

## 400 HUNDRED BLOWS,

1959    F    5.00    8.1    FRA

### Truffaut, Francois

Henri Deca 

Jean Pierre Leaud, Albert R my,  
Claire Maurier

Truffaut's loosely autobiographical debut film is a captivating mixture of charm, insouciance, comedy, pathos and grim reality, shaped by an exhilarating sense of the cinema's possibilities. Jean-Pierre Leaud turns in a truly remarkable performance, and the depiction of Paris is stunning. The final sequence is a *tour-de-force*, as is the interview with the unseen psychologist. Has to be one of the greatest of all childhood-early adolescence films. It's also an homage, both explicit and oblique, to the cinema itself. Spontaneity, innovation, grace, fluidity, dynamism – all in the service of an intensely personal film. Marvellous! The children's faces, watching the Punch and Judy show is one of the cinema's most touching moments! And some of the compositions are positively Bressonian – and this time I mean Henri-Cartier not Robert! Deca 's cinematography a thing of rare beauty, and the whole film is a miraculous blend of artifice and spontaneity. Along with Godard's **Breathless** and Chabrol's **Le Beau Serge**, this film really inaugurated the French New Wave, and has proved to be one of the most durable of that movement's achievements. For some reason I have always shunned Truffaut's films; perhaps it was because early on I saw one of his 70s films, **Day for Night**, which was widely celebrated, and was unimpressed. The earlier work must obviously be seen. Truffaut was more or less adopted by Andre Bazin, the father of French auteurism and * minence gris* of *Cahiers*, after T was abandoned by his parents. (The film is dedicated to Bazin who, sadly, died before the film's premiere.) Ken Loach must surely have seen **400 Blows** before he made **Kes**, another childhood/adolescence classic. Truffaut: one of the great cinephiles. **Later** (after seeing several more T. films): T seems to be one of those directors who makes a ravishing debut which they can't subsequently match but which provides free drinks for a very long time thereafter.



## À PROPOS DE NICE

1930 F 4.50 7.5 FRA

**Vigo, Jean**

Kaufman, Boris

The Avian Characteristics of the Cinematic Camera. The first collaboration of Jean Vigo and Boris Kaufman produces this extraordinary little film (21m) which is ostensibly a documentary portrait of Nice but which is also an exercise in the visual possibilities of the cinema – camera movement, montage, juxtaposition, fades, dissolves, double exposure, freeze frame, slow motion etc – to create a hypnotic interfusion of the sublime and the ridiculous, the spiritual and the sensual, the transcendent and the quotidian, comedy, pathos and satire, the artificial and the natural, the surreal and the mundane. Along the way there are observations about wealth, leisure, work, poverty, sex, voyeurism, festivity, art ... one might as well say “life”. Vigo’s first film is exuberant, airy, poetic.

Jacques Tati must surely have been an enthusiast of Vigo’s cinema.





## A WOMAN'S SORROWS

1937    F    4.00    6.7    JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Takako Irie, Hideo Saeki,  
Heihachirô Ôkawa

Tokyo. Hiroko, perhaps in love with her cousin, agrees to an arranged marriage and becomes part of a comfortable, well-mannered family. Slowly she discovers that her position within the family is little better than that of domestic slave. Meanwhile her younger sister-in-law is treating her weak-willed but loving husband cruelly.

There is much to like in this early Naruse outing — restraint, delicacy, poignancy, and the finely-calibrated performance by the beautiful Takako Irie who appeared in over a hundred films between 1927 and 1984. Some of the attempted humour (not Naruse's long suit) is clumsy, and the closing phase of the film abandons the principle of "show, don't tell", becoming uncomfortably melodramatic and unnecessarily didactic. While it's considerably less impressive than **Wife! Be Like a Rose**, it's a fine work nonetheless, yet another early milestone in Naruse's prolific career.



## ABOUT ELLY

2009      F    4.25    8.1    IRA

### Farhadi, Asghar

Golshifteh Farahani, Shab  
Hosseini, Peyman Moadi,  
Taraneha Alidoosti

Several young couples with children in tow escape Tehran for a short holiday at the Caspian seaside, taking along Elly, a teacher of one of the children, and hoping to make a match with Ahmad, recently divorced. Guess what: things go badly wrong. An absorbing and suspenseful psychological drama about people under pressure, and about various moral dilemmas. Like Farhadi's other films, although made in a different visual style, it all gets pretty intense after a leisurely first half hour; the mood darkens, the pace accelerates, the screws tighten. A fine ensemble performance which Farhadi conducts with a sure hand. Secrets and lies, good intentions, moral choices, subterranean tensions, sexual politics, group hysteria, karma... and a rumination on old and new ideas about honour and loyalty.

The film only goes to confirm that Farhadi is one of the most serious, accomplished and interesting of contemporary film-makers. This is not quite the *tour de force* that his two later films were but it's still very impressive.



## ALPHAVILLE

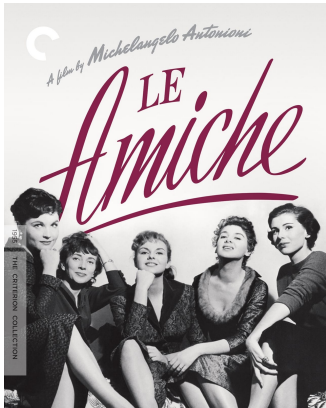
1965 F 4.00 7.1 FRA

**Godard, Jean-Luc**

Raoul Coutard

Eddie Constantine, Anna Karina,  
Akim Tamiroff

Journalist-investigator Lemmy Caution is on assignment in Alpha-60 (a futurist metropolis) where everything is run by super-computers and where imagination, art and romance are ruthlessly stamped out. The people are semi-human, tranquilized and robotic automata. Perpetual night, pervasive surveillance. Godard's strange cinematic concoction blends – or at least juxtaposes – elements from the American gangster movie, private-eye noir, horror stories, sci-fi, futuristic dystopias, comic books, satiric spoofs. Disjointed in sound, image, narrative. Mechanistic logic vs Imagination/Romance. A prescient and discomfiting anticipation of Techno-Totalitarianism. Visually highly dynamic and quite hypnotic — Raoul Coutard (**Breathless**) at work again. Doesn't have the charm and élan of that movie – but charm and élan aren't everything. But a rather cerebral exercise. Andrew Sarris: *You don't have to be French to enjoy **Alphaville**. But you have to love movies with high-minded seriousness.*



## AMICHE, LE

1955    F    4.25    7.3    ITA

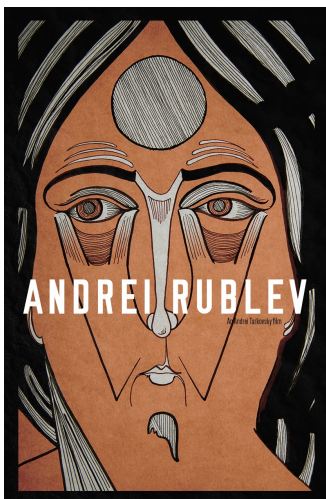
## Antonioni,

Eleanora Rossi-Drago Franco  
Fabrizi, Maria Gambarelli,  
Gabriele Ferzetti, Yvonne  
Furneaux, Madeleine Fischer

A gallery of mostly well-heeled and unhappy women in shifting relationships in the contemporary Turin fashion world, a perfect milieu for Antonioni to explore his preoccupations with alienation, loneliness, emptiness and the artificiality of modern urban life in the upper social echelons (hence Sarris sobriquet of “Antoniennui”). Antonioni’s films work through space, composition and movement as much as they do through dialogue and plot development. This is still comparatively conventional against **L’Avventura** and all that followed but one can see Antonioni working out his aesthetic. Based on a Cesare Pavese story this was Antonioni’s fourth feature; time has only made it look better. (It is not hard to discern the Rossellini influence: think **Voyage to Italy**.)

A film for cinephiles. The narrative doesn’t afford many of the pleasures and satisfactions of the classical cinema and for some people Antonioni is hard work/boring/pretentious/soporific. The more I see of Antonioni the more I’m convinced he’s Front Rank.

BFI have produced a magnificent restoration and a low-key but pleasing interview with an Antonioni enthusiast is included in the Extras on the Blu-ray, well worth a look (it only goes for 7 or 8 minutes).



## ANDREI RUBLEV

1966 F 4.50 8.3 RUS

**Tarkovsky, Andrei**

Anatoliy Solonitsyn, Ivan Lapikov,  
Nikolay Grinko

A visionary epic of the life and times of 15thC Russian monk and icon painter, Andrei Rublev, through a very subjective Tarkovskyan lens. Set in a Russia tormented by invasion, pillage, famine, plague, desecration and political turmoil. Surreal, haunting, picaresque, disturbing, beautiful, opaque, enigmatic, poetic, meditative, challenging... what to say? Structured into eight episodes, the last, centering on the miraculous creation of the bell, is the most extraordinary and powerful along with the one concerning the Tartar invasion and the despoilation of Vladimir Cathedral. Certainly a major work but not, in my view, in the same rank as the best of Dreyer or Bergman; comparisons with **Joan of Arc**, **Day of Wrath** and **The Seventh Seal** come readily to mind. (Bergman thought Tarkovsky one of the greatest of all film-makers.) One might also compare Tarkovsky to the romantic, mystical and slightly demented Werner Herzog (whom I prefer). But while I am not a fully-fledged Tarkovsky fan I found much to admire in this strange film.

There are two versions — 189 and 220 minutes respectively; apparently the longer version is no “clearer” (189 minutes was quite enough thanks). The icons that are shown at the end of the film are survivals (damaged and worn) from Rublev’s hand. The extras on this expensive two-disc set are truly pathetic!

Not surprisingly the Soviet authorities gave Tarkovsky all manner of grief over the film which was made against the odds and banned until 1972. Tarkovsky died of lung cancer at the age of 54 in 1986.



## ANGES DU PÉCHÉ, LES

1943 F 4.50 7.6 FRA

### Bresson, Robert

Philippe Agostini

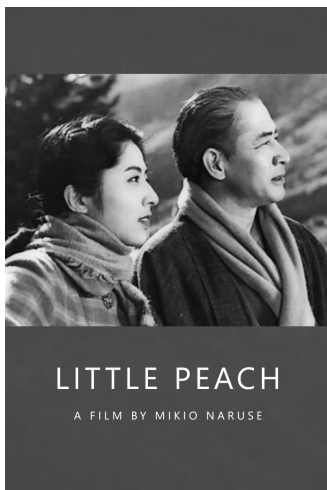
Reneé Faure, Jany Holt, Sylvie,  
Mila Parély

France. Bresson's first feature, about novice nuns in a monastery that takes in women from the local prison. Although Bresson's extraordinary aesthetic is yet to be fully developed this displays many of his later hallmarks: rigour, economy, precision, grace (in both senses); a cool and detached but compassionate point of view; a ravishing visual instinct; a highly charged narrative situation but treated in a way that eschews any histrionics and sentimentality; the Dostoevskian/Christian themes of crime, sin, obsession, punishment, guilt, pride, grace, redemption. Three salient differences from his later masterworks: the use of professional actors, a greater preponderance of dialogue and the very rich musical score. (Probably for these reasons that Bresson later came to be rather dismissive about this film. But hey, directors and writers are often not to be trusted!) How many better debuts have there been in the history of cinema??

Sylvie (the prioress) started her film acting career in 1912! Her last appearance was on TV in 1968.

Bresson spent a year in a WW2 POW camp.

Bresson in 1973: *There is the feeling that God is everywhere, and the more I live, the more I see that in nature, in the country. When I see a tree, I see that God exists. I try to catch and to convey that we have a soul and that the soul is in contact with God. That's the first thing I want to get in my films.*



**ANNUZKO**

1958    F    4.00    7.3    JAP

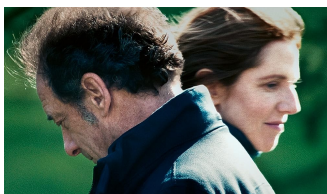
**Naruse, Mikio**

Masao Tami

Kyoko Kagawa, So Yamamura,  
Isao Kimura

Post-war Japan. Daughter of a famous writer more or less falls into a marriage with an aspiring but frustrated young writer who is jealous of her father's success and who harbours various resentments of the family. Essentially the story concerns the interplay of the three with her brother's apparently happy marriage as a counterpoint and postwar hardships as a backdrop. The film's first half is benign in mood and atmosphere, charming and entertaining in a very low-key kind of way, and one slowly gets involved in the emotional lives of the gentle father, the dutiful and loving young woman, and the self-tormenting writer. One even hopes there might – unusual in the Japanese domestic melodrama – be a happy ending in the offing! But, inevitably, it darkens as it moves towards a somewhat ambiguous and unsatisfying ending. The cast is excellent and the very engaging Kyoko Kagawa is a captivating stand-in for Hideko Takamine. Apparently Ryokichi is a unsparing self-portrait of Naruse himself in a period of crisis in his early adult life. Yamamura is altogether splendid as the father. In the context of Naruse's corpus this quiet melodrama in a minor register has been unduly neglected. It's a fine film even though it lacks the depth and texture of Naruse's best. It's gracefully shot, beautifully acted and delicately modulated. The story is from a novel by Saisei Muro.

Kyoko Nagawa worked with all of the Japanese big gun directors and has over 140 screen credits. She's still alive, into her 90s. So Yamamura racked up more than 200 screen appearances. He died in 2000, aged about 90. The daughter's name means "apricot" not "peach"!



# UN AUTRE MONDE

VINCENT LINDON  
SANDRINE KIBERLAIN  
ANTHONY BAJON  
UN FILM DE  
STÉPHANE BRIZÉ

avec MARIE DRUCKER scénario OLIVIER GORCE « UN FILM DE STÉPHANE BRIZÉ »



## ANOTHER WORLD

2021 F 4.25 7.0 FRA

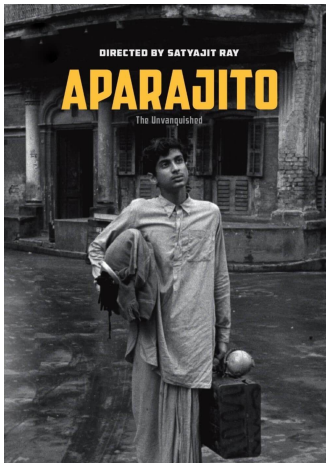
## Brizé, Stéphane

Eric Dumont

Vincent Lindon, Sandrine  
Kiberlasin, Anthonmy Bajon,  
Marie Drucker, Oilivier Lemaire,  
Jerry Hickey

Contemporary France. Middle-aged business executive is under severe pressure from industrial conglomerate HQ to implement a 'down-sizing operation' that he cannot support. He is losing the trust of his workers and union; son with serious problems; wife pulling the pin. Moral dilemmas, unpalatable alternatives, scrapheap in sight. It's intense, tight, unrelenting. Nicely realised performances from all involved. A humane portrait of a man who has unwittingly painted himself into a very uncomfortable corner. A bleak depiction of corporate capitalism. A serious-minded, well-crafted drama for adults; depressing how few films fit that bill these days! What was all the business about the length of the trip?





## APARAJITO

1956    F    4.75    8.2    IND

### Ray, Satyajit

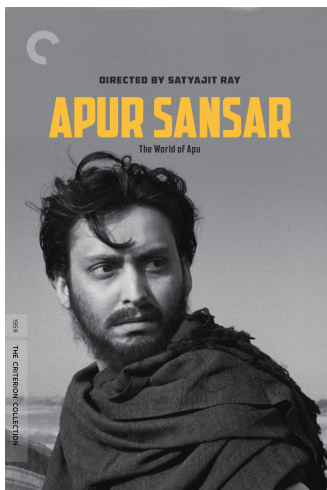
Subrata Mitra

Pinaki Sengupta, Kanu  
Bannerjee, Smaran Ghosai,  
Karuna Bannerjee

The second of Ray's Apu trilogy, set in the 1920s, covering Apu's late boyhood in Banaras, the death of his father, his move back to the village with his mother, and then Apu's education in Calcutta. Two central themes: the old ways making way for the new; the inevitable separation of mother and son. Poignant, poetic, stylistically graceful, perfectly realized with fine performances from the two actors playing Apu, and a compelling one from Karuna Bannerjee as the mother.

Doesn't have the rich minor characters of some of the other Ray films, nor as much humour. The score of the film is not by Ray (as it usually is) but by Ravi Shankar. (It's very good, which is no surprise.)

*Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon.*—Akira Kurosawa



## APU SANSAR

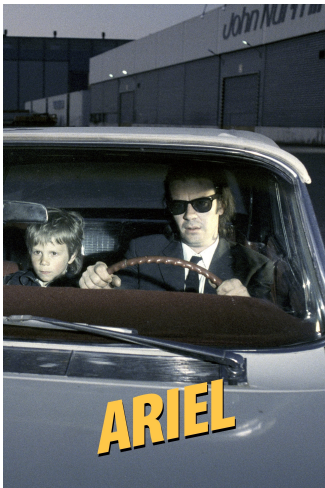
1959    F    4.50    8.3    IND

## Ray, Satyajit

Soumitra Chatterjee, Sharmila Tagore, Swapan Mukerherjee

The third of the Apu trilogy. Apu has left college, gone to Calcutta and is seeking to make his way in the world and as a writer. He inadvertently gets married... trouble comes (inevitably). **Apu** is stylistically quite exuberant, often lyrical and with all the freshness, charm and poignancy of Ray's early work, and has several stunning sequences. The early phase of the marriage is beautifully handled and deeply moving. A fine score by Ravi Shankar. The young wife is captivating (drawn from Ray's apparently inexhaustible supply of mesmerizing women!). Some of the usual themes and motifs: city/village, new/old, innocence/experience, the verities of family life.

On seeing it I thought it might be the best of the three — but in the cold light of day I'm not so sure; might go with **Aparajito**. What we do know is that all three are masterworks. (**Jalsaghar** and **Charulata** are still my absolute favourite Rays.)



## ARIEL

1988 F 3.75 7.6 FIN

### Kaurismäki, Aki

Timo Salminen

Turo Pajala, Susanna Haavisto,  
Matti Pellonpää , Eetu Hilkamo

Finland. Taisto, a drifter, loses his job when a mine closes down in Northern Finland. He heads south where he meets a knocked-about single mum and her kid, as well as various down 'n outs. Unemployment, nights in a hostel, prison, escape... One of Kaurismäki's early films with many of his trademarks: an offbeat narrative about losers and those on the margins of society; a drab and depressing physical and social milieu; a mixture of characters, variously weird, lost, unlucky, and downtrodden, and some nasty types as well; deadpan humour of a pretty dark kind and a rather bizarre but strangely effective soundtrack. The climate of the film is bleaker than some of his later offerings and there's less comic relief. Some echoes of B-noirs such as **Gun Crazy** and **Detour**. Completely devoid of Hollywood gloss, glamour and sentimentality — what we have here rather is stoicism, irony, sadness and quiet compassion. Although this is less impressive than his major works (**The Man without a Past**, **Le Havre** and to a lesser extent, the recent **The Other Side of Hope**) it's still an interesting and appealing work. Last night's film (**Love is Colder than Death**) and this one: non-stop smoking.



## ARME À GAUCHE, L'

1965 F 4.25 6.6 FRA

**Sautet, Claude**

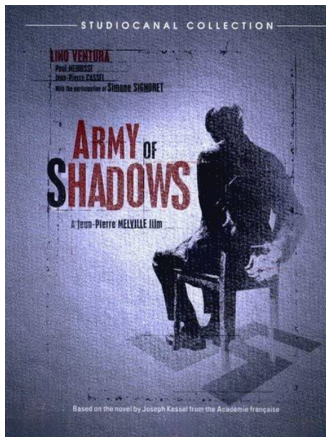
Walter Wottitz

Lino Ventura, Sylva Kscine  
Leo Gordon

Our Man Lino is a sea captain and Mr Fix-It who gets tangled up with a beautiful woman, a playboy-businessman, and some bad-ass gun smugglers in the far reaches of the Caribbean. Starts off as a noirish crime story and turns into a survival-at-sea epic. Most of it takes place on board a stolen yacht. Nice locations, pleasing cinematography, some great action scenes (dragging the anchor, below decks with the petrol, several deaths). It's very hard-boiled. Lino is up against it; he's got some serious work to do. But hey, Lino is The Man! Sylva Koscina is weak in the first stanza but not bad once she cranks up. Ventura and Leo Gordon are both on top of their game.

Claude Sautet wrote the screenplay for Franju's **Eyes without a Face**. This was his third effort as a director, following the splendid **Classes Tous Risques**; this one is not quite as good but still a very impressive effort. A fine film with no reputation. Echoes of **The Breaking Point**, **To Have and Have Not**, **Knife in the Water**, **All is Lost**, **Cape Fear** and **Wages of Fear**. The story has a certain Hemingway-Hawks feel.

In French "*passer l'arme à gauche*" means, roughly, "kicking the bucket". The English-release version was called **The Dictator's Guns**.



## ARMY OF SHADOWS

1969 F 5.00 8.2 FRA

### Melville, Jean-Pierre

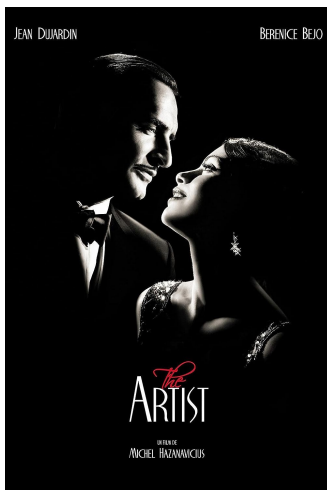
Pierre Lhomme & W Wottitz

Lino Ventura, Simone Signoret,  
Paul Meurisse. Jean-Pierre  
Cassel, Serge Regianni

WWII, French Resistance. No past, no future; only solitary individuals *in extremis* in the present moment. JP Melville's austere meditation on commitment, sacrifice, loyalty, trust, betrayal, existential crisis. The story turns on a small group of individuals in the French Resistance, each played in understated fashion by a marvellous cast, especially Ventura who gives one of the great screen performances, all the more extraordinary for its restraint. The whole film is anti-romantic, anti-heroic, even anti-ideological in the sense that the only thing that matters *in extremis* is the inescapable encounter with one's self. It's shot in drab and muted colours with a minimalist but extremely effective score. A perfect marriage of style and content in all aspects of this intense and disturbing film. It's quite long (139 mins.) but I found it riveting from start to finish.

The contrast between a director who is completely in control of his/her material and whose film-making is informed by a coherent aesthetic and a distinctive moral sensibility, and one who just assembles the pieces any old how, hoping to somehow create some "effects", could not be more sharply made than by juxtaposing **Army of Shadows** and **Our Kind of Traitor** (Susanna White, 2016), also seen this week.

Is this Melville's finest hour? It might well be. But then again he had many 'finest hour's! One of the masterworks of the French cinema which sits alongside the best of Bresson.



## ARTIST, THE

2011 F 4.25 7.9 FRA

## Hazanavicius, Michael

Guillaume Schiffman

Jean Dujardin, Bérénice Bejo,  
John Goodman, James Cromwell

A dialogue-free BW movie with music and sound effects, and a few subtitles, made by a French director, cast and crew, about a silent-era star whose Hollywood career is thrown into a tailspin by the coming of the talkies and a young woman climbing the heights of stardom; **A Star is Born** (1937, 1954, 1973, 2020) with some Gaelic charm and flair. It's inventive, polished, and entertaining with very engaging performances from all concerned (even John Goodman!). Comedy, romance, pathos... and the dog! There have been deeper and more moving treatments of this kind of story – the original **A Star is Born**, **Sunset Boulevard**, **Sullivan's Travels**, the **Barefoot Contessa**, to name a few but this is quite wonderful if you don't take it too seriously. Yes, it's essentially beautiful fluff – but so was **Singing in the Rain**, **Top Hat** and dozens of other gems from the silent and early sound era. Bérénice Bejo is married to married to director Hazanavicius.

For a sneering review see Jamie Christley in *Slant*. As is not frequently the case, the reviewer outsmarts himself; anything which is popular and a commercial success must be bad. Did **The Artist** deserve the 2012 Oscar? Well, given the other nominees **The Descendants**, **Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close**, **The Help**, **Moneyball**, **The Tree of life**, **Warhorse** and **Midnight in Paris**, yes it probably did although a case could also be made for **Tree of Life** and **Midnight in Paris**. Was it the best film of 2011? Not by the length of a Hollywood block: **A Separation**, **Once upon a time in Anatolia**, **Le Havre**, **Elena**.



## THE ASCENT



## ASCENT, THE

1977 F 4.50 8.3 RUS

### Shepitko, Larisa

Vladimir Chukhnov

Boris Plotnikov, Vladimir

Gostyukhin, Sergey

Yakovlev, Lyudmila Polyakova,

Anatoliy Solonitsyn

WWII, winter, Eastern Russian countryside, snow (lots). Two Russian partisans, in the grip of winter, in a desperate fight to survive and evade the Nazi occupiers, inadvertently and fatefully involve several other people and eventually have to deal with brutal Nazi soldiers and interrogation by a sinister Russian collaborator. Bravery, cowardice, betrayal, compromise, collaboration, despair, cruelty, remorse, sacrifice: a lot of suffering. It all ends badly. Some allegorical religious motifs and allusions. Echoes of both Dostoevsky and Eisenstein, and no doubt of Shepitko's cinematic mentor, Alexander Dovzhenko.

Relentless, harrowing, confronting, intense, thoughtful, humane, disturbing, one of the more complex and powerful of the serious arthouse war films, and certainly one of the best Russian films of the period. It more or less evades the normal propaganda line (the heroism of the ordinary Soviet people etc) and is an oblique and implicit critique of Soviet totalitarianism as well as being an exploration of the psychic and moral devastation of war. Beautifully shot.

The last of Larisa Shepitko's four films; she died in a traffic accident, aged forty, in 1979, a serious loss to world cinema. (Her **Wings** is a must-see.)



## ATALANTE, L'

1934    F    4.75    7.9    FRA

**Vigo, Jean**

Bris Kaufman

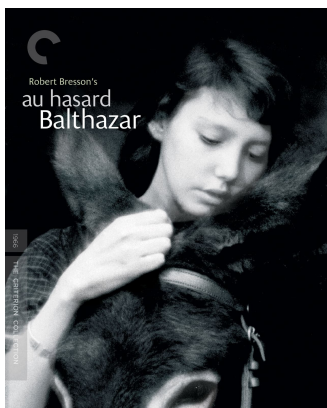
Jean Daste, Michel Simon, Dita Parlo

Four characters, a barge on the French canals, a lot of cats, the passing countryside and glimpses of Paris and Le Havre; the simplest of love stories, minimal dialogue; music by Maurice Jaubert and cinematography by Boris Kaufman. The magic is in Vigo's love affair with the camera and with the exhilarating possibilities of cinema. Dita Parlo is the vehicle for quite a few surreal flourishes while Michel Simon moves the film between quotidian reality and dream. The cross-cut erotic sequence is as potent and resonant as anything in the cinema. Visual poetry and surely a landmark work. My old pedagogical definition of "style": 'the ways in which the film exploits the expressive possibilities of the medium, considered all together, comprise style.' Here's a textbook case of a stylistic alchemy transmuting clay into gold.

