion. The other main event for the Sound and Vision strand isn't 100 per cent confirmed yet, but we're hoping to do a recreation of *The Last Waltz* with all Glasgow bands 🎵

As told to David Jenkins. The Glasgow Film Festival runs from 21 February to 5 March 2018. For mor details: glasgowfilm.org/glasgow-film-festival

IDFA



A friend and visiting programmer described International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) as somewhere to “take stock of what is going on in the world of documentary”, and by extension, in the wider world too. It is a mirror, microscope or window onto every corner of the globe and recess of the soul, if you will. At this year’s festival, narratives surrounding conflict, migration and extremism dominated. This included multiple filmmakers going undercover in terrorist training camps, an alarming number of portraits of neo-Nazis, and no less than 30 films relating to Syria. Viewing this type of work consecutively can prove exhausting. So several experimental films, with equally grave subject matter, offered a strange kind of relief, simply through the unorthodoxy of their approach.

Agustina Comedi’s *Silence is a Falling Body* has an unusual premise. After his death, Comedi discovered that her father – a prolific home-moviemaker – lived secretly as a gay man. Narrating her experience and interviewing his friends, now able to speak from the other side of silence, she searches his footage, cutting and splicing years of super 8mm and VHS creatively to uncover the narrative he was unwilling to tell. Her findings, though varied and insightful, oddly peak with her opening sequence, wherein the father’s gaze, while filming his family in a museum, drifts onto a male nude, lingering lustfully and revealingly on the statue’s carved musculature.

Tamil filmmaker Jude Ratnam’s abstruse, emotive *Demons in Paradise* offers a personal take on Sri Lanka’s 25 year civil war. Beginning with the 1983 riots that caused him to flee his home, Ratnam travels on the trains he took then, connecting with old acquaintances and reawakening suppressed memories. Wandering, conflicted conversations with those he encounters are interspersed with Ratnam’s own oblique musings, and laid over the striking, crepuscular cinematography. Instead of attempting to transform objective history into narrative, Ratnam offers his subjective truth.

On the Edge of Life also reframes something complicated through a personal perspective. A letter from a Syrian refugee to the family he left behind, Yaser Kassab’s equally resonant essay is constructed from dialogues with his father as they try to come to terms with the distance that has been imposed upon them. Though humble compared to other representations of this experience, the combination of minimalist, evocative sound design, varied, abstract imagery, and fluid, associative editing effectively evokes the sense of inertia and liminality contained within Kassab’s frustrated, guilt laden accompanying monologue. After separation, comes “the grief, the anger and the pain.”

A variation on the same theme arrives in Joshua Bonnetta and JP Sniadecki’s sublime *El Mar La Mar*, a film – part oral history, part landscape portrait – depicting life in the Sonoran Desert between the US and Mexico. In between beautifully composed scenes of natural splendour, sound recordings are heard, often centralised against a black image. Presented without context or explanation, these stories of migration reveal a narrative that the images avoid. This hostile and purgatorial space connects two nations, and thousands die traversing it. Often a message made indirectly hits with a greater potency than one plainly stated.

It’s difficult to deduce exactly what kind of message Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel are making with *Caniba*, their experimental, confrontational extreme-close up portrait of cannibal Issei Sagawa and his brother-carer. But it is also hard to refute both its ingenuity and the queasy effectiveness of the craft. A punishing, but also intermittently astonishing, stare into not only the mind, but the deepest crevices of the flesh of this notorious criminal, *Caniba* presses long and hard, finding no easy answers, instead only provoking further questions about both its participants and creators. If IDFA is a mirror, *Caniba* offered its bleakest reflection, but also the one from which it was hardest to look away 🕒



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Little White Lies

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DOUG JONES:

I love the element of escape. I love being able to dive into a world we don't live in, where we can unhook our daily problems and issues and delve into someone else's. And by the time those lights come up in that movie house, you can walk out, back into your real life, and face the demons and monsters in your own life with a new empowerment that the movie just gave you.



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