Made by Vigo in his dying days – literally – before he crossed to the other side, killed by TB at the age of 29. Like many great and radical films, **L'Atalante** was a commercial flop and was trashed by the critics of the day.

A walk-in for 5\*.





## AU HASARD BALTHAZAR

1966 F 5.00 7.9 FRA

### Bresson, Robert

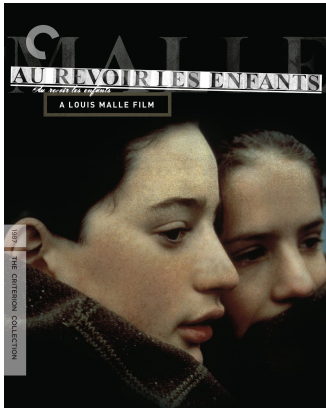
Ghislain Cloquet

Anne Wiazemsky, Walter Green,  
François Lafarge, the Donkey

An astonishing film in which the leading character is a donkey! A poetic-cinematic meditation on Christian themes; a deeply spiritual film. Like most Bresson films it is quite harrowing but is pervaded by the most delicate gentleness and poignant tenderness whilst also confronting the gamut of human vices and human evil: greed, pride, lust, hard-heartedness, apathy, cruelty. It is immensely moving; the end was almost too much for me. No need to comment on the altogether characteristic Bressonian style, techniques, effects etc. What is most distinctive about this film, apart from the daring narrative strategy of structuring the film around a donkey, is the tone and mood of the film which, as I say, is tender, poignant, haunting, stoic, elegiac, compassionate. All this without any sentimentality or moralizing; an extraordinary achievement. A vision at once terrible and noble, delivered in a quiet and mild tone but leaving one quite shattered and exhausted. I LOVE THIS FILM!!! It's beyond any rating system!

I'm always struck by how much ground Bresson shares with Dostoevsky (although Bresson, it seems, has none of Dostoevsky's "extremism" or his pathologies). A lay-down *misère* for 5 stars. One of the towering landmarks of the modern cinema. I think it might be my favourite Bresson (that will not be clear until the aftershock has dissipated). Excellent print. Extra feature worth watching — Godard, Malle, Duras and Bresson himself talking about the film. Godard on **AHB**: "Life in 90 minutes".

**AHB** put me in mind of Romain Rolland's profound observation about the suffering of animals: "To a man whose mind is free there is something even more intolerable in the sufferings of animals than in the sufferings of man. For with the latter it is at least admitted that suffering is evil and that the man who causes it is a criminal. But thousands of animals are uselessly butchered every day without a shadow of remorse. If any man were to refer to it, he would be thought ridiculous. And that is the unpardonable crime."



## AU REVOIR LES ENFANTS

1987 F 4.00 8.0 FRA

### Malle, Louis

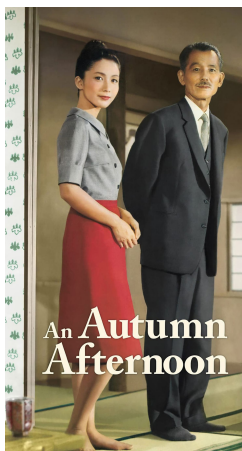
Renato Bera

Gaspard Manesse, Raphael  
Fejtő, Francine Racette

Louis Malle's semi-autobiographical film about boys growing up in a somewhat hermetic Catholic boarding school during the war, surrounded by the slowly encroaching menace of Nazism, the Gestapo and anti-Semitism. A delicate, understated and perhaps too dispassionate treatment of the material. Avoids some of the clichés of the coming-of-age film and only deals obliquely (but effectively) with the historical developments which eventually shatter the day to day life of the monks and the pupils. A very fine film but perhaps a teeny bit slow in the middle passage. Although it is very accomplished it doesn't have the zing and flair of **The 400 Blows** (admittedly a very different kind of film, but both about childhood and the loss of innocence).

Louis Malle is not one of my favourite directors but this film is a model of quiet, nuanced artistry, without bombast or histrionics. It is both unsentimental and generous to its characters (a rarer combination than one might suppose) — somewhat reminiscent of Satyajit Ray films in fact. Nice to see a film in which the monks are the good guys (though not without their human foibles)!

Later: Malle did make one great film: **Elevator to the Gallows** (1958).



## AUTUMN AFTERNOON, AN

1962 F 4.75 8.2 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

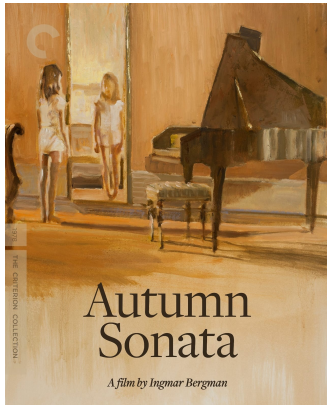
Yûhara Atsuta

Chisu Ryu, Marika Okado, Shima Iwashita, Keiji Sada, Tono Eijuro



*Another Drink?* or *Studies in Screen Space*. A loose reworking of the story from Ozu's masterpiece, **Late Spring**: family relationships, fathers and daughters, marriage, growing old, loneliness and 100 ways to drink a saké, as well as the background themes of Japanese identity, the effects of war, westernization etc. The Ozu aesthetic – stationary camera and low-level pov, empty spaces, rectangles, pillow shots, lights, signs, corridors, entries and exits etc – almost overwhelms the minimalist narrative. It's all done with the delicacy, sensitivity and refinement we expect of Ozu but in keeping with his title it's more autumnal than much of his earlier work: poignant, more melancholy, nostalgic, more sombre, sadder, richly textured, not without humour but of a very gentle and bitter-sweet kind. The woman playing the daughter gives a fine performance and it's not her fault that she's not Setsuko Hara! Chisu Ryu is... well, Chisu Ryu. (He appeared in 52 of Ozu's 54 films!) Ozu's last film, made shortly after his mother's death and just a year before his own, a fitting epitaph and a lovely bookend to a sublime body of work. To say that it's not quite as good as **Late Spring**, **Tokyo Story** or **Early Summer** (the Noriko Trilogy) is to say nothing: one could say that about any film you like! It's also, I think, not quite as ravishing as **Equinox Flower** but – and this is to say a good deal – it's better than **Floating Weeds**, **The Flavour of Green Tea over Rice** and **Hen in the Wind**. **Late Autumn** will be the next Ozu cab off the rank – bound to be another rare treat.

Only 36 of Ozu's films have survived. About 40% of the output was in the silent era.



## AUTUMN SONATA

1978 F 4.25 8.3 SWE

**Bergman, Ingmar**

Sven Nykvist

Ingrid Bergman, Liv Ullman, Lena Nyman, Hlvar Bjork

For the first time in seven years international pianist (Bergman) is visiting her daughter (Ullman), a dowdy and unhappy woman married to a quiet village vicar. Also living in the vicarage is another daughter who is in the later stages of a terminal disease which has now robbed her of the power of speech. Skeletons in the cupboard start jangling early in the piece. A troubled family history and a complex of love-hate relations (more hate than love, unhappily but not surprisingly given that it's a Bergman film) soon comes to the surface, culminating in a long and excoriating scene in which mother and daughter bare their souls, shredding each other in the process. After a great deal of soul-searching, angst, sound and fury the film ends on a not entirely convincing note of muted hope. Mothers and daughters, family and career, love's counterfeits, art and life. The film is very talky but beautifully organized, nicely shot by Sven Nykvist, and pulsates with the powerhouse performances of both Bergman and Ullman. It's a difficult and disturbing film about damaged souls or, if you prefer psycho-talk, pathologies of one kind and another, guilt, self-hatred, abandonment, humiliation, loneliness, catharsis. It's intense, gruelling, sad. But one doesn't turn to Bergman looking for light entertainment! Sometimes one wonders whether Bergman actually "enjoys" the pain of it all; is there a touch of perversity in Bergman's own make-up, unresolved issues, some element of vengeance in his art? Well, yes, of course there is. This film relentlessly and mercilessly "punishes" the Ingrid Bergman character... but is this really self-punishment, a reckoning with the selfishness and self-obsession of the artist? In any event, we are made to feel something of the pain and the yearning of all four players in this sombre sonata. An autumnal work in the Bergman oeuvre and far better than the much more enthusiastically received **Cries and Whispers** (which is perverse). Ingrid's first Swedish film for 40 years and her very last. I wonder, for obvious reasons, if the film had special resonances for her. (After a lot tension and disagreement with Ingmar over the script she was eventually very happy with the finished product.). Shot in Norway.



## AVVENTURA, L'

1960 F 4.25 7.9 ITA

### Antonioni, Micelangelo

Aldo Scavarda

Monica Vitti, Gabriele Ferzetti,  
Lea mazzari, Renzo Ricci

Existential Nihilism. When a group of bored and wealthy socialites visit a Sicilian island, one of the women disappears. Her friend and her lover go on a meandering search for her. Antonioni's most celebrated study of modern alienation, ennui, vacuous sophistication, wealth and spiritual sterility, and, perhaps more importantly, a cinematic exploration of time and space unshackled from the demands of conventional narrative.

In some ways the quintessential European Art Film of the period. It generated massive controversy at Cannes, where it was jeered by the audience but re-screened to serious acclaim and a Jury Prize; it put Antonioni on the map. Two and half hours of this sort of stuff is too much. The disavowal of narrative motivation, identification etc is all very well... but... Despite Antonioni's arresting visuals and elegant film-making I found it something of an ordeal. I preferred **La Notte**, and found **L'Eclisse** best of this trilogy. (Haven't seen **L'Eclisse** for a long time.) None of this to question Antonioni's status as the Italian film-maker of the 60s *par excellence*, just as Rossellini was in the 40s and 50s.

Martin Scorsese: **L'Avventura** *was one of the most profound shocks I ever had the cinema.*



## BAD SLEEP WELL, THE

1960 F 5.00 8.1 JAP

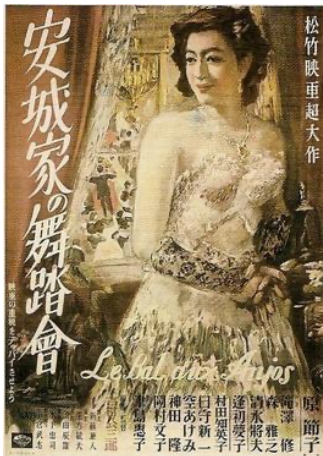
## Kurosawa, Akira

Yuzuru Aizawa

Toshiro Mifune, Tokeshi Koto,  
Masayuki Mori, Ka,atari Fujiwara,  
Kyoka Kogawa

A story about massive corporate corruption, a search for justice compromised by corrosive guilt and vengeance, a family and a marriage under the most severe duress, innocence violated. An ambitious film: the thematic reach, moral complexity and psychological intensity are nothing short of Shakespearean (apparently the film is, amongst other things, a homage to *Hamlet*) — or perhaps better, Dostoevskian (Wada and Yoshiko might have stepped straight out of a Dostoevsky novel). Yes, a scalding critique of postwar corporate Japan but, even more impressively, a study of the psychodynamics of “crime and punishment”. But get this: the story is based on a pulp noir by Ed McBain (aka Evan Hunter)! The film draws on the conventions of the American gangster and noir crime genres but altogether outreaches them. The work of a master auteur, a film-maker of extraordinary accomplishment. From the lavish and somewhat bizarre wedding scene with which it opens to the final shot in the corporation office it’s no holds barred. Tension, intensity, sledge-hammer force: kapow! (achieved with relatively little overt violence). But the style of the film — the cinematography, *mise-en-scène*, the choreography, the editing (done by Kurosawa himself), the music (interesting) — is as deliberate as you like and a veritable manual of stylistic techniques. At various points one thinks Fuller and Raoul Walsh and Lang, but also Frankenheimer and Melville and Bergman. Yet it’s also quintessentially Japanese. Remarkable!

I’ve hitherto thought that Kurosawa might be just a notch below Mizoguchi who’s a notch below Ozu. But the evidence is mounting for Kurosawa to surpass Mizoguchi. As well as his justly celebrated samurai films (a genre for which I have limited enthusiasm) we have **The Quiet Duel** (49), **Ikiru** (52), **High and Low** (63), **Red Beard** (65), as well as lesser but still highly impressive things like **Drunken Angel** (48), **Stray Dog** (49) and **Scandal** (50). Wow!



## BALL AT ANJO HOUSE,

1947 F 4.00 7.4 JAP

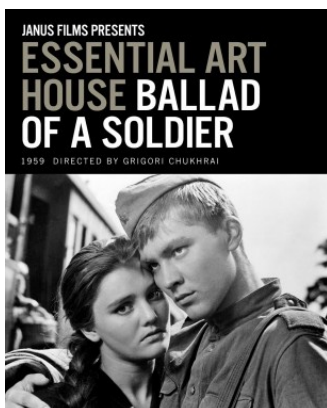
**Yoshimura, Kozaburo**

Toshio Ubukata

Osamu Takizawa, Setsuko Hara,  
Masayuki Mori, Takashi Kanda

Post-war Japan. Drastic change in the social and economic order bring about the loss of house, money and status for an old family now facing ruin. A cast of characters out of a standard Hollywood melodrama/family saga: the patriarch, a widower, who cannot face the future; a ne'er-do-well reprobate son; an embittered daughter; faithful old servants; the beautiful and loyal daughter who is trying to salvage the family wreckage. The centre-piece of the film is a ball held at the family mansion, one last fling before all is lost. Someone compared this to films by Sirk and Welles — perhaps a bit ill-advised but one sees the point. One thinks of films of families whose lives are disrupted by changing circumstances and who are caught up in the disappearance of the old order. This film, apparently, owes its narrative, in part, to Chekov's *Cherry Orchard* but the story is reminiscent of several Chekov plays. Think too **The Magnificent Ambersons**, **The Leopard**, **Jalsaghar**. Although the scriptwriter and director here are obviously accomplished I don't think they are quite able to draw out either the pathos or the grandeur of some of the films just mentioned. Nonetheless, the film is elegantly mounted, nicely shot and superbly acted by the two principals. We can never get enough of Setsuko! ... still quite young here and if not quite the celestial figure she became, skilful, delightful and captivating. The film is characteristically Japanese in its concern with changing social mores, the position of women, the national predicament, money etc but stylistically it seems closer to Hollywood than to the great Japanese Masters; it probably has more affinities with Kurosawa than Ozu, Mizoguchi or Naruse. It was immensely popular in Japan, both critically and commercially. Yoshimura was a veteran of the Japanese film industry, directing nearly 50 features.





## BALLAD OF A SOLDIER

1959 F 4.50 8.2 RUS

### Chukhrai, Grigori

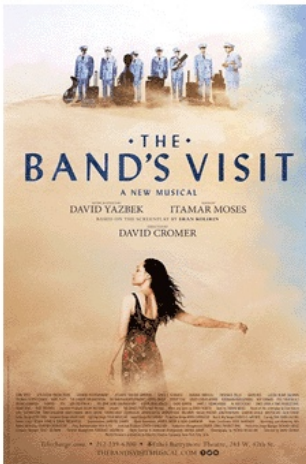
Nikolayev & Savelyeva

Vladimir Ivashov, Zhanna  
Prokhorenko, Antonina

Maksimova, Yevgeny Urbansky

Russia, WWII. Portrait of a Young Man as a Soldier. Aloysha, more or less accidentally, distinguishes himself during a tank battle and is rewarded with a short period of leave during which he hopes to visit his mother in their home village. His journey across the war-torn countryside, much of it by train, proves to be hazardous. Along the way he meets Shura, a wide-eyed young woman who, she avers, is on the way to visit her fiancé, an injured airman. Chukhrai's script attracted some heavy fire from the cultural apparatchiks ("an ideologically deviationist and subjectivist bourgeois trifle which doesn't meet the noble demands of social realism" etc). He had a lot of trouble getting the thing to fly — thanks goodness he did. This is a remarkable film in many ways: the beautifully fresh performances of the two leads who were plucked (with some difficulty) from theatre school; the tender depiction of a budding romance, tinged with eroticism (hitherto rarely seen in the stringently puritanical Soviet cinema); the powerful use of facial physiognomy; the careful accumulation of details in the portrayal of the wartime countryside and the effects on the ordinary people, told through vignettes and small episodes (the wounded soldier, the faithless wife, the dying grandfather); the restrained treatment of the emotional elements, all the more intense when the leash comes off in the final sequence; the visual style which is often audacious (the opening battleground sequence is a masterly set-piece), often lyrical. The film eschews ideological polemics and patriotic rah-rah but its implicit anti-war message is potent. The voice-over prologue delivers a massive spoiler. Does the film idealize and romanticize the ordinary folk? Probably. Does it matter? Not in the least. Chukhrai's film is one of the most impressive fruits of the Russian "Thaw" (roughly 1954-1960), perhaps only surpassed by Kalatazov's **The Cranes Are Flying** (57). In the Extras Chukhrai, now an old man who has dug out a clean shirt for the interview, discusses the many difficulties he encountered in the making of **BS**.





## BAND'S VISIT, THE

2007 F 4.00 7.6 ISR

**Kolirin, Eban**

Shai Goldman

Sasson Gabai, Ronit Elkabetz,  
Saleh Bakri

Egyptian Police Band (the Alexandrian Ceremonial Police Band to be exact) gets lost in an Israeli wasteland and stranded in an out of the way town where the band members have some awkward and funny encounters with a few of the locals. Quirky, whimsical, tender, bitter-sweet and touching take on the loneliness and sadness which is part of most lives. The two leads are wonderful in developing a fragile relationship. (The political implications are obvious but very lightly handled and kept well in the background, veiled by a kind of comedy of manners.) In tone and method it reminded me a little of Kelly Reichardt's **Lucy and Wendy**. A few Tati-like touches as well. An assured directorial debut.



## BANISHMENT, THE

2007 F 5.00 7.7 RUS

**Zvyagintzev, Andrey**

Mikhail Krichman

Konstantin Lavronenko, Maria Bonnevie, Aleksandr Baluev

Somewhere in Russia. Two brothers, seemingly involved in shady business, an anxious wife, two young kids. Trip to the old family farm in the countryside. Trouble. The narrative unfolds at a stately pace and with minimal exposition and dialogue. It explores some difficult terrain – love, jealousy, violence, family ties, self-deception, masculinity, spirituality – and deals with deep human hurts. Doesn't offer much by way of reassurance or easy answers; not hard to see why it tested the patience of some viewers. (It's long: 146 minutes.) I found it visually hypnotic, dramatically compelling, deeply thoughtful, humane and morally serious. Just about as good as Zvyagintsev's extraordinary **Leviathan** — and that's saying a lot! Loosely based on a William Saroyan story.

The critical reception of the film is curious; many critics have been either dismissive or lukewarm. Here's a fair sample: *It feels more like a ciné dissertation designed to showcase Zvyagintsev's appreciation of the medium than an original piece of cinema* (David Parkinson, *Empire*). Pardon? *There is an outstanding film inside this sprawling mass of ideas, which have been shaped more exactly in the edit* (Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian*). The film could not have been more 'exactly shaped', 'sprawling' is misapplied, and the film is not primarily about ideas! You missed the train altogether PB! *The elements are all in place – superb acting... masterly camerawork, an ethereal score, ghostly locations – but the problem is that the story never really connects* (Dave Calhoun, *Time Out*). No Dave, it's you who hasn't connected. .



## BARAN

2001 F 3.75 7.8 IRA

### Majidi, Majid

Mohammad Davaudi

Hossein Adedini, Zahra Bahraini,  
Mohammad Amir Najir, Abbas  
Rahimi

Tehran. 17-year old Lateef works on a hazardous building site along with a bunch of Afghans, 'illegal' refugees, one of whom is badly injured in an accident. Lateef gets involved with a young boy who has taken over his cushy job as the tea-man. Things aren't quite as they seem. (The eponymous character, Baran, speaks not a word throughout.)

In many ways this is a lovely and sometimes surprising film, suffused with compassion and human feeling but not offering any easy answers. Among other things, it's an affirmation of the common humanity of the Afghans in an already troubled Iran. Nicely shot.

The central narrative premise is implausible. I'm often slow on the uptake but I saw through the ruse in about 8 seconds! Lateef's transformation is way too abrupt and his behaviour not only uncommonly altruistic but also quite silly. The script needed further work to make this a really good rather quite good film.



## BARBARA

2012 F 5.00 7.2 GER

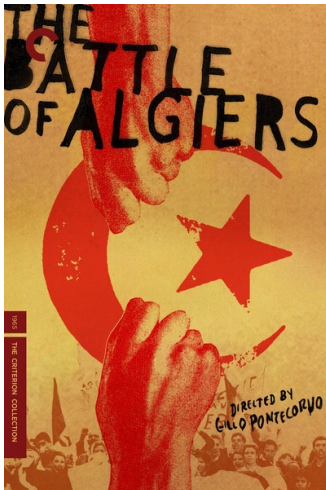
**Petzold, Christian**

Hans Fromm

Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld,  
Rainer Bock, Christina Heck

1980. Barbara is a doctor in an East German province and is being watched by the Stasi because of political activities (never specified). She is planning to escape to the West to rejoin her lover. Things get complicated. Part mystery, part political thriller, part romantic drama. It's superbly done. Nina Hoss and Ronald Zehrfeld give exquisitely understated performances, and the whole film is a study in creative ambiguity — narrative, moral, political, philosophical. Hoss is riveting.

A contemporary film with a LOT going for it: it treats its characters and its audience with deep respect; it deals with ugly realities without any exploitation; it refuses to indulge in grotty sex or titillating violence (though the plot could easily have accommodated both); intelligent, provocative and thoughtful without any “artistic” showiness or “postmodern” experimentation; leaves a lot unsaid and works on the principle of less is more. Reminiscent of two of the finest European films of recent times, Anna Justice’s **Remembrance** and Pawel Pawlikowski’s **Ida**. I liked it an awful lot.



## BATTLE OF ALGIERS, THE

1966 F 5.00 8.1 ITA

**Pontecorvo, Gillo**

Marcello Gatti

Brahim Hadjadj, Jean Martin,  
Yacef Saadi

A sledge-hammer film about the anti-colonial movement in Algeria, 1954-1962: powerful, explosive, phosphoric, immersive (to use the currently fashionable word) ... but also complex, nuanced, thoughtful and even-handed — a remarkable combination. It balances the larger story of the revolution with some more personal narrative threads. It looks like a doco, it walks and talks like a doco, but it ain't a doco: a dramatic reconstruction which uses many of the techniques of the documentary (though there is no archival footage whatever). Also notable for its arresting use of graphic facial close-ups. Carefully and cleverly constructed, and relentlessly paced; it doesn't flag in 2+. Stirring and soulful music by Morricone. It has become the paradigmatic film about geurilla warfare, anti-colonialism, terrorism, torture and the like, topics which, alas, remain of pungent contemporary relevance. (The film does not refer to the murderous doings of the OAS, the French underground military movement of the early 60s.) "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" — and vice versa. The films of which I was most often reminded were Eisenstein's earliest films (**Strike**, **October**, **Potemkin**), Rossellini's **Germany Year Zero** and Kazan's **America, America**, films in which the larger forces of history are foregrounded. I also thought of **Roma** and wondered if Pontecorvo was one of Cuarón's influences? The oft-remarked balance of the treatment does not mask Pontecorvo's fervent commitment to the general cause of anti-colonialism. In the words of one historian, French Algeria died badly. Its agony was marked by panic and brutality as ugly as the record of European imperialism could show. In the spring of 1962 the unhappy corpse of empire still shuddered and lashed out and stained itself in fratricide. The whole episode of its death, measured at at least seven and half years, constituted perhaps the most pathetic and sordid event in the entire history of colonialism. It is hard to see how anybody of importance in the tangled web of the conflict came out looking well. (Wikipedia) Hard to argue with that!



## BEANPOLE

2019 F 4.00 7.2 RUS

**Balagov, Kantemir**

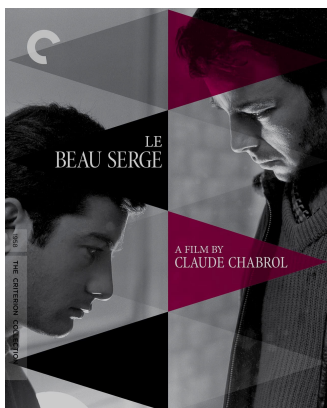
Ksenia Sereda

Viktoira Miroshnichenko, Vasilisa  
Perelygina, Andrey Bykov, Igor  
Shirigov, Konstantin Balakirev

Military hospital, Leningrad, 1945. The terrible siege and the war are over, leaving behind an appalling trail of carnage, both physical and psychological. Two young women, both seriously damaged and disturbed, are trying to piece together their lives and to find some way out of bewilderment, despair and pain. Although the film often works on a crowded canvas, there are only three other characters who matter: a weary and grief-stricken doctor, a paralyzed young soldier and a gauche young man who is attracted to one of the women. Beautifully produced and shot. Bleak, enigmatic, claustrophobic, confronting and an unflinching look at the consequences of war, all the more potent because it does not indulge in a direct depiction of the war itself. By no means an easy watch!

Written and directed by a young Russian director (still under thirty when this was made), a student of Alexander Sokurov (**Russian Ark**). Balagov left Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine to live in exile in California. What's next?

**Beanpole** is indisputably an impressive film of considerable ambition and power, an achievement to be reckoned with and Balagov a prodigious talent worth watching. But for me it didn't quite hit the bull's-eye for a few reasons: the film was always interesting, sometimes gripping, often painful, but it never really *moved* me; I found Vasilisa Perelygina's performance a bit mannered; I was disappointed when the doctor was expelled from the narrative; politics and spirituality are erased from the picture.



## BEAU SERGE, LE

1958    F    4.25    7.2    FRA

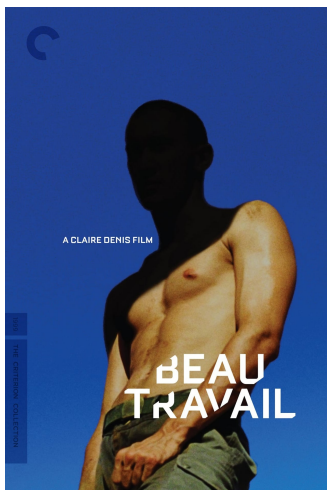
### Chabrol, Claude

Jean-Claude Brialy, Gérard Blain,  
Bernadette Lafont, Michele  
Meritz, Edmund Beauchamp

A young man recuperating from a serious illness returns to his childhood village and tries to revive his friendship with his schooldays companion Serge who has sunk into alcoholism, violence and self-pity. Explores the lives of five principal characters from a shifting viewpoint, avoiding any easy identifications. Shot in Sardent where Chabrol himself grew up, the film is pervaded by a bitter-sweet love-hate tone, no doubt reflecting Chabrol's own experiences. The impoverishment, lethargy and ennui of provincial life is quietly but powerfully depicted, balanced by the beauty of the countryside and the vitality of the school children. Chabrol's first feature and a landmark film, often cited as the first major achievement of the French New Wave. Influence of neo-realism, Catholicism and Hitchcock quite evident — in style and subject, in the theme of responsibility, guilt and redemption, and in the transference motif respectively. Chabrol has not yet completely mastered his technique but the film has plenty that is graceful and innovative, portending the arrival of a major talent. It's remarkably accomplished for a debut. The music is occasionally intrusive and not always attuned to the narrative. The resolution is abrupt and not altogether satisfactory.

In joke: one of Francois' friends is named "Jacques Rivette".

Hallmarks of the French New Wave: an iconoclastic rejection of conservative "literary" cinema (drawing room comedies, adaptations of literary classics, bourgeois romances etc); low budgets; location shooting; use of non-professional actors (usually only with secondary characters); innovative and experimental in style (and a tendency to favour long takes and tracking shots); narrative ambiguity; a commitment to auteurism; existential resonances. All of these are on display in **Le Beau Serge**.



## BEAU TRAVAIL

1999 F 3.75 7.3 FRA

### Denis, Claire

Agnes Godard

Denis Lavant, Michel Subor,  
Grégoire Colin, Loula Ali Lotta

Squad of soldiers in the French Legion training in the arid desert wastelands of Djibouti. Spartan codes, stringent discipline, endless drills and exercises, sculpted male bodies. Life goes on in desultory fashion for the locals in a nearby town where the soldiers go for R'nR. The main man is a hard-bitten sergeant who takes an irrational and vicious dislike to a naive and idealistic young soldier who performs an heroic rescue. Bad things happen.

The film is a free-wheeling riff on Melville's *Billy Budd*, transposed from the high seas to the rocky desert. Minimalist plot, sparse and cryptic dialogue, "arty" style. The whole thing might be seen as a surreal ballet, culminating in a bizarre finale. Some affinities with Camus' Algerian stories, early Herzog and Zvyagintsev.

**BT** was hugely popular with the critics: a staggering 91 on Metascore! I don't really get it. Interesting, unusual, inventive... but the characters, the storyline and style all left me rather cold. But each to their own.





## BÊTE HUMAINE, LA

1938 F 4.00 7.7 FRA

### Renoir, Jean

Curt Courant

Jean Gabin, Julien Carette,  
Simone Simon, Jean Renoir,  
Ferdinand Ledoux

Trains here, there and everywhere. A troubled train driver (Gabin) falls in love with an elfin woman (Simon) who has conspired with her husband (Ledoux) to kill her lecherous “godfather”. Some comic relief is provided by Gabin’s friend and stoker (Carette) ... but the prevailing mood is ominous and fatalistic. The world of the railway men is beautifully evoked and all of the train business is a visual feast. But Zola’s story, or such of it as survives the adaptation, is morbid and the motif of an inherited homicidal tendency exacerbated by drink and desire is unconvincing. The film has some of the “pessimistic poetic realism” of the French arthouse scene at the time (Carné et al). Renoir treats much of the story with a light touch and also gives an over-the-top performance as one of the secondary characters.

Here is some insightful commentary from Geoffrey O'Brien for Criterion): ***La bête humaine** is often described as an exemplar of the pessimistic poetic realism of the thirties in France, and as a precursor of forties film noir, but it begins on a note of heroic exhilaration, in which the natural world and the power of technology are wedded through the closely coordinated labor—effected through glances and sign language—of two men. The speed of the train establishes the relentless rhythm that characterizes the whole film. Renoir has taken a convoluted and sometimes ponderous Émile Zola novel and reduced it to a series of quick sketches. The cadence is of work and of the all-too-brief moments stolen from work. It is a film of restless transitions... But the genius of Jean Renoir is to situate the isolated torments of his central characters in a fully alive world of places and things. If we did not so fully accept the reality of the rail yards and boardinghouses and dance halls, the constant coming and going on platforms and in hallways, the hum and random bustle persisting even in the midst of catastrophe, we could hardly be so moved by the unsought and undeserved destruction visited on the movie’s three hapless protagonists. Well, yes, OK ... but for me, despite the fine performances, the film never quite achieved the emotional traction for which Renoir was clearly striving. (But I’m very glad to have seen it.)*



## BETWEEN WORLDS

2016 F 3.75 7.4 ISR

**Hata, Miya**

Ran Aviad

Maria Zreik, Maya Gasner, Yoram Toledano, Avi Dangur, Veronica Nicole

Hospital encounter between a middle-aged, ultra-orthodox Jewish woman and a younger Arab woman, one the mother of a critically injured young man, the other his secret girlfriend. Will Amal, posing as Sarah, reveal her true identity and what will ensue? An exploration of social and religious barriers, family secrets, mutual suspicion and incomprehension, fear of the unknown. A quite understated film of glacial pace, heavily reliant on the performances of the two principal players. Deftly done but doesn't have quite the bite it was searching for.



## BIRDS OF PASSAGE

2018 F 4.25 7.5 COL

**Gallego, C & C Guerra**

David Gallego

Carmiña Martínez, José Acosta,  
Natalia Reyes, José Vicente,  
Juan Bautista Martinez

Columbia, 1960s-early 80s. Narco-drama charting the destruction of old cultural patterns and rhythms by the encroaching drug trade which leaves families and clans divided. Eventually there are a lot of very dead bodies. It's an intense and riveting drama with a fair dose of the mythical, the supernatural and the surreal though these are less pervasive than in Guerra's mesmerizing **Embrace of the Serpent** (2015). Some echoes of early Herzog. The story takes place in a remote, harsh and arid zone of northern Columbia where the only intrusions from the outside world are American drug traffickers and their aeroplanes, and a handful of Peace Corps hippies. There are half a dozen characters with central roles, all performed with the utmost conviction. The colonial-American side of this violent story is peripheral with the focus firmly on the internecine conflicts which the drug trade generates. It's a film of considerable ambition and is certainly one of the more interesting offerings of the last few years. It's based on actual events during the 'Bonanza Marimbera' when the Colombian drug trade burgeoned. Unlike many recent narco-dramas it does not dwell unduly on the hideous violence which is integral to the drug trade. I found it powerful and engrossing but not quite as impressive as **Embrace of the Serpent**. (David Gallego's cinematography, good though it is, is not as ravishing as in the earlier film. I wonder how **BP** would have gone in B&W?)



## BITTER RICE

1949    F    3.75    7.7    ITA

**De Santis, Giuseppe**

Otello Martelli

Vittorio Gassman, Doris Dowling,  
Silvana Mangano, Raf  
Vallone

Hard yakka, love and lust in the rice fields. Each season hundreds of women descend on the Po Valley in Northern Italy for the annual rice harvest: back-breaking work in the fields, heat, sweat ... and only a meagre reward of rice at the end of it. Against this backdrop the film unwinds a flimsy narrative about a jewel theft, a plot to steal the rice and the tangled relationships of two men and two women, one of them, Silvana Mangano, a proto-type of Sophia Loren. (She later married film producer Dino de Laurentis.) Italian neo-realism with a heavy dash of American noir, especially in the closing phase (melodramatic narrative elements – sex, violence, hysteria, mayhem, suicide – as well as stylistics); in some respects it is reminiscent of **Ossessione**. Also interesting in being firmly female-focused. Doris Dowling was a minor Hollywood star (**The Lost Weekend**, **The Blue Dahlia**). Raf Vallone does his usual Burt Lancaster impersonation. Some striking camerawork by Otello Martelli (**Paisan**, **Stromboli**, **I Vitelloni**, **La Strada**, **La Dolce Vita**). As one reviewer said, **BR** is "pulpy, sexy and angry"... still has some political and erotic charge even if the drama itself is a bit wobbly.



## BLUE ANGEL, THE

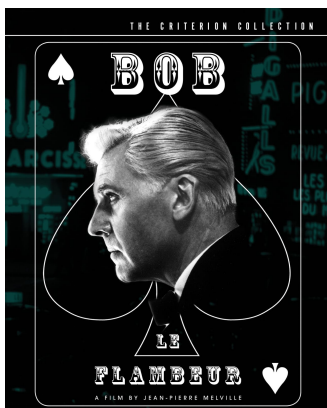
1930 F 4.25 7.8 GER

**Sternberg, Josef von**

Günther Rittau

Marlene Dietrich, Emil Jannings,  
Kurt Gerron

Tragi-comic story from Heinrich Mann's novel: musty old professor (Jannings) is caught by the aroma of Eros and falls for vaudeville/music hall singer/siren and good-time girl (Dietrich): momentary bliss, marital enslavement, the ravages of time, the vicissitudes of love and lust, humiliation. Remembered now primarily as the film which launched Dietrich into international stardom but the film ought also to be remembered as Sternberg's dazzling entry into the talkies and for Emil Janning's histrionic Wellesian performance. Like most of Sternberg's work in the 30s it's a captivating exercise in the expressionistic use of screen space, light and shadow, and baroque visual spectacle with a narrative blending farce, drama and pathos. From the opening image (girl cleaning the window behind which we see the poster of Lola: reality vs image) to the final classroom sequence the film vibrates with Sternberg's cinematic genius. Yes, it's dated, sometimes kitsch (what's with Marlene's truly appalling outfits?), sometimes over the top ... but it still retains the magical Sternbergian mix. For the more serious-minded it can be read as a parable about the decline and fall of the German bourgeoisie, the imminent encroachments of Nazism etc. Some read it as a film about the triumph of a new kind of film (Dietrich) over the older theatrical/silent film and an older tradition of acting (Jannings). But essentially it tells a universal story, summed up in Willie Nelson's song, "Love makes a fool of us all" — well, most of us anyway. Last word: **The Blue Angel** is rightly celebrated but it's a long way short of the astonishing **Shanghai Express**.



## BOB LE FLAMBEUR

1956 F 4.25 7.8 FRA

**Melville, Jean-Pierre**

Roger Duchesne, Daniel Cauchy,  
Isabelle Corey, Guy Decomble

Retired gangster and inveterate gambler has a bad run with the cards and horses, and succumbs to the temptation to return to serious crime: a heist at a very up-market casino. Things go awry. A great opening in the early morning Parisian streets is followed by a brisk and often comic narrative with most of Melville's signature traits. It's rather sunnier than his later work and is reminiscent, at least in tone, of some of Becker's early work. Lovely evocation of Montmartre, Pigalle and surrounds; a very catchy jazz-inflected score; plenty of humour; two wonderful sequences with the 'safe-doctor'. Stylish, elegant and tremendous fun: what more could you want?

René Salgue, the safe-cracker, was a real-life gangster. Melville picked 15-year old Isabelle Corey up off the street in his big American car.

PS. To understand the allure and the dark side of gambling read Dostoevsky's novella, *The Gambler*.



## BRIDGE, THE

1959 F 4.50 8.0 GER

### Wicki, Bernhard

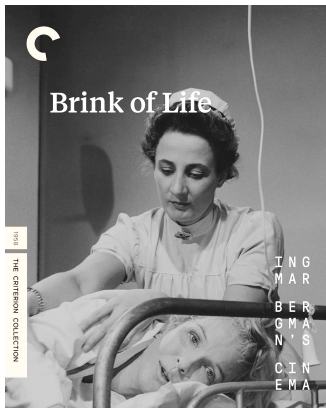
Gerd von Bonin

Folker Bohnet, Fritz Wepper,  
Michael Hinz, Volker  
Lechtenbrecht, Wolfgang Stumpf

Small German town in the last days of WWII. Bunch of schoolboys drafted into the army are given a completely futile mission of guarding a bridge which the Germans intend to blow up anyway. The first post-WWII German anti-war film, made in an expressive realist style, depicting the brutal realities of the last days of the war, and the bitter fruits and devastating consequences of the Nazi regime. Superbly staged and filmed, and acted with great conviction by the young cast. Wicki's second feature, following many years of acting. It's remarkably assured and made with a fierce and unflinching commitment to the true story, taken from a novel by a writer who had been in Hitler Youth and whose experiences inform both the book and film. The Slaughter of the Innocents.

**The Bridge** is, on several counts, one of the major works of the postwar German cinema. Stands alongside the very best of the antiwar films of the last 75 years. The Extras on the Criterion disc are well worth watching, especially the interview with Volker Schöndorff.





## BRINK OF LIFE

1958 F 4.25 7.7 SWE

### Bergman, Ingmar

Max Wilén

Ingrid Thulin, Eva Dahlbeck, Bibi Andersson, Barbro Hiort af Ornäs, Erland Josephson, Max von Sydow

A pared down, concentrated narrative about three women in a maternity ward. Character + situation + camera = drama. A study in faces, and in white. The whole film takes place in three small rooms. No music. Some anticipations of later work, especially **Persona**. Not unexpectedly, the film is intense, sometimes harrowing but also beautiful. I liked it a lot. Written by Ulla Isaksson (who also wrote **The Virgin Spring** which I think is one of Bergman's more over-blown outings.) The cinematography (by Max Wilén) is not as good as in B's major works (both Fischer and Nykvist AWOL). Heck, why isn't this much better known? It's rarely discussed. The few critics who have written about it are generally rather dismissive: "a minor work", "a fill-in" etc. Is it because it's about women and babies? Or is it too 'depressing'? Or because Bergman didn't rate it very highly himself? It came straight after **Wild Strawberries** and **The Seventh Seal** and before **The Virgin Spring**. It's obviously done on a much smaller canvas but it's marvellous nonetheless. All four leads were jointly given the Best Actress Award at Cannes — how nice! Barbro H.a.O., as Nurse Brita, can certainly hold her own with the more celebrated trio. Josephson and von Sydow deliver nicely crafted cameos.



## BROTHERS

2004 F 4.25 7.6 DEN

**Bier, Susanne**

Morton Søberg

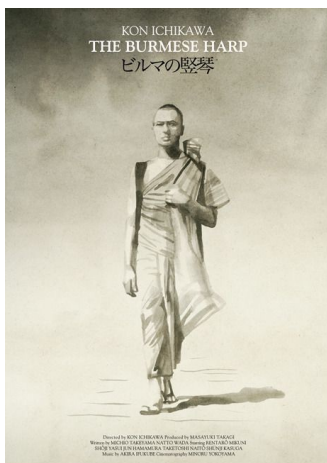
Connie Nielsen, Ulrich Tomsen,  
Nikolaj Lie Kaas

Middle-class Danish family, two brothers: one a straight military man with a happy and attractive family, the other a drifter, ex-jailbird and hard liver. First brother gets sent to Afghanistan, setting in train a chain of unpredictable and disruptive events. It's intense, gruelling, all too plausible, sad and disturbing. Superb performances all round and generally well directed. It has some of the same virtues of that other intense Danish drama, **The Hunt**, and is certainly one of the better European art-house films of recent times. The story might easily have lent itself to violent excess, undue psychologizing and/or sentimentality; this one steers around such pitfalls.

Doesn't set out to provide any kind of analysis of the war in Afghanistan; the Taliban (or whoever they are) are really *deux ex machina*. Still, a rather one-dimensional depiction in which the Afghanis are simply brutal and evil fanatics.

Since **Brothers** Connie Nielsen seems to have wasted her talents in a series of very mediocre films. The same might be said about Susanne Bier who has made some truly awful films. Pity.

Was remade in Hollywood about five years later: by all accounts the American film is not bad but a fair way behind this one. Susanne Bier belongs to the Danish "Dogme" school of film-making which eschews Hollywood type effects, big budgets and glossy hi-tech production values, focusing instead on a more "realistic" style and on the performances.



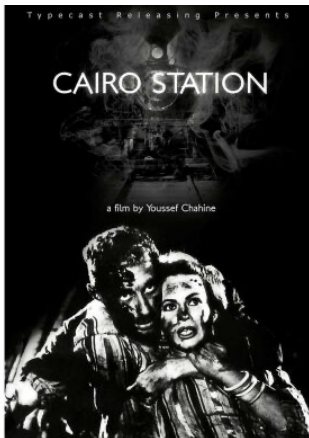
## BURMESE HARP, THE

1956	F	5.00	8.1	JAP
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## Ichikawa, Kon

Rentarô Mikuni, Shôji Yasui,  
Tatsuya Mihashi

Burma, end of WW2. Squad of Japanese soldiers surrenders and is interned in a British P.O.W. camp. One of their number has been detached from the group. While trying to rejoin his comrades he is appalled by the unattended piles of Japanese dead left on the battlefield. He dons the robe of an itinerant monk to avoid capture and goes about burying the dead. He is known for his harp playing which figures prominently in the story of his wanderings and the efforts of his comrades to find him before returning to Japan. We see some very grisly sights of dead soldiers but this is neither a combat film nor one driven by a straight-ahead anti-war polemic. Rather a meditation on the psychological effects of war, on varied human responses to stress and loss, and on the healing powers of music. Its quite a remarkable production, not least in its unconventional but highly effective use of the popular Western song "There's no place like home" as well as a Christian hymn (a real goose-bumper) and Japanese folk-songs. Some deft touches on the mystical and supernatural but primarily a humanistic affirmation which, apparently, is in stark contrast to the horrific rendition of war in Ichikawa's other well-known film, **Fires of the Plain** (not seen). Visually interesting and highly accomplished. Co-scripted by Ichikawa and his wife and long-term collaborator, Natto Wada, from a novel by Michio Takayama. It has taken me far too long to get around to *The Burmese Harp*, one of the major achievements of the post-war Japanese cinema (which seems to have reached its zenith in the 50s and 60s with a string of masterly works from Ozu, Kurosawa, Naruse, Mizoguchi et al.) I found this film powerful, disturbing, beautiful, and deeply affecting. (My only other exposure to Ichikawa was to **The Makioka Sisters**, also a masterly work but in a different register.)



## CAIRO STATION

1958 F 3.50 7.7 EGY

### Chahine, Youssef

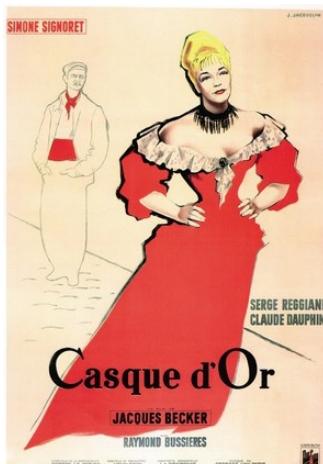
Alvise

Farid Shawqi, Hind Rustum,  
Youssef Chahine, Hassan el  
Baroudi

Cairo. Qinawi, a lame half-wit who sells newspapers on the railway platform, becomes obsessed with Hanouma, a flirtatious drink-seller who is engaged to Abu-Serib, a union organizer (layed by director Chahine who also scripted the film). Qinawi's obsession inevitably leads to serious trouble...

Here's what Dennis Schwartz had to say: *A florid neo-realist melodrama that plays like film noir, but quite deftly blends in romance, comedy, music (be-bop interludes), suspense and keen social observations.* [Throw in some sub-Clouzot horror as well Dennis.] *It's shot in sparkling black and white by the renown Egyptian filmmaker Yousseff Chahine (**Saladin, An Egyptian Story, Alexandra Encore**). This was Chahine's break-through film, one that was panned upon its release and then banned for decades by the censors. Much later it was re-released and declared by some as a masterpiece.*

Cairo Station was one of the earliest Middle Eastern films to cause a splash in the West. Doubtless it is a film of some attainment but I found the whole thing unpleasant while its comic moments, in the main, didn't really come off.



## CASQUE D'OR

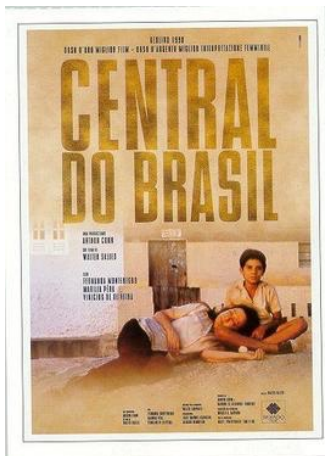
1952 F 3.75 7.6 FRA

**Becker, Jacques**

Robert Lefebvre

Simone Signoret, Serge Riganni,  
Claude Dauphin, Raymond  
Bussi res

*Belle  poque* France. Simone is the centre of attraction – four men buzzing around her (and why not!!) in a complicated story of lust, love, betrayal and fate. An Ophulsian milieu (think **Le Plaisir**) and love story blended with a Melvillian gangster film in which Fate has the strongest hand. Not surprisingly there's also a touch of early Renoir (**Partie de campagne**) under whom Becker had worked. Moves inexorably from a pleasant sunny atmosphere into something much darker. Beautifully shot, full of graceful movement by both the characters and the camera. An engaging mix of meticulously observed and sumptuously costumed period drama, violent crime and touching romance, all to end in tragedy. The characters are not all that *simpatico* and we find ourselves in a rather ugly and somewhat sordid world. But to some extent this is compensated by the film's visual beauty and elegance. Based on real-life events which did lead to the guillotine. Becker's status as an auteur depends on four films: **Casque d'Or** (1954), **Touchez pas au grisbi** (54), **Montparnasse 19** (58) and **Le trou** (60).



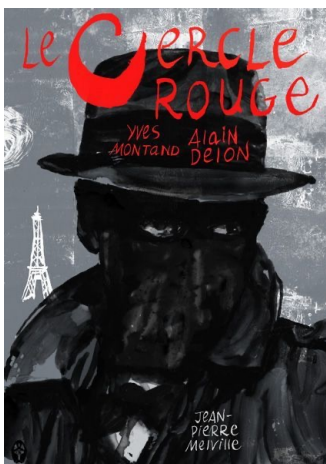
## CENTRAL STATION

1998 F 4.00 8.0 BRA

**Salles, Walter**

Fernanda Montenegro, Vinícius de Oliveira, Marília Pêra

Rio, Brazil. Life has beaten up on retired school teacher who now works as a letter-writer at the railway station. Her clients are mostly illiterate and poor. She doesn't care about her work or her clients. She comes into contact with a boy who wants to meet up with his long-disappeared father who is somewhere in the interior of the country. We learn about the morally squalid life of the urban underclass as well as the gaudy pieties of the rural poor. A study in loneliness, the need for connection, family ties, the plight of the poor. It's a gritty road-movie which has no interest in romanticism or sentimentality. Nicely played by the two leads (the boy was a shoe-shine when chosen for the part) and, on the whole, nicely filmed. Walter Salles has a few tricks which he perhaps pulls out of his kitbag too often. But generally the dramatic material is treated with restraint and understatement. It put me in mind of films such as **Wendy and Lucy**, **Vagabond**, **A Time for Drunken Horses** and **Living is Easy** — which is to say, a bit quirky, a bit left-field, deeply felt but apparently off-hand.



## CERCLE ROUGE, LE

1970 F 4.75 8.1 FRA

### Melville, Jean-Pierre

Henri Decaë

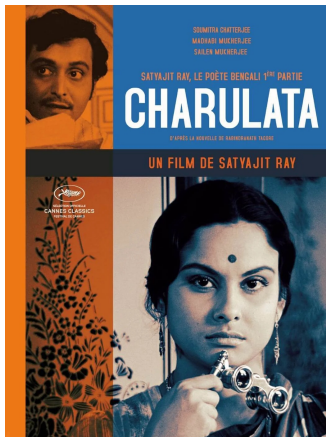
Alain Delon, Gian Maria Volonté,  
Yves Montand, André Bourvil,  
Francois Périer

Gangsters, jewels, guns, trains, cars, nightclubs, cafes, Parisian streets, prisons; crime as surgery, art, craft, ballet, Fate; criminals, police, informers, warders ... and women only as incidental props; loyalty, temptation, betrayal, trust, self-respect, character as destiny; the feline camera (Henri Decaë). Yep, it all adds up to classic Melville. One of the quintessential French crime/gangster movies, pared down to its defining elements. Minimal dialogue (tough guys don't talk more than necessary). The pacing is very deliberate, the tone is cool (in both senses), the plot development forensic, the ending desolate. **Cercle R** belongs in the company of **Rififi**, **Touchez pas au grisbi**, **Classe tous risques** and the like though it shades all of those. The robbery sequence matches that of **Rififi**. Melville's inspiration for this film (which he wrote) came from Huston's **The Asphalt Jungle** (1950).

Minor debits: the released prisoner and the escaped fugitive meeting up like that is a bit of a stretch; could do with a dose of Beckerian humour; must we have those tacky nightclub dance routines; is getting over the DTs really that easy? Not quite the perfect exemplar of the genre that **Le Doulos** is, but awfully close and right near the top of the Melville canon!

The original ran 150 minutes, this one 135. What's missing I wonder? (At least we are spared the dubbed 99 minute American release!)

Melville's Buddha-cum-Rama Krishna quote is a complete fabrication (nobody cares).



## CHARULATA

1964 F 5.00 8.3 IND

### Ray, Satyajit

Satyajot Ray

Madhabi Mukerjee, Shailin Mukerjee, Soumitra Chatterjee

**2014:** Regarded by some as Ray's masterpiece this is a hauntingly beautiful, delicate and painful film about ennui, about the possibilities and perplexities of love, trust, betrayal and fidelity. It also dramatizes the changing possibilities for women in a Westernizing India (late nineteenth century) while also lamenting the passing of traditional culture. It is not without humour. A quiet but rich, resonant and powerful film which recalls some of the best of Western literature (James, Chekhov) and cinema (Dreyer, Ophüls) without being in any sense imitative. Full of the most suggestive imagery treated in the most restrained way; see for instance the exquisite scene in which Charu spies the woman and baby on the balcony; a whole web of thematic possibilities and emotional nuances ripple through this scene without any heavy-handed flag-waving or sign-posting. The camera work is ravishing, as is the musical score (composed, as usual, by Ray himself). The first ten minutes in particular are as good as the cinema gets. A simple story, filled with emotional complexities and ambiguities, filmed in an unobtrusive but highly sophisticated and poetic style. No question, a 5\* film and a landmark of humanistic (in the best sense) cinema. This film seems to me to be pretty well perfect. Apparently it was Ray's own favourite. The title "The Ruined Nest" at the end comes from the Rabindranath Tagore novel which inspired the film. The last shot is a tribute to the closing shot of Truffaut's **400 Blows**. The two Mukerjees (Charu and her husband) are not related. **2020:** I have since seen most of Ray's films. This, **Jalsaghar**, **Pather Panchali**, **Aparajito** and **Mahanagar** are the absolute stand-outs.





## CHÂTEAU DE MA MÈRE, LE

1990 F 4.00 7.6 FRA

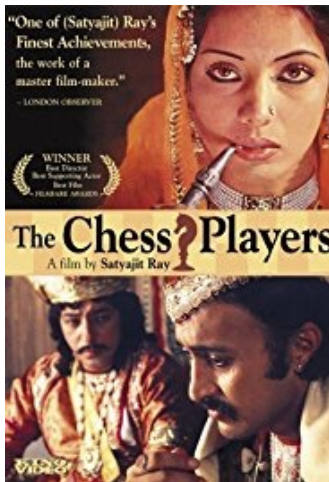
**Robert, Yves**

Julien Ciamaca, Philippe  
Caubère, Nathalie Roussel

Portrait of a Happy Family. Marcel Pagnol's childhood memoir brought to the screen. Each holiday the family visits their rural cottage in Provence and Marcel explores the countryside. The very sketchy "plot" concerns the family's ruse in taking a short-cut through the manors along a canal route, eventually precipitating a minor crisis. Here is a film with the most rudimentary story in which not much happens – no crime, no romance, no violence, no sex – and in which the pace is quite leisurely. Yet the film is never slow or boring. On the contrary, it's quite engrossing. It relies almost entirely on charm: the warmly portrayed characters, the rustic beauty of the countryside, the evocation of a mood, some quiet humour, the delicate interplay between experience and memory. The story has a sting in the tail. The three leads, playing Marcel, father and mother, are all very engaging.

Pagnol was a writer and film-maker, the first director to be elected to the French Academy. This was the second of his books about his childhood, the first also filmed by Yves Robert, **My Father's Glory** (1990). Pagnol is best known outside France as the author of **Jean de Florette** and **Manon des Sources**, both adapted for the screen and hugely popular, directed by Claude Berri (1986).

Nathalie Roussel has spent most of her career in TV. Julien Ciamaca and Philippe Caubère have more or less disappeared. Pity.



## CHESS PLAYERS, THE

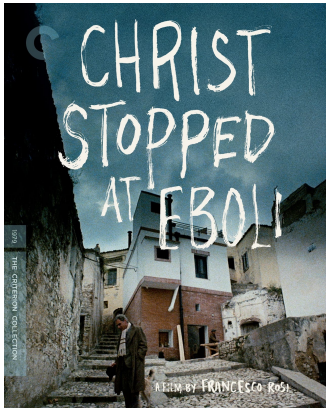
1977 F 4.25 7.8 IND

Ray, Satyajit

Sanjeev Kumar, Saeed Jaffrey,  
Richard Attenborough

A story about a couple of nawabs playing chess whilst the kingdom of Oudh, centered on Lucknow, is about to be taken over by an aggressive British colonialism. Ray: *I didn't see [this] as a story where one would openly take sides and take a stand. I saw it more as a contemplative, though unsparing view of the clash of two cultures—one effete and ineffectual and the other vigorous and malignant. I also took into account the many half-shades that lie in between these two extremes of the spectrum... You have to read this film between the lines.* The film does not have a big reputation and has been criticized for its lack of political analysis, its use of animation, its 'uneven tone', its purported failure to mesh the two stories, its 'heavy-handed symbolism', the use of narration, for being a 'shallow costume drama'. Don't buy any of this! Certainly, it's not as good as **Charulata** or **Aparajito**...but heck, what is? Equally as certain, it's a film of considerable subtlety, charm, intelligence, tact, humour (it has several very funny moments as well as a lot of quietly amusing ones) and beauty, as well as some edge. The strengths and weaknesses of all sides (and there are more than two!) are portrayed with exceptional delicacy. The film stands as a moving elegy to the old Muslim-zamindar order without lapsing into sentimentality and without evading the culpability of the nawabs et al in their own demise. (It has some thematic affinities with **Jalsaghar**, another of Ray's masterworks.) I'm not big on dance sequences but the one we are given here is quite ravishing.

Unusually for Ray, made in Urdu and English, not Bengali. The interview with Richard Attenborough on the extras is well worth a look. This film is way better than its rather lukewarm reputation. (Perhaps one reason is that this film is very different from Ray's early neo-realist work in the Apu trilogy: once the critics have you in a box they like you to stay there!)



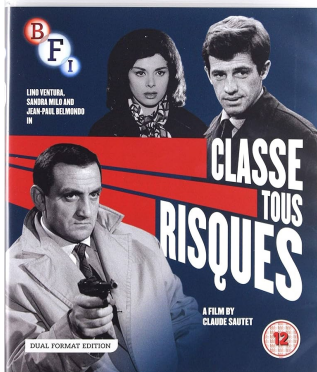
## CHRIST STOP'D AT EBOLI

1979 F 4.25 7.7 ITA

**Rosi, Franco**

Gian Maria Volontè, Irene Papas,  
Paolo Bonacelli, Alain Cuny

Rosi's four-part, made-for-TV adaptation of Carlo Levi's memoir of his exile as a political prisoner in Lucania in the mid-1930s. Levi, a doctor, painter and writer from the sophisticated milieu of Turin, is banished to one of the most desolate, poverty-stricken, and oppressed parts of the country, forgotten by time, so to speak. Slowly he comes to know the peasant folk and to understand their predicament, particularly their unrelieved and fatalistic attitude to "Rome", the "State" etc. Levi's exile unfolds against the background of the fascist-imperialist war in Abyssinia. Rosi, Levi and Volontè were all leftist in their political sympathies and the film may be read, in part, as a denunciation of fascism, imperialism (internal as well as external), and the exploitative urban bourgeoisie but the critique is developed without undue rhetorical flourish or polemical point-scoring. For my own part I was more engrossed by the meticulously accumulated observations about the way of life in an arid and unforgiving landscape and a semi-feudal social order. One critic accused Rosi of 'sentimentalizing' the peasantry. Seriously? Did he actually watch the film? The style is sub-Visconti but not without its attractions, including a haunting score. Volontè gives another intense, powerhouse performance – and he does so quietly. There are at least three cuts of the film, running at 240, 220 and 155 minutes. This one (the Criterion Collection) was 220. It held my attention throughout. It stands alongside **Hands Over the City** (76) as Rosi's best work. As far as I can figure it, Carlo Levi (1902-1975) was not related to Primo Levi (1919-1987), also from Turin, also Jewish, a painter and writer though an industrial chemist by occupation.



## CLASSE TOUS RISQUES

1960 F 4.25 7.5 FRA

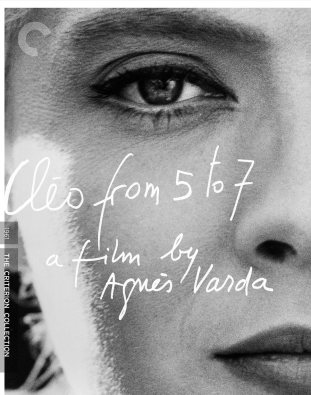
**Sautet, Claude**

Lino Ventura, Jean-Paul  
Belmondo, Marcel Dalio, Sandra  
Milo, Stan Krol

Being a family man and being a gangster don't mix! Lino V is on the run, and he has two kids in tow as well: testing times! The action moves from Milan to Nice to Paris. A very cool (in both senses) look at families, friendship, crime and karma (or call it Fate if you prefer) — the tragic fate of the gangster. The characters are interesting and believable, as is the scenario, and the performances compelling. The film has a grainy look which I liked. Very much in the Melville-Becker lineage though it has its own distinctive feel and style. Some real tenderness here without losing anything in the hard-boiled stakes; as someone said, it's both tough and touching. A stylish, intelligent and absorbing film, capped off with wonderful performances from both Ventura and Belmondo. Sandra Milo did nothing for me (and not much for the film).

Written by Jose Giovanni who also wrote **Le Trou** — yep the criminal-come-writer. Stan Krol, who plays Naldi in the film, was one of Giovanni's cellmates in the clink. **CTR** was Sautet's directorial debut; another *tour de force* first up! Sautet was a big fan of **Rio Bravo** and **Seven Men from Now**.

Originally released in a dubbed version as **The Big Risk**. The title (trans: Class All Risks) is an insurance term. How many of these very superior French crime/gangster movies can there be? However many there are I wish there were more! How good is Lino V?



## CLÉO FROM 5 TO 7

1962 F 5.00 7.9 FRA

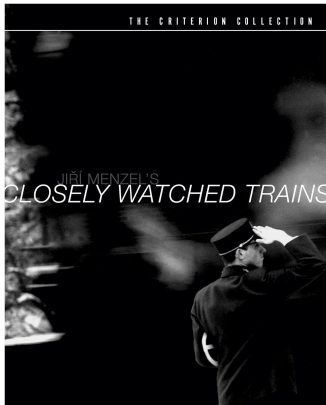
### Varda, Agnès

Jean Rabier

Corrine Marchand, Dorothé  
Blanck, Antoine Bourseiller,  
Dominique Davray

Paris. Beautiful aspiring young singer is waiting apprehensively for the results of some medical tests, fearing the prospect of death – as one would... although she might well be a hypochondriac! Two hours in her day: walking and driving around the city, shopping, bumping into friends, a visit from her elusive lover, cafés, boulevards, parks. A lot of looking and being-looked-at (soon to become a subject of obsessive interest to film-makers and critics alike). Eventually she encounters a young soldier on leave from the Algerian war. The test results turn out to be somewhat ambiguous.

Rightly hailed as a key (I almost said “iconic” but just reined myself in) film in the *Nouvelle Vague*. Fluid, dynamic, kaleidoscopic, apparently free-wheeling (but not really), occasionally surreal, and shot in ravishing style by the great Jean Rabier (with some help from Paul Bonis and Alain Levant). Brio, élan, kinetic energy. Corrine Marchand is altogether convincing in her volatility and her alternating vivacity, melancholy, spontaneity, charm and brittleness. Despite the shadow of illness/death, the film is effervescent, charming, full of *joie de vie* and a love song to Paris (with a dash of irony thrown into the mix). Clearly indebted to Godard’s **Breathless** but it has its own singular attractions. I had previously tagged this unseen film as a typical piece of French frippery; it’s much more arresting and interesting than that. It came 14th in the most recent *Sight and Sound* poll – that’s a bit of a stretch; it came 53rd in the more reliable directors’ poll.



## CLOSELY WATCHED TRAINS

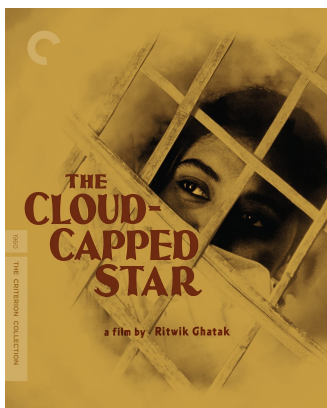
1968 F 4.25 7.8 CZE

**Menzel, Jiri**

Vaclav Neckar, Vladimir Valenta,  
Josef Somr, Jitka Bendova

A gently comical and ironic coming-of-age story about a young innocent trying to lose his virginity, set against the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia (read Soviets in the 60s). Director Jiri Menzel plays the doctor who advises Milos about his sexual problems. Redolent of a kind of middle-European humour evident in the films of Ivan Passer (*Intimate lighting*) and Milos Forman (*The Fireman's Ball*) or the novels of Jaroslav Hasek (*The Good Soldier Schweik*) and *Joseph Roth* (*The Radetsky March*). Visually innovative. Might be entitled *Closely Watched Lives of Ordinary People in a Little Village Under Threat*.

As in so many Eastern bloc countries a brief thaw in Soviet totalitarianism in the 60s germinated a short-lived blossoming in the arts, soon crushed by the brutal reassertion of Soviet control. Needless to say, **CWT** was soon banned.



## CLOUD-CAPPED STAR, THE

1960 F 5.00 7.9 IND

**Ghatak, Ritwik**

Dinen Gupta

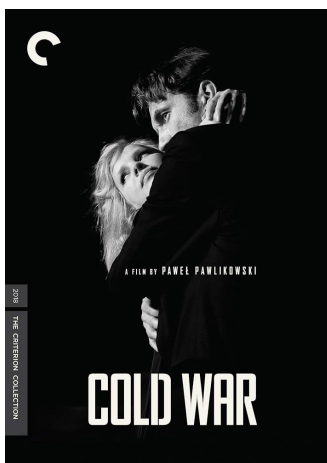
Supriya Choudhury, Anil  
Chatterjee, Gyanesh Mukherjee,  
Gita Dey, Niranjan Ray

Post-partition Bengal. A family of poverty-stricken refugees struggles to make a new life in a village on the outskirts of Calcutta. An idealistic but incompetent father, a primary school teacher with a fondness for Wordsworth and a precarious grip on social realities; a long-suffering and constantly complaining mother who can barely keep the household afloat; an unemployed elder son who is only interested in developing his musical talents; a younger soccer-obsessed son; a flirtatious younger daughter, an attractive airhead. At the centre of the family is Neeta who is studying and working part-time and on whom the rest of the family place impossible demands, threatening her future.

What a pleasure to find a film which can stand comparison with the best of Satyajit Ray! Here is a film of considerable complexity, combining melodramatic power, poetic beauty, sharp social observation, imaginative reach and stylistic daring. One of its most distinctive pleasures is the way in which music is used to inflect and modulate what might otherwise be a flat and depressing narrative. It is a heart-breaking story told with rare sensitivity and compassion. The disintegration of the family might be read as an allegory of the fate of India under partition, one of Chatak's abiding concerns. Supriya Choudhury is altogether marvellous in the lead role. In discussing his own work Chitak quoted Tagore: *Art has to be beautiful, but, before that, it has to be truthful.*

Derek Smith in *Slant*: *In plumbing the inner worlds of characters living on the fringes of society and enduring myriad injustices, the Bengali filmmaker taps into something at once strange and stirring through his singular, melodramatic fusion of offbeat humor, off-kilter framing, and editing rhythms, as well as though an experimental use of sound and music that's alternately beautiful and jarring in its disorienting effects.*

Chatak's own life (1925-1976) was marred by the traumas of partition, alcoholism and schizophrenia. He is a highly-regarded filmmaker in India but still little known in the West. We are indebted to Criterion for the remastering of **The Cloud-Capped Star**. Hopefully there are more to come.



## COLD WAR

2018 F 5.00 7.8 POL

**Pawlikowski, Pawel**

Joanna Kulig, Tomasz Kot, Borys Szyc, Agata Kulesza

Wounded Love in a Time of Trouble. Post-war Poland, Germany, Yugoslavia, Paris. An elliptical, episodic but perfectly intelligible narrative about two lovers, one a composer, the other a singer-dancer, moving in and out of each other's lives, and about the predicaments caused both by external circumstances and by their conflicting temperaments and contradictory desires. As IMDb described it, 'an impossible love story in impossible times', a story about ill-fated love, the conundrums and detonations of sexual attraction, the political turmoil (and worse) of the times, imprisonment and escape. Against a very grey and grim backdrop it's also an exuberant celebration of music. Pawlikowski's film is fictional but inspired by his parents' experiences. A film of extraordinary dramatic tension and intensity, of mesmerizing music and exhilarating cinematography, of cinematic art in its highest register... and with just a touch of the Tarkovskys.

No doubt this will be one of the two or three most impressive films of the year, along with **Roma**. It's a more flashy and dynamic film than **Ida** but, for me, just a notch below it on the emotional Richter scale. There's not much point in comparing it with **Roma**, so different are they in almost every respect ... but if I had to express a preference I think I'd go for **Roma**. But what the heck, two great films anyway!

How can a fella have a surname like 'Szyc'?





## COLONEL REDL

1985 F 3.75 7.6 HUNG

## Szabó, István

Klaus Maria Brandauer, Hans Christian Blech, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Gudrun Landgrebe

Late 19thC. Alfred Redl is born into a humble Ruthenian family on the outskirts of the increasingly dilapidated Hapsburg Empire. He is a boy of some intelligence and drive who rises rapidly after his training in a military academy. He becomes a ruthlessly efficient officer, dedicated to the Emperor and Empire, eventually becoming a high-ranking officer in the Intelligence Service. As he rises through the ranks he becomes more secretive about his Jewish background and his suppressed homosexuality. Eventually he is ensnared in a cynical plot to catapult the Archduke into power. But by now he has sacrificed his family, his friends and his self-respect. The pivotal theme: a man selling his soul in a futile pursuit of power and status, everything eventually turning to ashes in his hand — more or less precisely the theme of Szabo's earlier, better-known and superior film, **Mephisto** (also with Brandauer). A related concern is the moral corruption and collapse of monarchical and imperial ideals (the abiding theme of much of Josef Roth's work). Well mounted, powerfully acted (with a splendid and intriguing performance by Armin Mueller-Stahl as the Archduke), and an intelligent treatment of the material... but somehow the whole thing is a bit flat. I enjoyed the film without every becoming fully engaged. The historical figure of Colonel Redl was charged with treason, leading to his apparent suicide in a widely publicized case in the chaotic days before the outbreak of WW1. The facts of the case are still cloaked in mystery. Szabo's film is an imaginative treatment of what might have happened. In mood and theme the film is heavily indebted less to the historical facts and more to Josef Roth's very fine novel, *The Radetzky March* which deals with the death spasms of the Austro-Hungarian Empire — the musical "Radetzky March" by Strauss Sr provides a motif for Roth's novel, and features in the opening and closing sequences of the film, no doubt as an acknowledgment of the debt to Roth. For a novel with a similar setting see Stefan Zweig's *Beware of Pity*.



## COMMISSAR, THE

1967 F 4.25 7.5 RUS

**Askoldov, Aleksandr**

Valeri Ginzburg

Nonna Morduykova, Rolan  
Bykov, Raisa Nedashkovskaya,  
Vasily Shuskin

Russian Civil War, 1920. Klavdia Vavilova is a Red Army Commissar who inadvertently falls pregnant and is billeted with the family of a poor Jewish tinker. She is a hard-nosed ideologue but her outlook is challenged by her new circumstances. Set against an epic backdrop of the Civil War and with some surreal premonitions of the Holocaust (linked with Russian pogroms). The narrative is a bit lethargic in the first half but gradually revs up while the whole film is visually interesting, sometimes arresting. A mix of Heroic Epic (in vaguely Eisensteinian mode) and the domestic drama. Also interesting is the subtle fusion of Judaic and Christian religious symbolism, seen, for instance, in the washing of the feet sequence. Alas, Askoldov's only film. It was banned and confiscated, he was expelled from the Communist Party, prosecuted for 'wasting State funds', and forbidden to do any further filming. (His parents had been killed in a Stalinist purge. The family didn't fare well under the Soviets!) Made in 1967 but put into storage by the authorities who couldn't cope with the film's political ambiguities and its treatment of Russian anti-Semitism, foregrounded in the nightmarish scene where the Jewish children 'play-act' a pogrom in which their sister is (symbolically) raped, and in Klavdia's horrifying dream sequence near the end. It was one of about 150 films banned in the late 60s. It was rehabilitated (grudgingly) in the mid-80s, completed and put into circulation on the international arthouse circuit where it attracted some acclaim. It has never been screened in Russia. Based on a story by Vasily Grossman, the Russian Jewish writer who also ran foul of the Soviet apparatchiks. It's a film of considerable tenderness, beauty and power, a must-see for anyone interested in the Russian cinema. Who knows what Askoldov might have achieved under a less repressive, club-footed, and stupid regime. **The Commissar** can stand beside such works as Kalatazov's **The Cranes are Flying** (57), Jansco's **The Red and the White** (67), and Larisa Shepitkov's **Ascent** (77) – pretty impressive company!



## COMPANY LIMITED

1972 F 4.25 8.0 IND

**Ray, Satyajit**

Shamila Tagore, Barun Chanda,  
Paromita Chowdhury, Haradhan  
Bannerjee

Selling Your Soul to the Company. Smooth young man is on a fast-rising promotion escalator in a large Calcutta industrial firm. His attractive sister-in-law is visiting from the family home in Patna. Complications at work require some morally difficult decisions, as does the budding relationship. Told with Ray's usual sensitivity, restraint and poetic touch with plenty of detailed and sometimes satiric social observation, especially of the fads and follies of wealthy Westernized Indians. Show don't tell! Not quite the gallery of vivid characters nor as much humour as we get in the very best Ray. I also miss his lyrical depictions of traditional village life and the old ways. But you can't have everything!

The second of trilogy dealing with the same themes (the other two being **The Adversary** and **The Middle Man**). This one certainly belongs somewhere in the upper reaches of Ray's *oeuvre*.



## CONFERENCE, THE

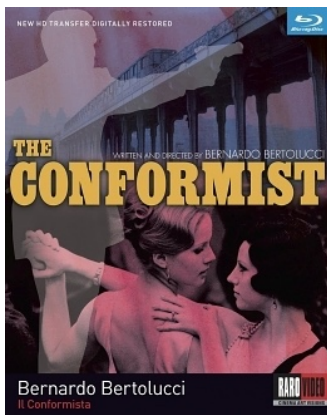
2022 F 4.00 7.4 GER

**Gershonneck, Matti**

Theo Bierkens

Philipp Hochmair, Johannes  
Almayer, Maximilian Bruuckner,  
Godehard Giese

Doco-drama based on the records of the Wannsee Conference in 1942 when Nazi leaders and bureaucrats met to discuss the 'Final Solution'. The story is unfolded in detached and 'objective' fashion without stylistic histrionics or dramatic embellishments, a judicious approach which allows the material to speak for itself. The 'negotiations' exhibit the bureaucratic and political machinations so characteristic of the modern state, the grip of malignant ideology and the moral paralysis which stems not only from fascism (the Führer principle, glorification of the state, racist theory etc) but from the individual pursuit of power, status, wealth. The script follows Eichmann's detailed record of the meeting. (Only one of the 29 copies survived, the rest destroyed by the Nazis, for obvious reasons. The fate of millions of Jews settled in 90 minutes! The secretary who was present throughout (a solitary, silent woman amongst these powerful and complacent men) later testified at the war crime trials. Shot on the historical location. One of the avowed purposes of the film-makers was to alert Germans to the contemporary tide of anti-Semitism, a menacing phenomenon being fanned by populist demagogues in many places, including the so-called liberal democracies. Will it ever end? The film is talky and without much dramatic modulation but these aspects, unpalatable in a narrative film, actually serve its purposes. One recalls Hannah Arendt's famous phrase about Eichmann, 'the banality of evil', here on chilling display. **TC** has received little critical attention of commercial success, possibly because of the endless flood-tide of TV shows and series about Nazism. Desensitisation.



## CONFORMIST, THE

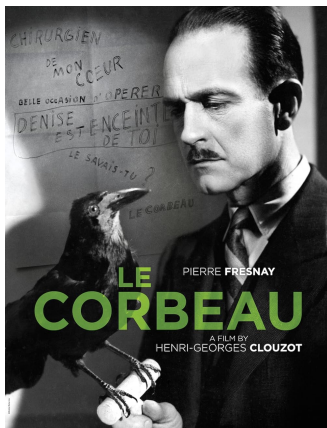
1970 F 5.00 8.1 ITA

### Bertolucci, Bernardo

Vittorio Storaro

Jean-Louis Trintignant,  
Dominique Sanda, Stefania  
Sandrelli, Enzo Tarascio

Bertolucci's dazzling and disturbing adaptation of an Albert Moravia novel about decadence, sexual repression, fascism and corruption through the entangled relations of a weak-willed man, his wife, a former leftist teacher and his enigmatic and seductive wife. There's also a mad father and drug-riddled mother. Fractured narrative, flashbacks and flash-forwards, ambiguity, reflexivity, a highly mobile camera, sumptuous décor. Trintignant delivers a high-voltage performance but the whole cast is uniformly excellent. The central theme is the psychology of complicity, dramatized and visualized with excruciating brilliance. Vittorio Storaro's camerawork throughout creates a delirium of unforgettable images and effects. One of the most distinguished films of the last half-century. (Nothing else Bertolucci made came anywhere near it!)



## CORBEAU, LE

1942 F 4.25 7.8 FRA

## Clouzot, Henri

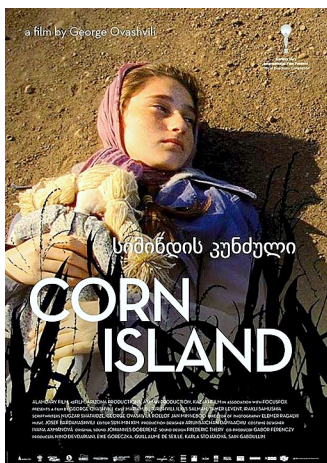
Pierre Fresnay, Ginette Leclerc,  
Micheline Francey, Antoine  
Balpétré

A provincial French town is racked by guilt, gossip and suspicion when a series of anonymous letters accuse various dignitaries of sundry crimes. Set earlier in the century but made in 1942 with obvious parallels to the effects of the contemporary Nazi occupation. Like Clouzot's other masterworks, it's intense, gripping, highly atmospheric, dark and stylish. Often described, wrongly, as a "noir", it's more accurately described as a psycho-drama with a dash of noir, a touch of gothic, and plenty of expressionist cinematography. (No one will be surprised if this description reminds you of Hitchcock!)

At the time this film upset almost everybody, not least because Clouzot had signed up with a German production company to make the film. At the time most people couldn't see that, amongst other things, it was a powerful condemnation of the Nazi occupation of France.

Why are the French so good at crime films of one sort and another? (Think Bresson, Becker, Melville, Chabrol...).

Preminger retold this story, poorly, in **The 13th Letter**.



## CORN ISLAND

2014 F 4.00 7.6 GEO

**Ovashvili, George**

Elemér Ragályi

Ilyas Salman, Mariam  
Bururishvili, Roelof Jan

Minneboo, Irakli Smuashia

Weather-beaten, time-worn old man and his grand-daughter build a hut and grow a corn crop on a fertile flood-created island in the Enguri River, the border between warring Georgians and Abkhazians. Their efforts are threatened by opposing soldiers roaming the river, the weather and the abrupt arrival of a wounded man. Shot in quite a lyrical but austere style by Hungarian cameraman Elemér Ragályi, and constructed with almost no dialogue (reminding me of **All is Lost** and **A Man Escaped**). The two lead players are both compelling. The film is not for viewers needing explicit narrative exposition and constant dramatic action but richly repays the patient and attentive viewer. Its sparse narrative and the central relationship also reminded me of the Korean film, **Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter** (Ki-duk Kim, 2004). The story has some overlap with another contemporaneous Georgian film, **Tangerines** (Zaza Urushadze, 2013) but the latter is much more action-packed.





## CRANES ARE FLYING, THE

1957 F 4.50 8.3 RUS

### Kalatozov, Mikhail

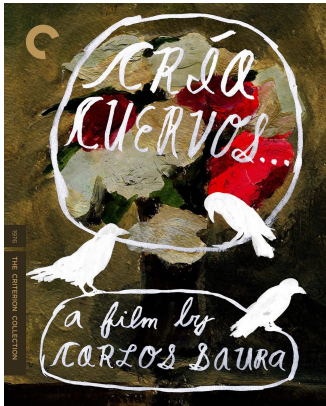
Sergei Uresevsky

Tatania Samoilova, Alexei  
Batalov, Vasily Merkuriev,  
Alexander Shvornin

*The Camera Cranes are Flying Too.* The once-thriving and innovative Soviet film industry had suffered a long and slow death under Stalin. **The Cranes are Flying**, in the era of Khrushchev's 'thaw', was one of the earliest and most celebrated films in its renaissance. It tells the story of a young woman, her lover who volunteers for military service and is sent off to the front, and the travails of his family. It's unsentimental, non-heroic and non-propagandistic (apart from the slightly triumphalist ending where the uplift is somewhat out of keeping with the drive of the narrative). More importantly it's splendidly shot with plenty of bravura cinematography from Uresevsky, much of it reminiscent of the pyrotechnics of the silent and early sound era (think Dziga Vertov, Jean Vigo, Boris Kaufman) and, more remarkably, anticipating some aspects of the *Nouvelle Vague*, Tarkovsky, Resnais and others; swirling cameras, exhilarating tracking and crane shots; arresting compositions; energy and movement. The opening ten minutes are especially ravishing. The film has a visual and dramatic fluidity in which moments of pathos and tenderness alternate with scenes of death, destruction, mayhem, corruption. It's engrossing, intense, and affecting with hardly a false note. Apart from the two lead characters I particularly enjoyed Vasily Merkuriev's performance (Boris' father, a doctor and in some respects the 'authorial' voice in this film). A prominent and impressive landmark in the post-Stalinist Soviet cinema.

Tatania Samoilova was the great-niece of Stanislavsky.





## CRÍA CUERVOS

1976 F 4.00 8.1 SPA

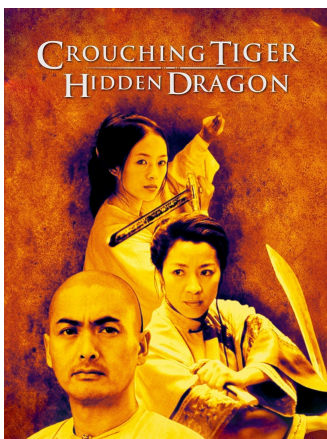
**Saura, Carlos**

Tea Escamilla

Ana Torent, Geraldine Chaplin,  
Hector Alerio, Mónica Randall,  
Florinda Chico

The narrative is a fragmented and non-linear admixture of present, past and future, and of memory, imagination and quotidian actuality – and hence difficult to rehearse. The story, anchored in 1975 (the year of Franco's death) concerns a bourgeois family: a military patriarch who conducts adulterous affairs and neglects his wife whose illness is perhaps psychosomatic; three daughters, the middle one, a damaged, defiant and imaginative child (Ana Torent) being the film's pivot; and the family housekeeper. It's a dark and unsettling film pervaded by death, grief, guilt and pain. Pretty clearly it is, amongst other things, an oblique allegory about Francoist Spain, the Civil War and what followed, and about the patriarchal family. This aspect of the film I found not entirely satisfactory. However, I was left with a unsettling sense of the profound sadness of childhood ruined by selfish and/or disturbed adults.

Saura bristled at comparisons with Erice's earlier **Spirit of the Beehive** but there are even more similarities between this and **El Sur**. To my mind both of Erice's films are richer and deeper than **Cría Cuervos** which struck me as somewhat contrived, cerebral and ideological rather than dramatically realized. But each to their own. CC is certainly a provocative and disquieting film, and not without some power.



## CROUCHING T, HIDDEN D

2020 F 4.25 7.9 TAI

**Lee, Ang**

Peter Pau

Chow Yun Fat, Michelle Yeoh,  
Zizi Zhnag, Chang Chen,  
Shihung Lu

Mythic story about a stolen sword, a famed warrior wrestling with the conflicting demands of his vocation and love, two beautiful and highly adept women warriors and a wild man from the desert. Lavishly mounted, superbly costumed and elegantly choreographed fight scenes – though I'm not quite sure how much swordplay I can cope with – certainly no more than is on offer here. The élan and grace of the spectacle is what is most immediately arresting but there is a complex storyline, some finely-drawn characters and subtlety-inflected themes to command our attention as well as a beautiful score. Martial arts films are very low on my wish list but this one, both epic and poetic, wildly surpasses the limits of the genre. All of the players are impressive but Michelle Yeoh is the knock-out.

Ang Lee's career since **CTHT** has not been as glittering as might have been anticipated.



## CRUEL GUN STORY

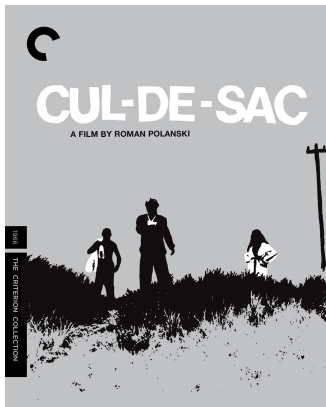
1964 F 4.00 7.2 JAP

**Furukawa, Takumi**

Jô Shishido, Chieko Matsubara,  
Tamio Kawaji

Armored Car Robbery Nikkatsu style. Set in Yokohama with plenty of references to the corrosive post-war American military presence. Mobster heavies spring a prisoner to carry out a heist. He assembles the gang, constructs a plan and tries to keep his accomplices — variously greedy, reckless, drunk and stupid — under control. Meanwhile he has to deal with his guilt over the brutal murder that had sent him to prison and the plight of his crippled sister. Despite the best-laid plans... Japanese gangster-noir hybrid in the same lineage as **High and Low** (63) and **Pale Flower** (64) but on a lower rung. A turbo-charged performance from Jô Shishido as the doomed protagonist (noir fatalism). The debts to the American gangster-noir tradition are everywhere to be seen but they are given a Japanese inflection. It brings to mind Huston's **Asphalt Jungle** (50), Kubrick's **The Killing** (56), several of Sam Fuller's works and a host of B-noirs, most obviously perhaps Fleischer's **Armored Car Robbery** (50). The heist lacks the intricate plotting which characterizes the best American films in the genre. The graphic violence is somewhat in cartoon mode. Nice print in the Eclipse series. The machine-gun clip apparently holds not twelve bullets but several hundred!

Nikkatsu was a film production company which, in the 60s, specialized in what came to be called "Nikkatsu noir" — high energy gangster and crime films. Jô (Mr Jowls) Shishido was one of their poster-boys.



## CUL DE SAC

1966 F 3.75 7.2 POL

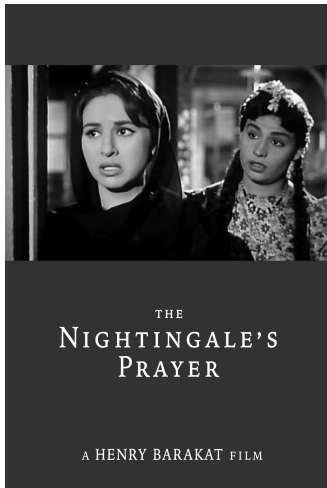
### Polanski, Roman

Donald Pleasance, Lionel  
Stander Frances Dorleac, Jack  
MacGowran

A mixture of acrid Polish humour, Pinteresque dialogue, Ionesco-esque and Polanskian obsessions gives us a kind of cinema of the absurd with various familiar motifs concerning sexual humiliation, identity, sanity, existential ennui, sadism, nihilism and the like. 'You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs' ... Just ask George!

This sort of stuff impressed me mightily in the late 60s but now it seems pretentious, grotesque, histrionic, a bit adolescent and without much to say. Still, not without interest – and Donald Pleasance and Lionel Stander both ham it up tremendously; there are several very funny moments. Also no denying that Polanski, clever fellow that he is, manages to give the whole thing a certain bizarre fascination. Frances Dorleac is Catherine Deneuve's sister and lookalike. **Repulsion**, made the year previous, has stood up a lot better than this.

Polanski musta had issues....duh!



## CURLEW'S CRY

1959    F    4.00    8.1    EGY

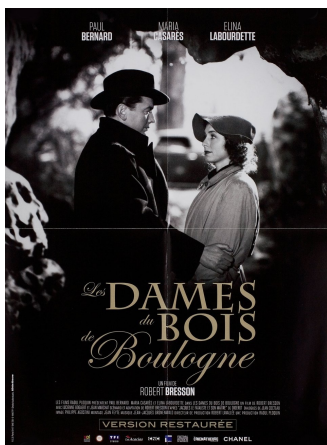
## Barakat, Henry

Wahid Farod

Faten Hamamah, Ahmad Mazhar,  
Aminah Riuzq, Mimi Shaib

Egypt, 1950s. Mother and two daughters are driven from a remote village after the death of their father who has dishonoured the family. The elder sister is seduced by an upperclass engineer after she is sent to his house as a domestic servant. She is subsequently killed by their cruel and vengeful uncle. Amna, the younger sister, plots her revenge ... An elemental melodrama of lust, betrayal, revenge, family honour, leavened with some social motifs (old vs new ways, village and city, men and women, class divisions). A film of some force and intensity, held together by a vigorous performance by Fateh Hamamah as Amna. She became an icon of the Egyptian cinema with more than 100 acting credits. Barakat also had a long and illustrious career, directing a similar number. This is his most celebrated film, from a novel by Taha Hussein. Well worth a look.

Aka **The Nightingale's Prayer.**



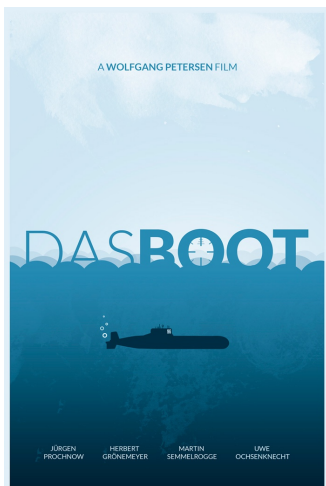
## DAMES D BOIS D BOUL.

1945 F 4.25 7.4 FRA

### Bresson, Robert

Maria Casares, Paul Bernard,  
Elina Labourdette, Helene  
Bogaart

Paris. Spurned woman manipulates her former lover into a relationship with one-time bad girl Agnes; a story of ice-cold revenge elaborated with feline cunning (by both Helene and Bresson). Elegant melodrama with dark undercurrents. Based on a Diderot story with brilliantly polished script by Jean Cocteau. Comes before the maturation of the Bresson style but the seeds of future developments are there. Beautiful ending even if it is not altogether psychologically convincing — psychology isn't everything! Morality play, fable, cinematic ballet, psychodrama... The surgical precision with which the story is developed, the cold inexorability, put me in mind of **The Servant** though one hastens to add that there is a veritable abyss between the respective sensibilities and aesthetics of Bresson and Losey. On first viewing, a decade ago, this seemed a very atypical work in Bresson's oeuvre; this time much less so, both in style and in its thematic concerns. A remarkably accomplished film to appear so early in a director's career — but we need not be surprised if we are familiar with **Les Anges du Peche**, one of the most stunning debuts in all of French cinema, perhaps surpassed only by Vigo's **L'Atalante** and Truffaut's **400 Blows** (which turned out to be the best thing Truffaut ever did whereas Bresson's film was the harbinger of even more impressive work). Here is a partial list of other very arresting European debut films: **Story of a Love Affair**, **Le Beau Serge**, **Elevator to the Gallows**, **Le Silence de la Mer**, **Ossessione**. From elsewhere: **They Lived by Night**, **The Great McGinty**, **Citizen Kane**, **In Which We Serve**, **This Sporting Life**, **Room at the Top**, **A Tree Grows in Brooklyn**, **Night of the Hunter**, **12 Angry Men**, **Whisky Galore!**, **Pather Panchali**, **The Last Picture show**, **Badlands**.



## **DAS BOOT (The Boat)**

1981    F    5.00    8.4    GER

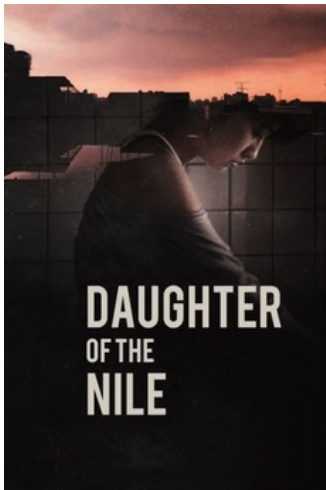
**Petersen, Wolfgang**

Jost Vacano

Jurgen Prochnow, Klaus  
Wennemann, Herbert  
Gornemeyer

Men at Work *In Extremis*. WW2 U-boat: monotony, squalor, sweat, danger, claustrophobia, foul air, gut-wrenching terror, resourcefulness, heroism, death – all horribly real. Almost entirely shot within the confines of the sub. A film of heart-pounding tension and intensity which blows all other submarine films out of the water, so to speak. (The next best – **K19: The Widowmaker? The Enemy Below? Run Silent, Run Deep? We Dive at Dawn?**— all a fair way behind.) **Das Boot** is a highly accomplished piece of film-making: cinematography, editing, sound, lighting etc are all meticulously crafted. It's superbly acted and the narrative is relentlessly engrossing. The anti-war theme is secondary, handled with some restraint and all the more effective thereby. Jurgen Prochnow is extraordinarily good as the still centre around which the storm rages.

The USA release ran 145 minutes; this one, the director's cut, goes for 208 minutes. I suspect the perfect film would have been about half way between – a tidy three hours! The film took a crew of 250 people two years to complete. Thank goodness they didn't dub it! If you suffer from claustrophobia (or a weak heart) stay away!



## DAUGHTER OF THE NILE

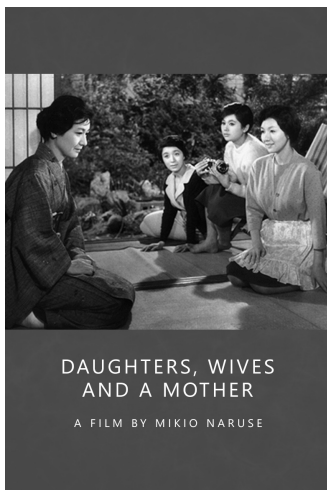
1987    F    4.00    7.0    TAI

### Hsiao-Hsien Hou

Lin Yang, Fan Yang, Jack Gao,  
Shu-Fen Hsin

Taipei, mid-80s. Eldest daughter tries to keep her family together while her elder brother slowly goes off the rails. On one level this is a domestic family drama but the film offers a portrait of a whole generation of young Taiwanese whose lifestyle is saturated with Western music, neon lights, nightclubs, bars, gambling, violence and petty crime with very few signs of any remnant traditional culture. The protagonist, Hsiao-Yang, has a lot to deal with: a frisky younger sister, a brother who is trying to avoid the pitfalls of crime, a disgruntled father-cop (the mother has died some time previously), an amiable but useless grandfather who buys a lot of lottery tickets, drudge work at a KFC. Hsiao-Hsein Hou, apparently, wanted to make a film about the younger generation whom he did not really understand. He drew heavily on the real-life experiences and interests of Lin Yang, a pop star at the time. The narrative is detached, fractured and sometimes a little confusing as it comprises a series of fragments only loosely tied together. The visual style focuses on the alternation of still-camera interior shots and cityscapes which recall Ozu's "pillow shots". Like Ozu, Hsiao-Hsien also favours static deep-focus shots with frames within the frame. The "daughter of the Nile" motif is unusual and quite evocative. It took me a while to get involved in Hsiao-Yang's predicaments but eventually I was roped into a story which has the feel of real life. The extras include a thoughtful and perceptive monologue by Tony Rayns about Hsiao's whole career, a very useful introduction. **A City of Sadness** is obviously a must-see, but hard to get without paying big \$. (**Daughter of the Nile** is one of the director's less well-known films.)





## DAUGHTERS, WIVES, M

1960 F 4.25 7.3 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Jun Ysaumoto

Setsuko Hara, Hideko Takamine,  
Masayuki Mori, Daisuko Kato,  
Tatsuya Nakadai, Haruko  
Sugimura

Postwar Japan. Three generations of one family living under the one roof in a smallish house: the widowed mother, two sons and three daughters, with other relatives blowing in and out. It's a muted story about the slow disintegration of a seemingly close family under a widening generational gulf, economic pressure and the changing culture which erodes traditional family mores and puts an exact monetary price on everything. The narrative moves slowly and I found it difficult to get all the characters and relationships sorted out. On the surface very little happens but there's a lot of half-hidden emotional turmoil culminating in a long and complex scene in which all of the family members have to make difficult decisions. The story has some similarities with Ozu's **Late Spring**.

The film is in colour and brings together a quite extraordinary cast, many of whom have been regulars in both Naruse and Ozu films over the previous two decades or more. And what a treat to see Setsuko and Hideko together: the former is allowed a long leash while Hideko is asked for a more restrained and understated performance. (Both are wonderful, as usual.) It's a fine-grained film which rewards close viewing. Sober, grave, melancholic, restrained, subtle, elegant – words that present themselves in any discussion of Naruse – are again all highly apposite. It has attracted remarkably little attention (the way of it with so many fine films by Naruse).

Japanese title: **Musume tsuma haha** (though there's precious little "haha"!; Naruse doesn't have a big joke-book).



# DAVID GOLDER

1931	F	4.00	7.0	FRA
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## Duvivier, Julian

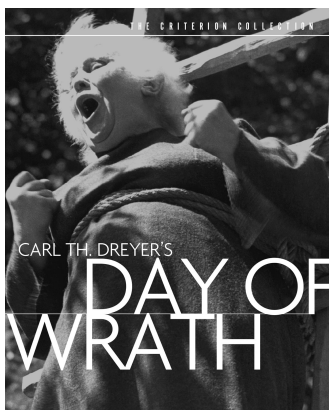
Harry Baur, Paule Andral, Jackie  
Monnier, Gastron Jacquet

Golder, a Polish Jew who has emigrated to France and worked his way up from poverty to huge wealth, is being shorn by his selfish wife and daughter and their frivolous and parasitic friends. He's had enough...

The story is by Irene Nemirovsky, essentially a study of character, karma and the lure of wealth, a common enough tale. But the film is elevated by Duvivier's graceful and sometimes daring visual style, a fine performance by Harry Baur (seen recently as Maigret in Duvivier's excellent **La Tête de l'homme**, 1933), and a haunting finale aboard a decrepit boat filled with Jewish refugees.

I was restless during the first half hour – why watch these silly and disagreeable people behaving badly? – but was eventually roped in to David's story. Nonetheless, the distinctions of the film are primarily stylistic rather than dramatic or thematic. The film also confirms the impression that Duvivier did his best work in the 30s.

Nemirovsky (1903-1942) was a Ukrainian Jew who spent most of her adult life in France where she was denied citizenship on racial grounds. She died in Auschwitz. **David Golder** is one of her earliest stories while her posthumous fame rests largely on **Suite Française**, not published until 2004 and made into an OK film in 2007, Michelle Williams in the lead role.



## DAY OF WRATH

1943 F 4.75 8.0 DEN

### Dreyer, Carl

Thorkild Roose, Lisbeth Movin,  
Sigrid Neiiendam, Preben  
Lerdorff-Rye, Albert Høeberg

Phew! Heck! Stewth! What the...? One of the few films to which the word harrowing can be applied, in all its dark weight and acute pain. A film of astonishing power, density, beauty, and darkness — one need not labour the ravishing formal beauty of the film (primarily evident in the way in which the film brings to life the whole world of 17th century Dutch art, and in the movements of the camera), nor the depth, richness and poignancy of the narrative, nor the electric performance of the players: such things are axiomatic in Dreyer's cinema. Awesome! The film diagnoses the horrific results of the ecclesiastical equation eroticism: witchcraft: evil — but the question must be asked to what degree Dreyer himself and this film “authenticate” it? This is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the film and prevents me, at this point, from giving it the unqualified endorsement that I so willingly give to **Ordet** and **Gertrud**. The question is surrounded with all sorts of ambiguities. I do not claim that the film *does* endorse it — but the disquiet remains. Many critics have seen the film as a stringent critique of religious intolerance and hypocrisy; this is certainly one of its themes, but the matter is rather more complicated than that! For one thing, its hypnotic power derives partly from the fact that Dreyer takes the possibility of witchcraft altogether seriously, a fact seemingly overlooked by many critics. It is too simple to dismiss the clerics as monsters of patriarchal repression (though again the film does undoubtedly expose this dreadful phenomenon, as did **The Passion of Joan of Arc**); D's treatment is subtle, searching and ambiguous. In any event, clearly a masterpiece — so far above the common ruck of films that it's not funny (not that anyone ever accused **Day of Wrath** of any comedic intention!). Not at all convinced that Dreyer primarily intended the film to be an allegorical denunciation of the contemporary Nazi occupation of Denmark, though this may well be of tangential significance. The film confirms what we knew already — Dreyer is a genius of the cinema — one of the few. I don't believe his four major works (**Passion of Joan of Arc**, **Day of Wrath**, **Ordet**, **Gertrud**) have ever been surpassed, though Ozu, Bresson and Satyajit Ray throw down very serious challenges. You want to know where Spielberg really stands? — put his work next to Dreyer's and you'll soon see! (Like comparing a clever but glib schoolboy with Plato!) Impossible to imagine that Bergman wasn't profoundly influenced by Dreyer (and probably Bresson was as well).



## DAYS & NIGHTS IN THE

1970 F 4.00 8.0 IND

**Ray, Satyajit**

DAYS AND NIGHTS  
IN THE FOREST

Samit Bhanja, Soumitra  
Chatterjee, Subhendu Chatterjee

A SATYAJIT RAY FILM

Four young men from Calcutta, self-styled 'VIPs', arrive in a remote Bihari village for a short holiday. There they encounter a variety of different characters (the *chaulkidar*, two beautiful young women, the 'curator' of the bungalow, various villagers) each of whom brings out some facet of one or more of the young men. A chamber piece. An ambitious film of considerable formal and psychological complexity and stylistic daring. Less restrained than most of Ray's films it also blends some dark eroticism and satiric humour with his more characteristically tender depictions of human foibles and frailties.

The characters, while sharply drawn, are less sympathetic than usual in a Ray film, the mood and tone are darker, the themes more negative. None of this necessarily discredits the film in any way, but for me it was one of Ray's less satisfying films. It's certainly interesting, entertaining and impressive, sometimes arresting, but it didn't much move me the way pretty well all of his other films have. (**The Chess Players**, to choose but one example, seemed to me to a much more satisfying blend of satire, comedy and pathos.) Plenty of the critics disagree with me, several opining that this is Ray's masterpiece. But, when all is said and done, it is Ray after all! Good to finally run down this elusive quarry.



## DEATH OF A CYCLIST

1955 F 4.00 7.8 SPA

### Bardem, Juan Antonio

Alfredo Fraile

Lucia Bosé, Alberto Closas,  
Bruno Corrà, Carlos Casaravilla,  
Otello Toso

Post-war Francoist Spain. Well-heeled society woman is having an affair with disgruntled academic. Whilst driving home from a tryst they accidentally kill a passing cyclist; they flee the scene. Complications follow. Complacent husband, worried mother, slime-ball art critic and would-be blackmailer, and a sub-plot about an unhappy incident in the academic's university.

Noir thriller + neorealist locations + political critique + arthouse style (*a la* Antonioni) = **DC**. The film realizes its aims in all four departments: a portrait of a decadent society and the gulf between the rich and privileged, and the poor; noir atmospherics and a tidy plot which builds tension and climaxes in a violent finale; an oblique but effective exposé of the corruption, hypocrisy and spiritual emptiness of the Francoist bourgeoisie; a film which, stylistically calls to mind many European arthouse auteurs, Antonioni, Chabrol and Franju most obviously. Location shooting, angles, jump cuts proliferating, alternations of open space and claustrophobic interiors.

Bardem (the uncle of Xavier) wasn't impressed with the state of contemporary Spanish cinema which he denounced as "politically ineffective, socially false, intellectually worthless, aesthetically nonexistent, and industrially crippled." The Francoist regime was equally unimpressed with Bardem and had him jailed after the release of **Death of a Cyclist**; international pressure saw him released but he had a very difficult time making films in Spain thereafter.



## DEPARTURES

2008 F 4.00 8.1 JAP

**Takita, Yojiro**

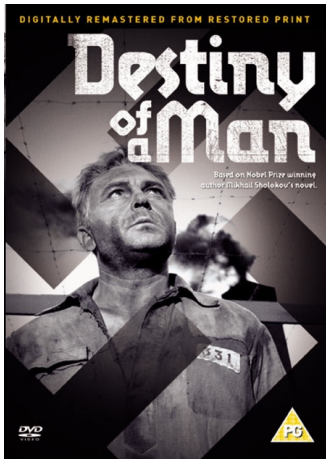
Masahiro Motoki, Ryoko Hirose,  
Tsutomu Yamazaki, Yo Kimiko

Budding young cellist is out of work when his orchestra folds. He inadvertently and secretly ends up working for an “encoffiner”, preparing bodies for their final “departure”. Problems with his young wife. It’s an interesting mix of humour, whimsy, pathos, social observation and an exploration of attitudes to death. The musical motif is well integrated. Masahiro Motoki is very appealing and all of the cast bring warmth and conviction to their roles. For the most part it’s well done with engaging characterization, delicate elaborations on its themes and several very touching scenes. Rituals: funereal-musical-cinematic.

The narrative trajectory is pretty formulaic and perhaps a touch facile.

The cello playing in the fields (several times!) added nothing. The preparation of the bodies is nicely done — but perhaps done once too often. (This is yet another 2 hours+ film which could profitably have trimmed off 10 to 15 minutes.)

This one really divided the critics: many of the trendoid pointy-heads dismissed it as sentimental, predictable, mediocre, slow, conventional, mushy. Some got in a lather because it won the best Foreign Film Oscar over more worthy contenders. Others found it beautiful, sensitive and moving. I’m mostly with the latter group though I understand that some sensibilities would find it sentimental. It’s certainly not Ozu... but then again, what is? More precisely, this is sub-Kore-eda.



## DESTINY OF A MAN

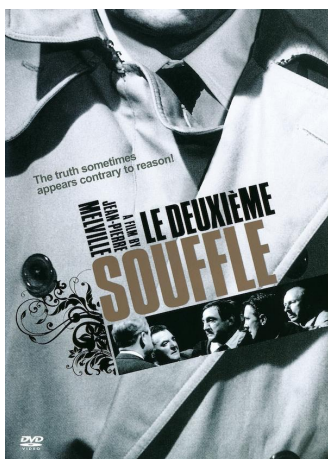
1959 F 4.00 8.0 RUS

### Bondarchuk, Sergei

Vladimir Monakhov

Sergei Bondarchuk, Pavel  
Boriskin, Zinaide Kirienko, Yuri  
Averin, Pavel Volkov

WWII disrupts the life of Sololov (Bondarchuk) who leaves his family and village to fight at the front where he is taken prisoner by the Nazis at whose hands he suffers various hardships and humiliations. The cruel vicissitudes of war. From a late short story by Mikhail Sholokov, apparently based on real life experiences. **DM** typifies some of the best Mosfilm productions of the comparatively benign post-Stalinist 'Thaw' (mid 50s-early 60s), an all too brief interlude. Both in style and narrative subject it shares a good deal with **The Cranes are Flying** (57, Kalatazov), **Ballad of a Soldier** (57, Chukhrai) and **Father of a Soldier** ((64, Chkeidze), though it is a less accomplished film than the first two. All are concerned with the ravages of war as experienced by ordinary folk. Bondarchuk's film is bold, energetic, robust, sometimes brutal, relieved by passages of lyrical beauty and sensitivity, but a times a bit clumsy and over-stated (often to be seen in Russian films!). There is also a bit of Soviet Uplift. Her and there one senses certain stylistic and thematic anticipations of Tarkovsky (especially **Ivan's Childhood** and **Andrei Rublev**. An impressive work in Bondarchuk's career as both actor and director. He best-known film is the 1965 epic version (6.5 hours) of **War and Peace**.



## DEUXIÈME SOUFFLE, LE

1966 F 4.50 8.0 FRA

**Melville, Jean-Pierre**

Lino Ventura, Raymond Pellegrin,  
Paul Meurisse, Christine  
Fabrega, Michel Constantin Paul  
Frankleur

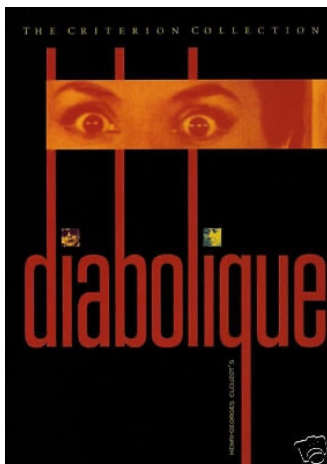
Gu is on the run after a prison outbreak. One last job, and as it goes with “one last job”.... Good crooks, bad crooks, good cops, bad cops ... and a beautiful woman caught in the vortex. A clinical examination of the moral anatomy of crime, loyalty, betrayal, professionalism, violence and the existential predicament with the heist as the narrative fulcrum with the action moving between Paris and Marseilles. And as the poster says, *The truth is sometimes contrary to reason*. Does Gu’s pride or self-respect or anachronistic code determine his fate? The pace is deliberate but the film is never less than absorbing, not least because of Melville’s masterly exploitation of the visual possibilities inherent in the subject. I kinda wish Melville had stuck with B&W.

This is up there with the best of Melville’s gangster films, perhaps half the length of a Colt barrel behind **Le Doulos**, **Le Samourai** and **Red Circle** — but I wouldn’t argue with variations on this configuration.

*Taken as a series of bravura showcases for the director’s unparalleled modulation of tone, rhythm, texture and mood, however, **Le Deuxième Souffle** smolders, its portentous fatalism generated from hyper-composed camerawork and an experimental jazz score that helps couch the proceedings in a nowhere-world situated between dream and reality (Slant).* The title means “second wind” or “second breath”.

For a fine essay on this dense and complex film see Adrian Danks for The Criterion Collection ([www.criterion.com](http://www.criterion.com)).





## DIABOLIQUE

1955      F    4.25    8.1    FRA

**Clouzot, Henri**

Simone Signoret, Vera Clouzot,  
Paul Meurisse, Charles Vanel.

Clouzot's dark, cold, atmospheric and macabre thriller about a nasty man's wife and mistress conspiring to do him in. Set in a boy's boarding school. The plot is elaborated with forensic precision and detachment. It has a great deal in common with **Psycho**: the director's moves make us forget the implausibility of the story; black humour; the blending of noir and horror ... not to mention what goes on in the bathroom! The cast is uniformly good. As someone said, "the greatest film that Hitchcock never made".... and as someone else said, "Clouzot is one of cinema's great misanthropes"; certainly Clouzot is something of a misogynist (as is even more apparent in **Wages of Fear**).

Irresistible associations with Hitchcock, Chabrol, Melville and Polanski: the quality of the company is suggestive. (It's altogether plausible that all four had seen this film.) Hitchcock tried to buy the rights to the novel by Pierre Boileau and Thomas Narcejac's novel but Clouzot beat him to it; Hitch later used their novel *D'entre les Morts* as the basis for **Vertigo**.

Vera Clouzot (the director's wife) is like a more attractive version of Isabelle Huppert.



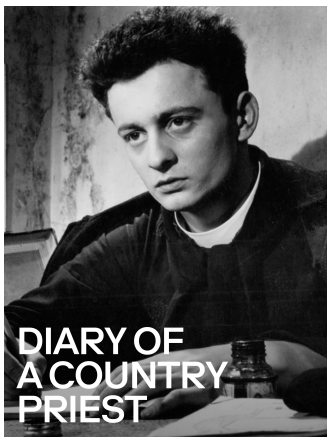
## DIARY OF A C'MAID

1964 F 4.00 7.6 SPA

### Buñuel, Luis

Jeanne Moreau, Michel Piccoli,  
Daniel Invernel, Gilberte Genial,  
Georges Geret

One of several adaptations of Octave Mirabeau's 1900 novel, the critique now being transposed to the incipient French fascist movement (Action Français etc). Moreau is the ambitious and scheming maid – and, we might say, almost a proto-feminist – who sees the underside of the social order but who is no less implicated in the pervasive decadence. Buñuel's usual mix of sex, perversity, anti-clericalism, cynicism, black humour, fetishism and satire, served up in a fluid and often beautiful cinematic style. Very restrained in its use of surrealist techniques and privileging the moving camera shots. Clever, engrossing, often amusing... but for mine too nihilistic to deliver a knock-out punch despite Jean Moreau



## DIARY OF A COUNTRY PR

1951 F 5.00 8.0 FRA

**Bresson, Robert**

Claude Laydu, Nicole Ladmiral,  
Jean Riveyre

The first of Bresson's indisputable masterworks. A sombre story of a naive young priest, dying of cancer, deeply troubled by his apparent inability to save the souls of his spiritually lazy, petty and sometimes malicious parishioners but able to find grace at the moment of death. The most austere, rigorous, troubling and formally beautiful film one can imagine. Like all of Bresson's films it is difficult to watch for several reasons: the suffering of the priest, the cruelty of the world (and seemingly of God), the crisis of faith; the squalid realities of provincial life, unrelieved by any lyricism and only a few glimmers of human warmth; the relentlessly bleak perspective; the uncompromising asceticism of Bresson's method. The scene with the countess is astonishing and devastating, as is the priest's death and its aftermath. Amongst other things, a dramatization of Schiller's dictum that *the world seeks to blacken what shines and to drag into the dust what is sublime*. Perhaps also of Dostoevsky's directive, *accept suffering and be redeemed by it*. Still, some difficulties remain: Is there a direct or inverse relationship between the priest's spiritual state and his stomach cancer? i.e., is there something spiritually unhealthy in his make-up of which the cancer is an 'objective correlative' (in Eliot's famous term), or is the cancer the worldly opposite of his spiritual purity? Perhaps the tension between these two possibilities is what gives the film its extraordinary tension and power. Interviewer: *Do you believe that there is anybody that does not partake in this essential soul. For example, is an atheist outside your audience?* Bresson: *No, he is not. Besides, there are no real atheists.*



## DIVIDED WE FALL

2000 F 4.00 7.6 CZE

Hrebejk, Jan

Bolek Polívka, Csongor Kassai,  
Jaroslav Dusek

Czechoslovakia, 1937-1945. A married couple shelter a Jewish escapee and put themselves in considerable peril from the Nazi occupiers. Life is complicated by a friend, a frequent visitor to the household, who has openly collaborated with the Germans.

This is a slightly absurdist black comedy which consciously affiliates itself with the Czech New Wave of the 60s, and thereby pays homage to Menzel, Forman, Passer et al. The narrative deals with a dark and menacing subject but does so in that off-beat, ironic and somewhat unpredictable way that is so characteristically Czech.

I enjoyed this film for its reconstruction of the milieu, its very human characters and the fine performances of all the players. I had three not-too-serious problems with the storyline: the whole pregnancy episode was too obtrusively an implausible narrative contrivance; the narrative rather stacks the deck in portraying *none* of the Czechs and *all* the Germans as really bad (could things have been that simple?); I was slightly discomforted by the feel-good ending. Insofar as this is a film about the ways in which ordinary Czechs responded to the Nazi occupation of their country and to the treatment of the Jews I found **The Shop on Main Street** much more powerful. That doesn't make **DWF** a bad film but it does expose its limitations. 'Josef and Mary'?



## DOULOS, LE

1963 F 5.00 7.9 FRA

**Melville, Jean-Pierre**

Jean-Paul Belmondo, Serge  
Regianni, Michel Piccoli

Robbery, betrayal, murder, duplicity, police informants... guns, jewels, the folding stuff, trench-coats, cars... bars, prisons, police stations, nightclubs, nocturnal streets, rain... beautiful and dumb women... you get the picture. One of Melville's brilliant Parisian gangster films, starting with a breath-taking open shot and sequence (Cinematography: Nicholas Hayer, who also worked with Cocteau and Clouzot), and moving through 100 minutes of highly stylized and meticulously controlled film-making, elaborating a convoluted plot and exploring Melville's obsessive themes. This is one of Melville's absolute best: it's at least as good as the much more widely hailed **Le Samourai**. It's both riveting and ravishing: visually hypnotic, tense, engrossing. I absolutely loved it! (My only misgiving about Melville's gangster films concerns the generic problem of the representation of women — not a problem in **Army of Shadows**.)



## DOWNFALL

2004 F 4.75 8.2 GER

### Hirschbiegel, Oliver

Bruno Ganz, Ulrich Mattes,  
Alexandra Maria Lara, Corinna  
Harfouch, Juliane Köhler, Heino  
Ferch, Christian Berkel

*Gottterdammerung*. The last days of Hitler: claustrophobia, madness and mayhem in the Berlin Bunker. The bizarre charisma, delusional meglomania and demented ideology of the Führer; the disintegrating morale of the High Command; the Russian encirclement of Berlin; the suffering of the civilians; the macabre fate of Hitler, Eva Braun, the Goebbels family and the Nazi inner circle. The story is told, in part, through the eyes of Traudl Junge, a naive young woman who served as one of Hitler's secretaries. She later wrote a memoir on which the script is largely based, along with a book by historian Joachim Fest; excerpts from a poignant TV interview late in her life, bookend the film. (She died in 2002). Bruno Ganz gives a mesmeric and altogether extraordinary performance as Hitler, showing us something of his deformed humanity as well as his demonic ideology. (Ganz died last year, 2019). Question: Is there enough in the film about the Holocaust, the ultimate manifestation of Nazism? One thing the film does clearly show, at least for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, is the sinister influence of Darwinian ideas on Hitler and the Nazi ideologues. The sets are hugely impressive as is the darkening atmosphere, the descent into a kind of twilight world of delirium, hysteria and despair (recalling the nightmarish 'dance of death' in the final stanza of Herzog's **Nosferatu** – but this time it was for real!) No single film could ever be adequate to such a subject but **Downfall** is historically scrupulous, powerful, engrossing, thoughtful, a film of large ambition and accomplished execution. Impressive in almost every respect. Along with **Night and Fog** one of the most important films we have about Nazism.



## DRIVE MY CAR

2021 F 4.25 7.6 JAP

### Hagamuchi, Ryûsuke

Hidetoshi Shinomiya

Hidetoshi Nishijima, Tôko Miura,  
Reika Kirishima

Generally I have little enthusiasm for the so-called “new wave” of Korean-Japanese-Hong Kong films about which there has been far too much critical gushing in recent times. One may mention such films as **Parasite**, **Burn**, **Mother**. But this one I found an engaging, strange, dense, ambitious and rewarding film. The story concerns a theatre director in the grip of a deep grief, now trying to direct a trans-national production of Chekhov’s *Uncle Vanya*. It touches on all manner of themes and motifs: the mysterious workings of memory, guilt and grief, solitude, the nature of theatre and performance, the interplay of theatre and cinema, the universal reach of art. It’s visually stylish, often arresting and graceful, beautifully acted and quite haunting in its effects. It held my attention for three hours, no small feat! A relief to see an impressive new/recent film of which there have been precious few this year (**Belfast**, **A Hero**, **Bait**). Adapted from a story by Haruki Murakami.



## EARLY SUMMER

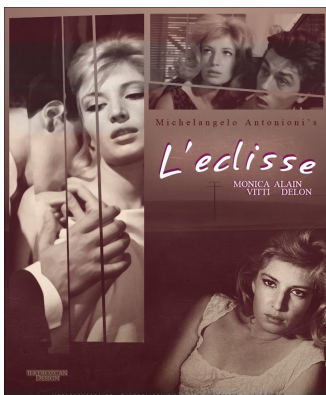
1951 F 5.00 8.2 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Setsuko Hara, Chisu Ryu,  
Haruko Sugimara

The second in Ozu's astonishing 'Noriko Trilogy, this came between **Late Spring** and **Tokyo Story**, in each of which the heavenly Setsuko Hara plays a character called Noriko (though they are not the same character). The familiar Ozu themes: tradition and change; family relations, marriage and old age; the effects of the war; the position of women; the movement of time, the evanescence of life. Stylistically, too, we are in familiar terrain: the low, stationary camera (though there are several striking tracking shots); the extraordinary movement not of the camera but in and out of the frame; the use of space; the pillow shots; the haunting music. It's an extraordinary mixture of the mundane, the melancholic, and the comic with a narrative unfolded with Ozu's usual restraint, delicacy and precision. Like Chekhov, like Satyajit Ray, Ozu can not only make a great film out of almost nothing (in terms of dramatic action). And what a treat to see not only Setsuko Hara but Chishu Ryu and Haruko Sugimara at work again. It would be highly impertinent, lacking in all sense of decorum and proportion, to make any criticism of Ozu who has to belong in the inner sanctum of the very greatest film-makers. Ozu never married; his films portray a quiet but deep ambivalence about marriage because, paradoxically it seems, it breaks up families! This is one of the greatest of all films about family life. (Think **I Remember Mama** and **Meet Me in St Louis** as far as Hollywood goes.) It's less engrossing than **Late Spring**, less heart-wrenching than **Tokyo Story** but, in its own way, just as good. What a trilogy! And how about getting Ozu and Setsuko Hara in one package, not once but six times! Setsuko Hara never married either. After Ozu's death in 1963 she retired from film-making and lived a very quiet life in Kamakura (the setting of **Early Summer** is set). I feel about Setsuko Hara as novelist Shusaku Endo did, writing after seeing one of her films: *We would sigh or let out a great breath from the depths of our hearts, for what we felt was precisely this: Can it be possible that there is such a woman in this world?*





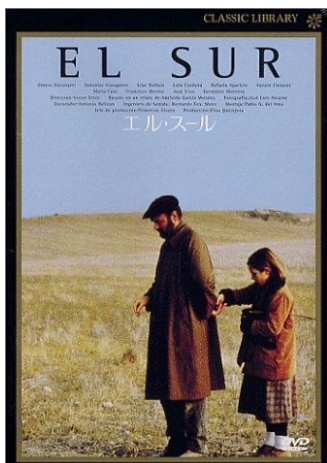
## ECLISSE, L'

1962 F 4.75 7.7 ITA

**Antonioni, Michel.**

Monica Vitti, Alain Delon,  
Francisco Rabal, Lilla Brignone

The last film in Antonioni's enigmatic trilogy exploring ennui, existential crisis, alienation and the impossibility of meaningful and durable relationships. ... and the madness of capitalism (the stock market scenes would do Tati proud though the second one goes on too long). Psychic torpor, spiritual sterility and emotional numbness on one hand (Vitti) or, alternatively, greed, cynicism, lust and mania on the other (Delon). And possibly nuclear annihilation to end it all anyway. Not reassuring! As well as these apparent themes there is Antonioni's extraordinary aesthetic which transforms the mundane world, showing its weirdness, its beauty and ugliness, its poetry. (In a strange way Antonioni is half in love with the urban-industrial landscape.) Elliptical narrative, long takes, a certain abstraction, visual elaborations with no narrative motivation, the foregrounding of mood and inner turmoil rather than overt action, disruption and instability. Further, as the talking head on the extras says, *Antonioni is a looker not a thinker*. **L'Eclisse** gives exactly what we expect from mid-period Antonioni (which doesn't make it any less impressive). The Extras monologue by the French critic perceptive: he nails what is most exceptional about Antonioni — and this only has a tangential relationship with whatever "message" may be discerned in his films. I share little of Antonioni's "philosophy", insofar as one can surmise it: his appeal is almost entirely aesthetic and 'moral', by which one means his engagement with life's serious issues, even if his 'answer' is bleak and possibly sterile. Antonioni's joke book is not small; it doesn't exist. American distributors deleted the last 7 minutes of **L'Eclisse**; wouldn't you know it!!



## EL SUR

1983 F 5.00 8.0 SPA

**Erice, Victor**

Omero Antonutti, Sonsoles  
Aranguren, Iciar Bollan, Lola  
Cardona

A meditative and melancholy film constructed around a young woman's recollection of her childhood and her enchantment with her mysterious father. Meticulously and patiently constructed with exquisite use of light, imagery and composition, often painterly. Evokes the puzzles, secret sorrows and half-understood mysteries of childhood, adolescence and adulthood in a way which is never didactic and expository but rather poetic, suggestive, allusive, elusive. The voice-over (a device which is so often irritating) is used to great effect. The rumination on both the Civil War and the cinema itself is seamlessly woven into the fabric of the story. Childhood, the clouding of innocence, love, loss, estrangement, loneliness, memory, hope and despair. Altogether wonderful and all handled with Chekhovian delicacy. It's hard to think of a film I like more. (The young girl was altogether captivating; I was disappointed when she exited the narrative.)

Erice's first film, **Spirit of the Beehive** (1976), was very widely celebrated; I must revisit it. (It's nearly forty years ago that I saw it; hard to believe it's as good as this.) **Later:** I did revisit it. It's very very good ... but **El Sur** is better!

This was only the first half of what Erice intended as a three-hour movie — and indeed it only covers the first part of Adelaida Garcia Morales' novel, on which it is based. Financial troubles brought production to an abrupt halt. But this stands perfectly well as it is. Who knows, he might have ruined it if the original plan had been realized!



## ELENA

2011 F 4.00 7.3 RUS

### Zyvagintsev, Adrei

Nadezhda Markina, Andrey  
Smirnov, Aleksey Rozin

Elena is a former nurse and domestic worker, recently married to a wealthy businessman who exploits her as a domestic slave. She's worried about her layabout son and his family. The husband's heart attack brings things to a head...

A slow-burn thriller of sorts, though thrills are in pretty short supply, and a probing examination of the cynicism, moral lassitude and spiritual sterility of life in contemporary Russia. Its pace and rhythm are very deliberate with many long takes, a carefully structured use of space and sound, and a kind of Hitchcockian strategy of implicating the spectator in the guilt of the protagonist. Wonderful sound track by Philip Glass. Long and interesting interview with Zyvagintsev on the Extras.

I saw this back in 2011 and wasn't much impressed. Ten years later, and now familiar with all of Zyvagintsev's films, I was much better placed to understand his purpose and to appreciate his distinctive style. Can't say this relentlessly bleak film is very enjoyable but it is powerful and disturbing, and interesting as cinema. I like it least of Zyvagintsev's films but it is impressive nonetheless.



## ELEVATOR TO T GALLOWS

1958 F 4.50 8.0 FRA

### Malle, Louis

Henri Decaë

Jeanne Moreau, Maurice Ronet,  
Georges Poujouly, Lino Ventura

New Wave crime thriller shrouded in fated romanticism and echoes of American noir, tinged with some absurdist humour (including a few Tati-like touches). The perfect murder is complicated by an elevator on the blink. Gadgets and machines all about the place: tricky calendars, motorized pencil sharpeners, space age motor cars, miniature cameras, the mysterious working of lifts... On-the-run street scenes, late night café life, edgy score. Location filming anticipating such other early Nouvelle Vague masterpieces as **Le Beau Serge** and **The 400 Blows**, and inevitably, reminiscences of American gangster/noir films of the 40s and 50s. In fact it's a perfect link between the best Hollywood-influenced French crime films of the 40s and the 50s (Melville, Clouzot, Becker, Bresson, Sautet et al) and the emergent Nouvelle Vague (Chabrol and Varda most obviously). The most striking sequences are of Jeanne Moreau wandering the Parisian streets in the small hours, in the rain. The German tourists are pretty funny. Always enjoy Lino Ventura, even in a minor role. It's a radical film in which story and style are dancing in and out and around each other. Decaë's striking cinematography is integral to the whole thing, as is Miles Davis' moody score.

**EG** put Moreau on the map... where she belonged!  
Impressive debut from 24-year old Malle; he never made anything better.



## EMBRACE OF THE

2015 F 4.00 7.9 COL

## Guerra, Ciro

Jan Bijvoet, Brionne Davis,  
Nilibiuo Torres, Antonio Bolivar,  
Miguel Ramos

Inspired by the diaries and writings of a fin-de-siècle German ethnographer who disappeared during his travels in the Upper Amazonian jungle but whose work survived to become the sole source of a our fragmentary knowledge of the many tribes who vanished under the onslaught of the Colombian rubber plantations. The narrative cuts between solo ethnographic expeditions in 1909 and 1940, each accompanied by a shaman of sorts. It's a hallucinatory and visionary work which broods on the strangeness of the Other, the appalling consequences of the collision of cultures, and on alternative ways of knowing and experiencing the world. The cast are all superb. The B&W cinematography is mesmeric, and much of the film is powerful, disorienting and disquieting. The late scene in the 'Workshop of the Gods' is an awesome spectacle. It reminded me variously of Jarmusch's **Dead Man**, the works of Tarkovsky and Herzog's madness-in-the jungle films **Acquarre** and **Fitzcaraldo**, as well as having affinities with Heart of Darkness. It's impressive... but not a contender for my list of favourite films. The coloured interpolation of the vision near the end struck me as being gaudy and tacky — breaking the solemnity and the sombre tone of the film. For me it didn't work. The bizarre episodes at the mission and the Messiah cult also struck me as, at best, odd and a bit hysterical — to no very good effect. The anti-Christian animus of the film doesn't cohere into any sort of critique; it's really just a cry of rage. In much the same way the depredations of the rubber barons are asserted rather than shown. As an anti-colonialism statement the film is very angry — and not without some power — but not particularly thoughtful or illuminating. But as a hymn to the glories of the Amazon and as a lamentation for the 'lost songs' it's poetic and powerful.



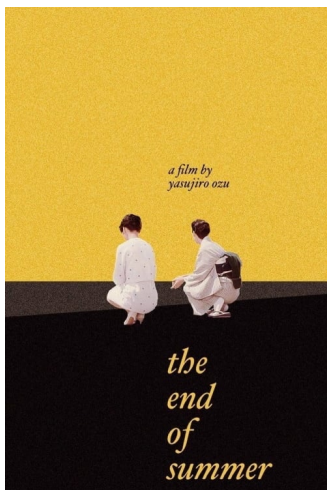
## EMIGRANTS, THE

1971 F 4.50 8.0 SWE

**Troell, Jan**

Max von Sydow, Liv Ullman,  
Eddie Axberg, Allan Edwall,  
Monica Zetterlund

Karl Oscar (Sydow) and Kristina (Ullmann) are small farmers struggling to eke out an existence for their family in a harsh, impoverished and semi-feudal region of mid-19thC Sweden. Eventually they make the decision to emigrate to America, along with several other relatives and villagers. A film in three acts: toil and trouble in Sweden; the long, hazardous and sometimes nightmarish voyage to the New World; their arrival in America with some intimations of the difficulties that lie ahead. It's leisurely and deliberate in pace with many alternations in tone and mood as it ranges over a marriage and a family, back-breaking toil in the stony fields, the cruel vagaries of the weather, a village community, religious divisions and the strange pieties of a breakaway group, life aboard a creaky, infested and claustrophobic vessel at sea. Always visually beautiful: Troell has a painterly feeling for light, space and movement. (He did much of the camera work himself.) The whole thing is held together by the beautiful depiction of the relationship between the two protagonists, played with characteristic sensitivity and restraint by Sydow and Ullmann. At the time it was the most expensive Swedish movie ever; the money was well-spent!



## END OF SUMMER, THE

1961 F 4.25 8.0 JAP

### Ozu, Yasujiro

Yuhara Atsuta

Keiju Kobayashi, Setsuko Hara,  
Haruko Togo, Reiko Dan, Yuko  
Tsukasa, Chisu Ryu

'The Kohayagawa family is complicated,' says one of the minor characters. Quite so! Ozu's penultimate film (**An Autumn Afternoon** was the last) is an ensemble piece about two generations of the family, most of them concerned about the precarious state of the family business (brewing saki wouldn't you know!) and the surreptitious love life of the old father. Like its immediate predecessor, **Late Autumn**, this is a charming mix of comedy and pathos, lightly touching on the usual Ozu motifs of love, duty, marriage, family relations, the impact of modernity, death, ephemerality etc. It centres on the family patriarch and the four daughters – the eldest widowed, the middle one married, the youngest unwed, and the daughter-in-law who scolds the old fellow for his naughty ways. But there are really eight or nine significant figures who are all deftly characterized. The camera-work and editing are, as usual, elegant and spare, but the *mise-en-scène*, for Ozu, is positively baroque! It's a pleasure to see so many familiar faces from earlier Ozu films including, pre-eminently, Setsuko who has noticeably aged but is as graceful as ever.

Is there such a thing as a 'minor Ozu'? If so, this probably fits the bill. I think **Late Autumn** covered much the same terrain more effectively.

The sub-titles are very poorly synchronized, especially in the first thirty minutes; intensely annoying and very distracting. Ozu would have been appalled I'm sure.

The more literal translation of the film's title is *The Autumn of the Kohayagawa Family*, though the story is obviously set in the end of a very hot summer. A lot of fans at work!





## ENFANTS DU PARADIS, L

1945 F 4.50 8.4 FRA

**Carné, Marcel**

Roger Hubert

Arletty, Jean-Louis Barrault,  
Pierre Brasseur, Maria Casares,  
Pierre Renoir, Marcel Herrand

The 'Boulevard of Crime', Paris, 1820s. Teeming streets: spruikers, performers, vendors, pickpockets, horses, citizens of all classes, shapes and sizes, all moving about. We find ourselves in the theatrical world of a pantomime company where the star attraction is Baptiste, a mime (Barrault). Garance (Arletty) is an alluring but distant woman of the world around whom buzz a constellation of admirers: Baptiste; Frederick, an aspiring actor and a bit of a ham (Brasseur); criminal mastermind Lacenaire (Herrand); a wealthy count (Salou) who imagines that he has 'bought' her only to discover that he has only 'rented' her. Perennial themes of the cinema: reality and illusion, dreams and quotidian life; desire, love, disillusionment, doomed romance; the inter-relations of theatre, the silents and the talkies. (Think Ophüls' **Lola Montès**.) Extravagant, melodramatic, operatic, all done with incessant movement on a crowded screen. A triumph of human creativity in the midst of wartime occupation and destruction. A film of great distinction and charm ... but the best French film ever, as many have claimed? Not for mine. I was never *enchanted* the way many viewers are. (I actually prefer the earlier Carné-Prevert collaborations, **Jour se leve** and **Quai des brumes**.)

Roger Ebert: *All discussions of **LEDP** begin with the miracle of its making. Named at Cannes as the greatest French film of all time, costing more than any French film before it, [it] was shot in Paris and Nice during the Nazi occupation and released in 1945. Its sets sometimes had to be moved between the two cities. Its designer and composer, Jews sought by the Nazis, working from hiding. Carné was forced to hire pro-Nazi collaborators as extras; they did not suspect they were working next to resistance fighters. The Nazis banned all films over about 90 minutes so Carné simply made two films, confident he could show them together after the war. The film opened in Paris right after the liberation, and ran for 54 weeks. It is said to play somewhere in Paris every day.*





## EQUINOX FLOWER

1958 F 5.00 8.0 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Shin Saburi, Ineko Arima, Kinuyo Tanaka, Chisu Ryu

Japanese family life. Eldest daughter wants to marry; father is still attached to the old ways (arranged marriages and the like). It's quintessential Ozu (generational change, liberalization, Westernization, tradition v modernity, family dynamics) but especially interesting in several ways: the focus is on the father and on men (rather than the plight of women, though that's there as well); it's in colour (his first); being an Ozu, there's plenty of restrained pathos and delicate feeling but it has a light comic touch (which one doesn't readily associate with Ozu) as well as a playful satiric irony (which one does). The story is simple and there is very little outward drama or tension. A case-book study in Ozu's aesthetic. The performances are wonderful beyond any singing of them.

I never thought I'd see another film comparable with **Late Spring** and **Early Summer** – but this is it!! It's altogether ravishing. It doesn't have quite the depth or power of those films but for sheer beauty (of several kinds) it's unsurpassed. Will be very hard to beat for the Film of the Year! It's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen.



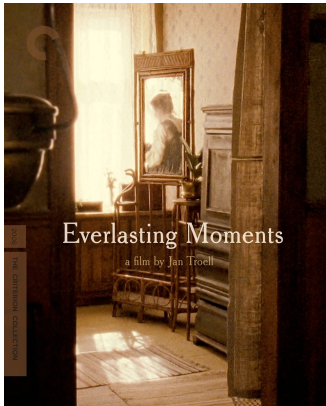
## EUROPA 51

1952 F 4.75 7.6 ITA

### Rossellini, Roberto

Ingrid Bergman, Alexander Knox,  
Ettore Giannini

The second story in Rossellini's 'Bergman trilogy' concerns the psychological and spiritual crisis of a wealthy bourgeois woman after the death of her son. It's the most polished of Rossellini's works with elaborate lighting scenes and carefully constructed set-ups, though these are intermittent, inter-leaved with improvised and raw outdoor scenes. (The film proceeds through the alternations of inside/outside and day/night.) It's a powerful, provocative and moving drama in which wealth, the law, medicine, psychiatry, Marxism and the Church all fail the test of meeting Irene's needs. Only the 'insulted and injured' (to use Dostoevsky's memorable phrase) can do that. A Christian story and theme which Bresson or Dreyer might have tackled, no doubt with different results. Rossellini's approach is much more free-wheeling, more melodramatic and more imbued with the immediate political and social concerns of the day. In any case, this is a seriously good film (which was, predictably, pasted by the critics at the time). The extra with the Italian film critic (whose name I have forgotten) is well worth watching. This is the English version in which Bergman and Knox were re-filmed doing their own parts but much of the rest was dubbed, disastrously, in a variety of New York accents. This really detracts from the dramatic impact. Dubbing is ALWAYS bad!!!! The film is more verbally explicit than it needed to be: too didactic. (For some reason, and on his own testimony, Rossellini wanted to make the film very didactic.) Rossellini derived the idea for the film partly from the experiences of a friend and partly through pondering, whilst making **The St Flowers of St Francis** (made between **Stromboli** and **Europa 51**), what would happen if St Francis, or someone like him, were living in contemporary society. Ingrid looks thin, worn out, nervy (which suits the film, but it's not Ingrid as we know her: upsetting!) ...and her hair needs a complete make-over. Last week I wrote that **Mahanagar** only went to consolidate Ray's reputation as a pantheon director; the same might be said of this film viz Rossellini. I now only have **Stromboli** to see. Either the war trilogy or the Bergman trilogy would have been enough to establish Rossellini as one of the great directors — to give us both really comprises an astonishing gift to the cinema. Which of the five seen is my favourite? Well, that depends on which day you ask me! Today I think I'd go with **Germany Year Zero** with **Voyage to Italy** hard on its heels.



## EVERLASTING MOMENTS

2009 F 4.00 7.5 SWE

**Troell, Jan**

Maria Heiskanen, Mikael  
Persbrandt, Jesper Christensen

Early 20thC, Malmo, Sweden. A poor working-class woman, a migrant from Finland, struggles with an alcoholic and philandering husband, her several children, poverty. Her life changes through a chance winning of a camera in a lottery. An elegaic film about family, identity, marriage, independence, art, love, despair and hope... and photography and the cinema. A modest, understated but beautifully crafted and realized film. The story is taken from a novel by Troell's wife, based on the real-life story of one of her relatives, narrated in the film by the protagonist's daughter.

The narrative needed a bit more drive, a bit more oomph. **EM** doesn't belong in the highest reaches of films of its type (one thinks particularly of Victor Erice's films, **El Sur** and **Spirit of the Beehive**) beside which it looks just a tad lightweight... but that's an unfair comparison; it's pretty good anyway. I hardly need say that **Everlasting Moments** is almost everything that contemporary Hollywood is not.



## EVERYBODY KNOWS

2018 F 4.00 7.0 IRA

**Fahardi, Asghar**

José Luis Alcaine

Penelope Cruz, Javier Bardem,  
Ricardo Darin

Laura, with two of her children, arrives from Argentina for her sister's wedding in their hometown in Spain. Beautiful people, wine and roses, sunshine, family reunion ... until the daughter is kidnapped and things turn dark. Secrets emerge and there are difficult decisions to be made.

Contemporary cross-over (Hollywood-arthouse) melodrama: meticulously crafted, well acted, intense, suspenseful ... a family under severe pressure. But doesn't have the depth or force of his earlier films. Farhadi is clearly one of the most accomplished and serious-minded of contemporary filmmakers, and this film testifies to that. But it's probably his weakest outing to date. (Farhadi's joke-book hasn't grown any!)

Cruz, Bardem and Darin all attracted a lot of plaudits ... fair enough but I also really liked the performances of Barbara Lennie (Bea) and Eduard Fernandez (Fernando), though Bardem is undoubtedly the presiding presence.



## EYES WITHOUT A FACE

1959 F 5.00 7.8 FRA

**Franju, Georges**

Eugen Shüfftan

Pierre Brasseur, Alida Valli, Edith Scob

Eminent plastic surgeon tries to repair his daughter's destroyed face after a car accident in which he was the reckless driver. Laboratories, dogs, operating rooms, funeral vaults, beautiful young women. A very seductive blend of SF, zombie/mad-scientist/gothic horror, black comedy, noir and psychodrama in which Franju keeps not only the dogs but the film on a very tight leash. Somehow, out of an outlandish story he manages to create something quite extraordinary, creepy, sinister and suspenseful but also elegant, poetic and haunting. Hitch said you needed to have at least one reel of serious worry; from start to finish this film generates intense anxiety, acute discomfort, dread. 3 reels of Worry! Veteran camera-man Eugen Shüfftan creates a surreal atmosphere without resorting to any tricks or gimmicks. Powerful, deeply disturbing, unforgettable. It met with critical outrage and disdain before it was belatedly recognized as a truly remarkable film, made at the time of the emergent *Nouvelle Vague* but without any apparent debt to it. Franju was an original in every sense of the word. He remarked that the producers wanted a horror story but without too much blood (upsetting the French), without any torture of animals (upsetting the British), and without any mad scientist-doctors (which might trigger some unhappy memories for the Germans!). It is a horror movie though there are only two brief scenes which are visually horrific. It's all done, so to speak, with surgical skill! Reminiscent of **Nosferatu** (Murnau's 'poetry of horror') and of **Diabolique** (the same scriptwriters who also adapted their novel for **Vertigo**.) Alida Valli was in **The Third Man** and **The Paradine Case**.



## FACES PLACES

2017 F 4.50 7.8 FRA

**Varda, Agnès (& JR)**

Roberto De Angelis et al

Veteran photographer and film-maker, 88-year old Agnès Varda and director/muralist/photographer JR team up to roam around various parts of France, meeting people, taking photos, pasting up huge photographic murals in all sorts of unlikely places. Most of the film was shot in rural and provincial France. We meet quite a few characters with at least one foot off the grid. The whole shebang is deliberately but deceptively casual and 'off-the-cuff' but it must have entailed a lot of hard work. Free-wheeling, largely improvisatory, fresh, lively, charming and given extra emotional texture by the growing relationship between Agnes and JR. Loved the anticlimactic and abortive visit to Varda's old pal Jean-Luc Godard. Was also taken by the goat woman.

Varda was married to Jacques Demy whose **Umbrellas of Cherbourg** still has a strong cult following among hardcore cinephiles. He died in 1990. Agnès died in 2019 at the age of 90.



## FAR FROM MEN

2014 F 4.50 7.2 FRA

**Oelhoffen, David**

Vigo Mortensen, Reda Kateb,  
Sonia Amori

1954, Algeria. School-teacher in a remote desert village reluctantly gets involved in a long march. French troops, rogue soldiers, angry villagers, rebels, mad Arabs in the desert, fighting, bloodshed, moral choices. Atmospheric and slightly surreal soundtrack by Nick Cave. Wide open spaces and forbidding terrain. Some faint echoes of Sergio Leone, Werner Herzog and several Westerns (**The Ride Home**, **3.10 to Yuma** and various other “man and prisoner on difficult journey” stories). I liked the tender scene with the prostitute. One can understand why one critic wrote that this is ‘the kind of movie in which sobriety and a stalwart sense of seriousness yield more inertia than profundity’. He calls it a Distinguished Slog and is also troubled by the film’s changes to Camus’ story. I don’t agree. I found it quite engrossing, enjoyed the small leavening of humour, and thought it intelligently explored enough issues to justify the film’s admittedly over-insistent air of D&M. Amongst other things it’s a story about a man trying, against the odds, to put down some roots. The film is based on a Camus story and displays altogether Camusian themes. (Camus was troubled throughout his adult life by the seemingly relentless pressure to ‘take sides’ in a situation where both sides were bad, most notably in the Algerian debacle. In this respect he was quite unlike his one-time friend and compatriot Sartre who was all too ready to ‘take sides’ no matter what even when it meant treating his friend Camus quite disgracefully!

Shot in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Reda Kateb was born in France to an Algerian actor and a French nurse of Czech and Italian origin. He is a film director as well as actor.



## FAREWELL MR HAFFMANN

2021 F 4.25 6.7 FRA

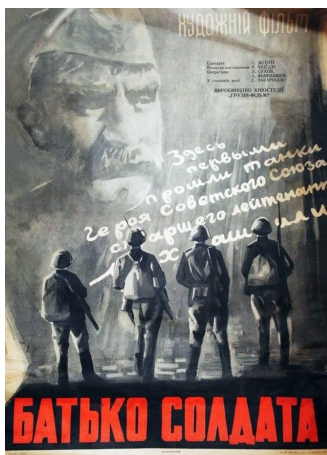
**Cavayé, Fred**

Denis Rouden

Daniel Auteil, Sara Giraudeau,  
Gilles Lelouche, Nikolai Kinski

Paris, 1942. A jeweller with a successful business, sensing the impending round-up of Jews, hustles his family out of Paris with a promise to soon follow. He hands his business and home over to an employee on the understanding that it will all be handed back to him at war's end. But his own escape is thwarted and he has to hide out in the basement while his assistant and his wife take over the running of the business. Soon difficult emotional and moral decisions confront them. The atmosphere steadily darkens, life becomes more complex and dangerous, compromises are made, roles are reversed. It's a tense, gripping, multi-layered drama which is handled with some poise and feeling by players and filmmakers alike. Auteil received most of the plaudits but the other two principals are also excellent. A somewhat different and entirely commendable wartime drama. Adapted from a play by Jean-Philippe Daguerre. Nikolai Kinski (the German officer) is indeed the son of you know who.





## FATHER OF A SOLDIER

1964 F 3.75 8.7 RUS

**Chkheidze, Rezo**

Sergo Zakariadze, Vladimir  
Privaltsev, Aleksandr Nazarov

Russia, WW2. An old, tough-as-boots peasant leaves home to visit his wounded son in hospital only to discover that he has returned to the front. The old fella continues his search and joins the fight. The only review I could find describes it as “a Soviet anti-war film”; no, it’s a pro-Soviet war film — ie. its central thrust is not anti-war but flag-waving for the country as embodied in the ordinary folk. It’s generally well done, has some fine sequences, and gets its traction from a powerful and energetic (and perhaps sometimes overstated) performance by Sergo Zakariadze. However, it’s a more or less conventional war story with a fair dose of sentimental propaganda (much like its American and British counterparts).

I am astonished by its stellar IMDb rating of 8.7!!! Absurd!

Zakariadze was a Russian footballer in the 1920s.

Good luck in pronouncing the director’s name!



## FEAR

1954 F 4.00 6.6 ITA

### Rossellini, Roberto

Ingrid Bergman, Mathias  
Weiman, Edith Schulze-Westrum

*Woman on the Edge of a Precipice*. The last of Rossellini's Bergman films (there are four though many critics refer to the preceding three as 'the Bergman trilogy'), loosely based on a Stefan Zweig story and made in several different versions. Well set-up scientists in post-war Germany, children in the care of servants in the country. Bergman is having an affair which she is desperate to keep from her husband. Betrayal, guilt, blackmail, treachery, despair (yes, it's full-blown melodrama). Bergman, as usual, is electrifying, the others problematic because of the dubbing. City-country/adult-children/guilt-innocence motif with allegorical resonances about science and post-war Europe. Expressionist cinematography, polished style (more like **Europa 51** than **Stromboli** or **Journey to Italy**). Renzo doesn't hold back with his soundtrack either.

These multi-language, multi-national versions cause all sorts of problems, as here. The English dubbing is quite unsatisfactory and disconcerting, Bergman's voice being the only one that doesn't sound like it's coming from someone sitting in a recording studio. Best to have the sub-titles on anyway. The other major problem is the ending which is abrupt, facile, implausible and unsatisfying.

It's a strange and uneven film, the faults of which are largely redeemed by Bergman (rather than Rossellini): she gives a highly charged performance which ranks with her best. Despite the film's flaws there is enough going on to make this a compelling experience. Rossellini's second- or even third-best is still pretty good.



## FEMME INFIDÈLE, LA

1969 F 4.50 7.5 FRA

**Chabrol, Claude**

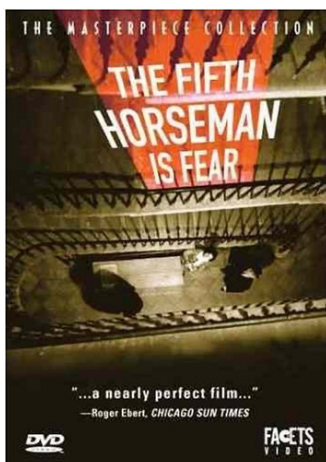
Jean Rabier

Stéphane Audran, Michel  
Bouquet, Michel Duchaussoy,  
Maurice Ronet

Cool, elegant, understated thriller of some moral complexity and ambiguity. Shifting narrative point of view: shifting moral perspective. A study of bourgeois affluence and life-style, marriage, desire, complicity and dependence. Food and drink figure prominently (as per usual in Chabrol's films; he was a gourmet cook). As to the treatment of the material/theme: cynicism and sympathy in equal measure (not unlike Hitch with whom he is so frequently compared). Marvellous performance from Michel Bouquet (husband); Stéphane Audran is good (as she almost always is) as the wife. Some Hitchcockian allusions and reminiscences, eg. the sinking of the corpse/car (**Psycho**) and the backwards-forwards zoom shot with which the film ends (cf. final staircase scene in **Vertigo**). Also some black comedy. I always think of the scalpel with Chabrol — so deft, so precise, so deadly! One of the film's pleasures, unsurprisingly, is Rabier's cinematography.

The restaurant/nightclub scene is so 60s it's embarrassing! Remade by Adrian Lynne as **Unfaithful** (unseen) with Diane Lane and Richard Gere (not a promising start!).

I like this as much as any of Chabrol's 60-70s golden run of crime thrillers, along with **This Man Must Die** (69) and **Just Before Nightfall** (71). At the time my favourite was **Le Boucher** (70) ... but tastes change.



## FIFTH HORSEMAN IS FEAR

1965 F 5.00 7.2 CZE

### Brynych, Zbynek

Jan Kalis

Miroslav Macháček, Jiri  
Adamira, Josef Vinklar, Jiri  
Vrstala

Prague, WW2 & 1960s. A Jewish doctor, forbidden from practising medicine and working in a warehouse classifying confiscated property, secretly treats a wounded political dissident. The fugitive is hiding out in the apartment block where stealth, paranoia and despair pervade the atmosphere. The State intrudes in the endless stream of monotonous slogans belching from the radio, and through the corrupting influence of the fear of an unnamed but palpable threat. A police raid brings things to a head. The film is shot in a somewhat expressionist style with touches of surrealism, achieving its effects through abrupt editing, bleak compositions and a dissonant soundtrack as well as the restrained performances, especially by Miroslav Macháček (the doctor). Everything is out of kilter in a world where nightmare has become reality, most disquieting in the madhouse/hospital sequence. Whilst we are obviously in Nazi territory the narrative takes place in a somewhat abstracted world which could be under the heel of any kind of totalitarian regime, faceless, brutal, ever-present. The usual iconographic paraphernalia of the anti-Nazi WW2 film is absent — no swastikas, tanks, flags, no overt reference to the camps (except through the factory symbolism and the sinister smoking chimney), no pathological Gestapo goons. It must surely have had powerful resonances in Czechoslovakia in 1965. Soon banned by the commissars. A film that will inevitably put you in mind of Kafka, Orwell, Solzhenitsyn, and remind you, in different ways, of films like **The Trial**, **The Shop on Main Street**, **Ashes and Diamonds** and various other works from the Czech New Wave. Some echoes of Fritz Lang. One scene has been edited out of this print: the doctor's visit, while searching for morphine, to a Nazi brothel, a scene which directly references the gas chambers. **TFHF** (American title) is powerful, disturbing and, in its unsentimental affirmation of courage and moral integrity, quite beautiful. Should be much more widely known. I'm very glad to have discovered it, albeit very belatedly.



## FILL THE VOID

2012 F 4.00 6.7 ISR

**Burshtein, Rama**

Hadras Yaron, Iftach Klien, Irit  
Sheleg, Chaim Sharir, Razia  
Israeli

Troubled times for an orthodox Hasidic family in modern-day Tel Aviv, with daughter Shira in a fix over whether to marry her recently widowed brother-in-law. Depicts the traditional ways of this deeply religious, somewhat hermetic community in carefully nuanced fashion. A gentle, insightful film which quietly explores human predicaments and achieves its powerful effects through the script, direction, performances, a haunting score and the carefully controlled cinematography (long takes, shallow focus and close-ups are the order of the day). Great ending. The kind of film which Hollywood today seems quite incapable of producing. An impressive debut from Rama Burshtein (herself an orthodox Hasidic Jew).



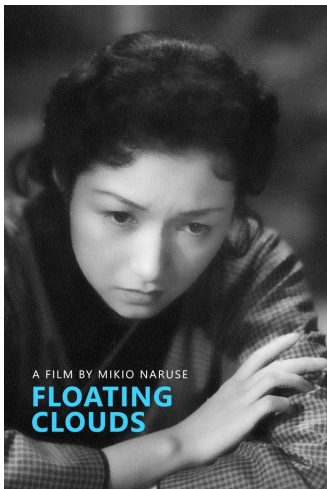
## FLAVOR OF GREEN TEA,

1952 F 4.50 7.9 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Shin Saburi, Michiyo Kogure,  
Keiko, Tsushima, Chisu Tyu

Portrait of a Marriage. Mid-life trials and tribulations of comfortable and complacent couple. All in low-key. Shin Saburi and Michiyo Kogure are wonderful beyond praise. The film's final twenty minutes are quintessential Ozu, as is the whole film though this is a more modest and a more or less purely domestic affair compared to his frontline masterpieces (though the effects of Westernization/modernization are ever present). How much meaning, feeling and nuance can be created in the simple preparation of rice and tea?? A slightly different tone from most of his later films — a mixture of the playful, the satiric and the serious. Taeko is a daring, interesting and compelling characterization. And no one says “Mmmm” better than Shin Saburi ... and what a touching performance he gives. For most of the film I was inclined to think it was a lesser Ozu — and it is — but the last half hour is pure magic.



## FLOATING CLOUDS

1955    F    4.50    7.8    JAP

### Naruse, Miko

Hideko Takamine, Masayuki Mori,  
Mariko Okada

Married man and beautiful young woman fall in love in Indo-China during the war. After they return to Tokyo things go downhill. Another relentlessly bleak and sombre film about the plight of women, love gone wrong and the malaise of postwar Japan, handled with Naruse's usual 'austere delicacy', to recall an earlier observation. Hideko, as always, is heart-breaking; Masayuki Mori is also altogether splendid in a challenging role. The whole film is ravishingly done and its themes perfectly realized.

Some of the critics miss out on the source of much of the film's power and poignancy when they read Hideko's character in entirely positive terms, and Mori's in negative; it ain't that simple my friends!

Although this is probably Naruse's most celebrated film in the West, and despite its manifest distinction, I think it's no better than the other three seen previously: **A Wife's Heart**, **When a Woman Ascends the Stairs** and **Yearning**. It's perfectly clear from these four films that Naruse is a pantheon director.



## FLOATING WEEDS

1959 F 4.25 8.0 JAP

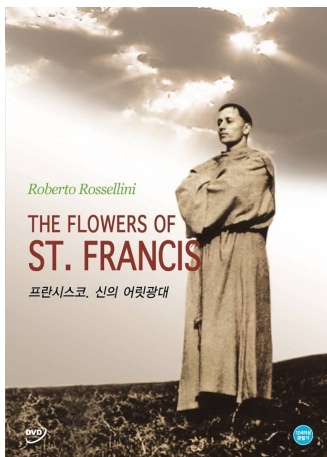
**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Ganjiro Makamura Hirsohi  
Kawaguchi, Machika Kyo, Ayako  
Wakao, Haruko Sugimura

Ozu's late work about a travelling troupe of Kabuki players, down on their luck, visiting a seaside town where the master of the troupe rejoins his former lover and their son. Trouble ensues. Rather more dramatic action than usual in Ozu and an unexpectedly sly sense of humour, some if it a little risqué by comparison with other of his films I've seen. The Ozu style is on full display; static, low level, 50mm camera; no tracking, dollying or panning, no wide angle, no telephoto; no dissolves; the interest in the formalities of composition; the use of "pillow shots"; the complex and evocative soundtrack. The usual Ozu themes: families, time, lost dreams, love, change, age. And yes, the usual adjectives also spring to mind: melancholy, delicate, subtle, contemplative, slow-burning. Quintessentially Japanese and completely universal (as Satyajit Ray could only be an Indian but whose films transcend all cultural limits). Like Bresson, I think Ozu is better in BW — though I am much less troubled by the use of colour here than in Bresson's later films. (I think Ozu made three colour films late in his career.)

A remake of his 1934 film of the same name. Ozu made 54 films, most of them variations on the same perennial themes. In varying ways Ozu reminds one of Dreyer, Bresson and Satyajit Ray — very exalted company!





## FLOWERS OF ST FRANCIS

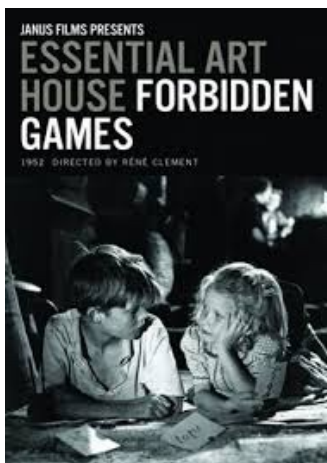
1950    F    4.00    7.5    ITA

**Rossellini, Roberto**

(unprofessional actors, mostly monks)

Episodic film, shot in neo-realist style, depicting incidents from the life of St Francis and his followers. Textured with a sense of the spiritual radiance in mundane, everyday life and affirming the true freedom of poverty. Told in very simple but fervent, sometimes humorous fashion, without any grandstanding, either stylistic or theological. Some beautiful and memorable scenes: the opening in the rain; the meeting with Chaira (Claire); Ginepro's (Juniper) taming of the tyrant; going out into the world. (In some sense Ginepro is the real "hero" of the film.) Doesn't have the exhilarating dynamism and visual audacity, nor the overwhelming drama of **Rome Open City** or **Germany Year Zero**, nor the power and beauty of Pasolini's **Gospel According to Matthew**. But it is a fine film nevertheless.

Like **Paisan** and **Rome Open City**, this was co-written by Rossellini and Federico Fellini, and scored by Renzo Rossellini. The last of Rossellini's neo-realist films before launching into the extraordinary sequence of films with Ingrid Bergman. (This came after **Stromboli**.) As can be seen from my rating, it's no real criticism to say that this is the least of the Rossellinis I've seen. It's charming, simple, modest, humble, affecting, as is appropriate to a film about St Francis and the Franciscan ideal.



## FORBIDDEN GAMES

1952 F 4.00 8.0 FRA

**Clement, René**

Robert Juillard

Georges Poujouly, Brigitte Fossey, Amédée, Laurence Badie, Suzanne Courtal

France, WWII. Nazi air attack leaves Paulette orphaned and lost in the French countryside – an intense and harrowing opening in which the loss of the child's dog somehow seems even more horrific than the killing of the parents. She is befriended by farm boy Michel, and taken in by his family. The main story concerns the plotting by the two children to steal crosses to place over the graves of the girl's dead dog and various other farm animals. While farmyard life and a feud with the neighbours goes on, with the war coming ever closer, Michel and Paulette conjure up a kind of fantasy world to immunize themselves against the horrors of war. The performances of the two child actors are remarkable. **FG**, Clément's first feature, was controversial at the time and was simultaneously criticized for 'trivializing' the war, for subjecting the child actors to trauma, for being too 'morose' and for ridiculing the French peasantry; none of these claims have much cogency. **FG** is a quiet, sometimes ironic meditation on the ambiguities of childhood, the riddles of innocence and experience, and the mystery of death, balanced by a wry and sometimes humorous observation of the rural life of the adults. The story outline might suggest something mushy and mawkish — far from it; the film is actually not at all sentimental and is not without a disquieting, even sinister undercurrent (young children are not only naive and vulnerable but they can also be precociously manipulative, sadistic and destructive). I don't believe the film is essentially or primarily a humanistic anti-war film, which is how it is often read; it's something darker and more troubling, in a way similar to Tarkovsky's superior children-in-war film, **Ivan's Childhood** (or to choose a film from another milieu, Clayton's **The Innocents**). Clément, and more particularly the scriptwriters (Aurenche and Bost) were famously excoriated by a young François Truffaut as embodying all that was worst in the French Establishment cinema of the 1950s — effete, genteel, literary, polished, uncinematic — charges that look extraordinarily ill-advised against the actual experience of watching the film. I'm not ready to go with the frequently-made claim that **FG** is a masterpiece but it's certainly a film of considerable distinction.



## FOREVER A WOMAN

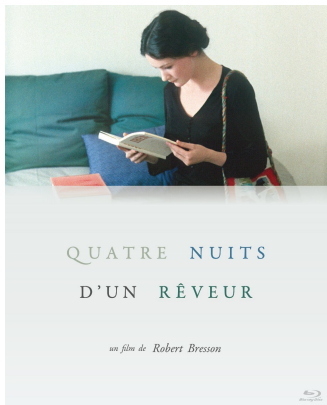
1955 F 4.25 7.8 JAP

**Tanaka, Kinuyo**

Kumenobu, Fujioka

Yumeji Tsukioka, Masayuki Mori,  
Yoko Sugi, Ryoji Hayama

Fumiko is an aspiring poet with two young children, trapped in a loveless arranged marriage with a grouchy husband. She wants out to pursue her writing but alas, she discovers she has breast cancer... things move on from there. An ambitious and daring proto-feminist exploration of marriage, 'femininity', motherhood, body-image, career, disease, death. The style is generally functional and without the grace of the pre-eminent masters of the domestic melodrama, Ozu and Mizoguchi, but it is quite fluid and with some striking sequences. Yumeji Tsukioka is wonderful in the lead role while Masayuki Mori delivers a nicely shaded and touching performance as Mr Hori, Fumiko's former teacher with whom she is secretly in love. All the characters are portrayed with some sensitivity and sympathy while the pathos never collapses into slush. Overall an intense, deeply-felt but poised treatment of some sombre themes. Fumiko is based on the real-life Fumiko Nakajo who died of breast cancer in 1954, aged 31. The film was originally released under the unhappy and soon abandoned title of **The Eternal Breasts**. Kinuyo Tanaka (1909-1977) is one of the most significant figures in the Japanese cinema: 250 acting credits including 15 films made with Mizoguchi (**Ugetsu Monogatari**, **The Life of Ohara**, **Sansho the Bailiff** among them) as well work with Ozu, Kurosawa, Naruse and Kinoshita. She was only the second Japanese woman to direct a feature. Despite Mizoguchi's discouragement she directed 6 features between 1953 and 1962. She was a filmmaker of considerable distinction who has only recently started to receive her due as a director (as distinct from her long elevation as an actor).



## FOUR NIGHTS OF A D

1971 F 4.00 7.6 FRA

**Bresson, Robert**

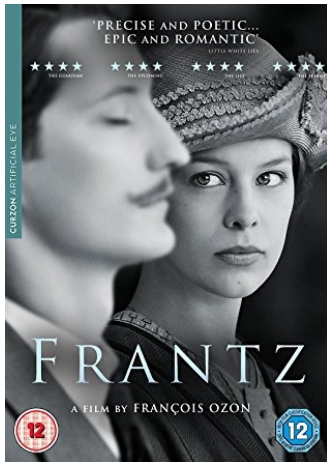
Guillaume Des Forets, Isabelle Weingarten

### Four Nights of a Dreamer

Loosely adapted from a Dostoevsky novella, a tale of young love, unrequited passion, erotic yearnings, fragile dreams and romantic loss. The two young people might answer to the title of one of Dostoevsky's great novels, *The Insulted and the Injured*. As usual, the style is austere and spare but also sometimes lyrical and beautiful, while the tone is sometimes ironic but never cynical. The film might also be read as a quietly humorous take on a kind of narcissistic romanticism which pervaded much of the Nouvelle Vague cinema of the late 50s and 60s, as Byronic romanticism influenced so many of the young Dostoevsky's contemporaries; in any event Bresson is a long way away from Truffaut, Chabrol et al. In the Bressonian *oeuvre*, this one sits above **A Gentle Woman** but below the BW masterworks.

I have difficulty with Bresson in colour, in contemporary (1960s) Paris; he belongs to the unchanging French countryside, and his visuals are more haunting in BW.

Visconti adapted the same story for **White Nights** (1957).



## FRANTZ

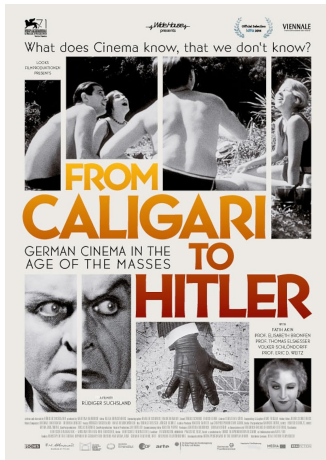
2016 F 4.50 7.5 FRA

### Ozon, François

Pascal Marti

Pierre Niney, Paula Beer, Ernst Stötzner, Marie Gruber

1918, Germany. Anna, a young woman who has lost her fiancé in the war, finds a stranger, a Frenchman, placing flowers on the soldier's grave. He harbours a terrible secret which will shape his relations with the dead man's family. The vicissitudes and exigencies of romance, the folly of belligerent nationalism, the ravages of war. Inspired by Lubitsch's **Broken Lullaby** (1932) but given some different twists and narrative elaborations. It's an engrossing story, elegantly shot in monochrome with intermittent (and irritating) transitions into sepia-tinted colour). Ozon's rendition deploys a different narrative structure, is visually more stylish, and is more psychologically credible and morally coherent than its predecessor but lacks its human warmth and gentle humour. The old fellow's speech is much more powerful and moving in the Lubitsch. Here the story is told in a cool, restrained and 'objective' manner. Paula Beer is utterly compelling (as she so often is), Niney is interesting and appealing as Adrien Rivoire. **Frantz** is one of the most impressive European arthouse films of recent years, comparable with the best work of such auteurs as Pawlikowski, Petzold and Zvyagintsev: can't do better than that! See it!



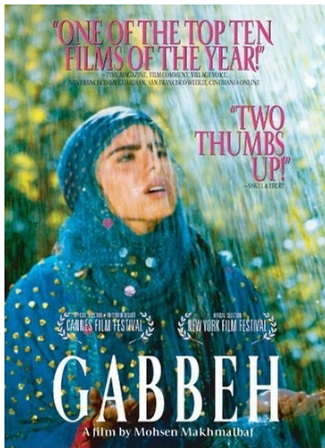
## FROM CALIGARI T HITLER

2014 F 4.25 7.3 GER

**Suchsland, Rüdiger**

F Reiman & H Schmuck

Stylish and thoughtful doco about the German cinema of the Weimar republic, analyzing the political and psychological dimension of a range of films in this turbulent period from directors such as Murnau, Weine, Pabst, Siodmak, Lubitsch, Wilder and Lang. The central thesis – that the Weimar cinema, unconsciously so to speak, foreshadows Nazism – and much of the attendant critical commentary derives from Siegfried Kracauer's landmark work from which the film takes its title (a work I read many years ago as a young cinephile). Latter-day talking heads include Thomas Elsaesser, Elisabeth Bronfen, Volker Schorndorff and Fatih Akin. The film also recalls the careers of some of the stars/actors of the era such as Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich, Gustaf Gründgens, Peter Lorre and others. The deepest impression the film made on me was the peculiar genius of Fritz Lang. The first two-thirds of the film is impressive indeed. The last third is in danger of disappearing up one of its own orifices. Like German operas, it's too long. But it's a fine reminder of one of the most creative periods in cinema – anywhere, anytime.



## GABBEH

1996 F 4.00 6.9 IRA

### Makhmalbaf, Mohsen

Mahmoud Kalri

Shaghayeh Fjodat, Abbas Sayah,  
Hossein Moharami, Rogheih  
Moharami

A magic carpet ride! Iran. Story about a young woman from a community of nomadic goat herders and weavers. She wants to elope with an elusive horseman who rides alone in the desert and mountains but her father puts up a roadblock. Really a picture of a mountain community and an exercise in the use of colour, interwoven with a timeless fable. Evocative use of the landscape, haunting music and sounds, seasonal rhythms and the rich symbolism of weaving. Some exquisite tableaux. Lots of goats. Somewhat reminiscent of **The Yellow Dog** and **The Weeping Camel**. gentle, modest, charming film with some salt and sand. Another to add to iran;s impressive track record over the last half-century.



## **GARDE À VUE**

1981    F    4.00    7.8    FRA

**Miller, Claude**

Lino Ventura, Romy Schneider

Paris police office. A long interrogation of a rape-and-murder suspect. It's intense, gripping, cleverly plotted with enough ambiguities to keep the tension ratcheted up. Lino Ventura (**Army of Shadows** etc) gives another understated but powerful performance; Michel Serrault (the suspect) and Romy Schneider (who died soon after) also deliver. Quite a reticent treatment of the more squalid aspects of the story. A few touches of wintry humour. Intelligent film-making and quite intense viewing.





## GATES OF THE NIGHT

1946    F    4.00    7.2    FRA

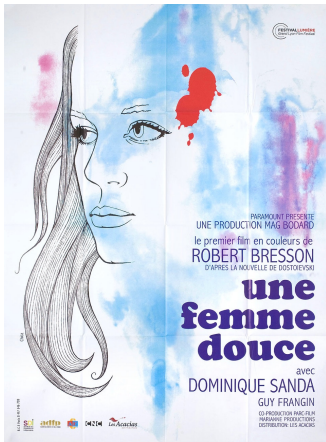
### Carné, Marcel

Philippe Agostini

Pierre Brasseur, Serge Reggiani,  
Yves Montand, Nathalie Nattier,  
Julien Carette

Another offering in Marcel Carné's style of "poetic realism", following **Port of Shadows**, **Le Jour Se Leve**, **Les Enfants du Paradis**. Perhaps the weakest of the four but still with considerable appeal. The story traces the fate (or "Destiny") of half a dozen characters in Paris in the last days of the war. Its oblique but insistent theme concerns the psychic traumas left by the war, treated with a very Gallic blend of theatrical artificiality, melodramatic pathos, and ironic/cynical humour. The visual style, especially the *mise-en-scène*, might be described as "baroque noir". Scripted by Jacques Prevert, a regular collaborator with Carné. Stylish and enjoyable but without much emotional torque. The story started life as a ballet. I liked **Port of Shadows** and **Le Jour Se Leve** much better.

Carné's career subsequently went into a slow tailspin.



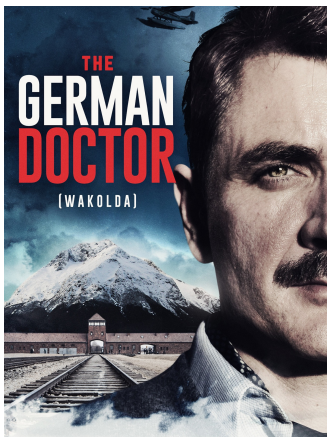
## GENTLE WOMAN, A

1969 F 4.00 7.7 FRA

**Bresson, Robert**

Dominique Sanda, Guy Frangin,  
Jeanne Lobre

Bresson (and Dostoevsky) at his most opaque and enigmatic. A bleak tale about a loveless marriage between two incompatible people, one an empty soul, the other a lost one struggling against spiritual and psychological confinement. Amenable to any number of different readings ... but in any event a meditation on human aloneness and the loss of any sense of the spiritual and transcendent in a hectic, materialistic and mechanized world. The usual Bressonian techniques, if that's the word. Also a film of entries and exits! Does the very short scene with the crucifix provide a key to the film's central concerns? I have trouble with the whole notion of a Bresson film in colour — B&W seems to his natural milieu. One of three Dostoevsky adaptations by Bresson, along with **Pickpocket** and **Four Nights of Dreamer**.



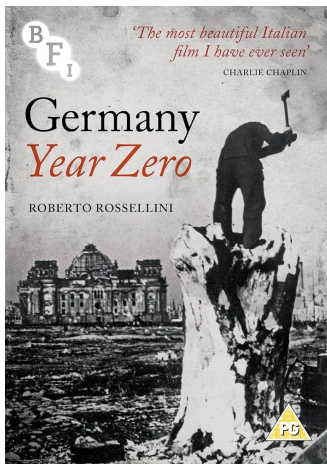
## GERMAN DOCTOR, THE

2014 F 5.00 6.8 ARG

Puenzo, Lucia

Alex Brendemühl, Natalia Oreiro,  
Florencia Bado, Diego Peretti,  
Elena Roger

Patagonia, 1960. Writer-director Lucia Puenzo filmed her own novel, *Wakolda*, an imaginative reconstruction of a six-month period in the life of Josef Menegle. A disturbing film full of menace and dread, tightly controlled, and dealing thoughtfully with its volatile material. Coming-of-age drama/ political thriller/philosophical meditation. Could very easily have gone badly wrong. The cast is uniformly good and I like the way the film is put together, including the use of Lilith as the narrator. I was occasionally reminded of **El Sur** and **Spirit of the Beehive**. The symbolism of doll factories etc is perhaps a little too flagrant but it works well enough. Easy enough to categorize Menegle as an evil Nazi – but how different were his experiments from much “science” that has gone on in this field everywhere? And after all, eugenics was widely heralded as the new frontier of science in the early 20th century. What’s changed?



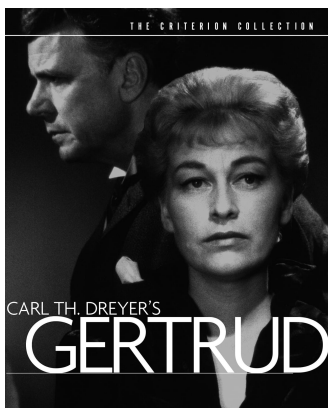
## GERMANY YEAR ZERO

1948 F 5.00 7.9 ITA

**Rossellini, Roberto**

Edmund Moeschke, Ernst  
Pittchau, Ingetraud Hinze, Franz  
Kruger

The third in Rossellini's ground-breaking war trilogy, this one concerned with the psychic and moral consequences of Nazism and war in Germany. A relentlessly desolate and deeply unsettling examination of innocence corrupted, of childhood (and everything it represents) destroyed, of material and spiritual impoverishment. In the neo-realist style which blends documentary record, fiction, expressionism and visual symbolism in a very non-Hollywood fashion. Made in the usual *ad hoc* and improvisatory Rossellini method (eg. only a fragmentary and provisional script which drove everyone else mad) and with non-professional actors. (Moeschke was a circus boy.) The exteriors were all shot in Berlin, the interiors in a Rome film studio six months later. The ending is not altogether psychologically convincing, but it retains its symbolic force nonetheless. The musical soundtrack (by Renzo Rossellini) is too obtrusive and melodramatic. ("Jobs for the brothers!") One of Doris Lessing novels was entitled *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* — it came to mind as I watched this film. Rossellini's young son died abruptly in 1946; his presence/absence haunts the film. In its attempt to understand something of the horror and tragedy of Germany the film was an act of imaginative daring and human sympathy. The young boy Edmund is a disturbing character, unsympathetically portrayed (deliberately), and has something in common with Gunther Grass' Oscar in *The Tin Drum* (i.e., the pathologies of Nazism made manifest in a young child). A very different strategy from the conventional use of children in neo-realism and elsewhere. The film was criticized for being "nihilistic", "despairing", "negative" etc, to which there are two answers: 1. you want a "positive" film about the toll of Nazism, Holocaust, total war?? 2. To make a work of art out of human experience (no matter how dreadful) is to make a positive statement — about the possibilities of art (and thus of human creativity) if nothing else.



## GERTRUD

1964 F 5.00 7.5 DEN

### Dreyer, Carl

Henning Bendtsen

Nina Pens Rode, Ebbe Rode,  
Bendt Rothe, Axel Gebuhr, Baard  
Owe

Gertrud and Her Men, four of them. Lovers talking across an invisible abyss. A haunting film with a rigorous, spare style, a stately formality and something of the feel of classical tragedy, achieved partly by the declamatory style of acting — or, should one say, “performance”. (The players “recite”; one might say they are akin to the performers and instruments of an orchestra under the control of a splendid conductor.) A familiar fin-de-siècle story and theme (the pathos of romanticism; the ambiguous intercourse of desire, memory, dream and love) with a kind of Ibsenesque, proto-feminist theme about the search for independence, autonomy and respect. Certain “Scandinavian” motifs and preoccupations — what the detractors call “Scandi-hooey”. Beautiful use of space, light and décor. The “shadow scene” is a special treat. Also loved the banquet sequence — but **Gertrud** is full of beautiful, painful and poignant sequences. A great ending. Some might find the narrative a bit slow and the lack of overt dramatic action “boring”; for my own part I found the whole thing enthralling, nay mesmerising — despite the distancing effects and the comparative lack of “identification”. The young lover/wastrel/composer accents the “hopeless cause”, which dissipates dramatic intensity. Luther, Strindberg and Ibsen are loitering in the background and there are irresistible comparisons with Ozu (the austerity, formality, control), Bergman (the narrative material, locale etc) and Bresson, though the style is in many respects quite different and distinctive. Poorly received on its release though a few cinephiles recognized a masterpiece when they saw one. Dreyer only made five full features in a forty year career, the other four being **The Passion of Joan of Arc**, **Vampyr**, **Day of Wrath**, **Ordet**, masterworks all.



## GIRL IN BLACK, A

1956 F 4.25 7.7 GRE

### Cacoyannis, Michael

Walter Lassally

Dimitris Horn, Eleni Zafirov, Ellie  
Lambeti, Anestis Vlachos

Two Athenian friends, one a middle-aged architect, the other a slightly younger writer and playboy, visit the Greek island of Hydra for a brief holiday. They soon become enmeshed in a web of rumour and scandal, and the harassment of two women, a widower and her daughter, in the house where they have rented rooms. Behind the idyllic surface of the Aegean island there are dark currents of intolerance, ignorance and cruelty. The narrative winds up to a dramatic and moving climax.

Beautifully shot by Walter Lassally with a single camera, capturing light and shade (both literally and metaphorically), the harsh beauty of the island, the rhythms of life in the fishing village and the emotional turmoil of the characters. Lambeti as Marina, the young woman, delivers the film's most striking performance.

This caused a splash at Cannes but now, sadly, seems to be largely forgotten (less than a thousand viewers on IMDb). Cacoyannis' hour in the sun came with **Zorba the Greek**, 1964. His last film was the somewhat stodgy **The Cherry Orchard**, 1999, in which he was reunited, 35 years later, with one of the stars of **Zorba**, Alan Bates.



## GIRL IN THE RUMOUR, THE

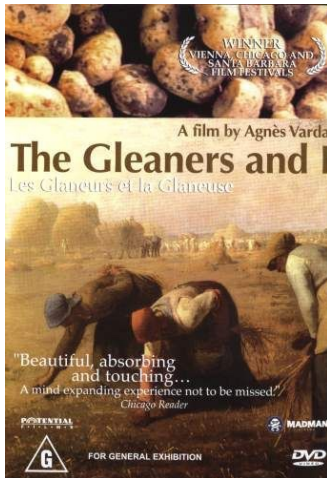
1935    F    4.00    6.7    JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Sachiko Chiba, Kamatari  
Fujiwara, Toshiko Itô, Ryuko  
Umezono, Kô Mihashi

Early Naruse family melodrama. Widowed father struggling to run a saki shop and cutting a few corners along the way, grandfather on the booze, two daughters — one a modern, Westernized party girl on the up, the other a dutiful, loving and traditional-minded daughter. There's also an uncle who is trying to arrange a marriage and the father's mistress on the periphery of the family. It's done with a light touch and only runs to 54 minutes but the usual Narusian themes are there and there is a good deal going on under the surface. The cast are uniformly excellent. I especially like Toshiko Itô who played the abandoned mother and poet in **Wife! Be Like a Rose!** I'm surprised Ryuko Umezono (Kunie, the dutiful daughter) didn't have a more illustrious career. She's another fore-runner of Hideko Takamine.

The print is just fair but we must be grateful that it survived. Not to be confused with Mizoguchi's film (1954) of the same name, quite unrelated.



## GLEANERS AND I, THE

2000 F 3.75 7.7 FRA

**Varda, Agnès**

Agnès Varda wanders around France talking to gleaners of various kinds — in the fields and vineyards, people scrounging market refuse, junk collectors, artists who assemble and recycle rubbish, people on the social margins, lawyers who clarify the laws about gleaning and salvaging. We see various paintings and drawings of gleaners, mainly from the 19thC. Along the way Varda indulges in various whims and fancies concerning her own life and work. I wasn't quite as taken with this as many of the critics but it is an interesting film of some charm.





## GOSPEL ACCORDING TO M

1964 F 4.75 7.9 ITA

**Pasolini, Pier Paolo**

Enrique Irazoqui, Susanna  
Pasolini, Mario Socrate

The first forty minutes or so are mesmerizing; not surprisingly Pasolini can't quite maintain that level though the rest of the film includes a great deal that is powerful, beautiful, poetic, disturbing and arresting. The last half hour is intense. So, it's the hour in the middle that sometimes sags just a little. Love Pasolini's use of faces, especially those of women and children ((the facial close-ups are balanced by Pasolini's penchant for the long-shot), and the use of locations is brilliant (all Italian: Mel Gibson used the same locations for **The Passion of Christ**). Enrique Irazoqui (a Spanish college student) brings strength, beauty and dignity to an impossible role and the rest of the "cast" (mostly Italian peasants; Judas was a truck driver) are superb. (Christ's voice was supplied by someone else and dubbed over Irazoqui's.) The neo-realist style is altogether apposite; its rawness gives the film much of its energy and vitality. The film's many silences are eloquent indeed. As a friend remarked, Pasolini started with a good script! As in Matthew's Gospel, much is left out — a film about the life of Christ with no Mary Magdalene? The music is generally wonderful and the counter-pointing of Christ's words and the music is handled so effectively...but that Latin American-type music at the end (and once previously) is jarring. It's an abrasive picture of an angry Christ — a useful antidote to the pastel-tinted Jesus of Victorian storybooks. — but more of Christ's gentle and compassionate aspect would have given a fuller picture, as would have a tempering of Matthew's messianic heat with some of the mystical calm of John. And was Jesus really this joyless? But then again, a film can't do everything — what this film does do, it does with complete conviction. In the secret, innermost chamber of his heart Pasolini must have been a Christian, whatever his avowed ideas and commitments. (How does a Marxist atheist, obsessed with violence, degradation and sexual perversion, make such a fervently sincere and compelling film about the life of Christ? Of course part of the answer lies in Christ's radical identification with the poor, the deformed, the criminal, the outcast — but still... We might ask the same question about Buñuel and **Nazarin**.) Pasolini's own mother plays the older Mary and Pasolini himself is one of the three wise men. There is something Dreyer-like in Pasolini's sculptural use of human figures and his meditations on the human face — though in other respects the two styles are radically different. The film upset the French Left and the Italian Right — musta been doing something right!



## GRANDE ILLUSION, LA

1937    F    4.25    8.1    FRA

### Renoir, Jean

Jean Gabin, Pierre Fresnay, Erich von Stroheim, Marcel Dalio, Dita Parlo, Julien Carette

WW1. Group of French soldiers in a German POW camp attempt to escape. Three of the officers have an ambiguous relationship with the German commandant. Two officers escape and are sheltered by a German widow.

This widely-acclaimed film is often cited as one of the great anti-war movies; actually it's primarily about the death of the old order in Europe, one in which there were certain codes and values which were seen to transcend national differences. Of course it *also* has something to say about the futility and destructiveness of war. And it's a master class in some of the techniques and expressive possibilities of the cinema, not least through the fluid and elegant movements of the camera for which Renoir became so well known. Gabin, Fresnay, Von Stroheim, Dalio, Carette — *la crème de la crème* one might say! Stroheim and Fresnay, in particular, are at the top of their game. Dita Parlo is touching as the German widow. This was the first of three great masterpieces which Renoir made in just three years, followed by **La Bête Humaine** (1938) and **Rules of the Game** (39)

Banned, unsurprisingly, in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. The history of the film, its apparent destruction by the Nazis and its eventual restoration is a fascinating one; see Roger Ebert's review on IMDb.



## GRANDMASTER, THE

2013 F 4.00 6.6 HKG

### Wong, Kar Hai

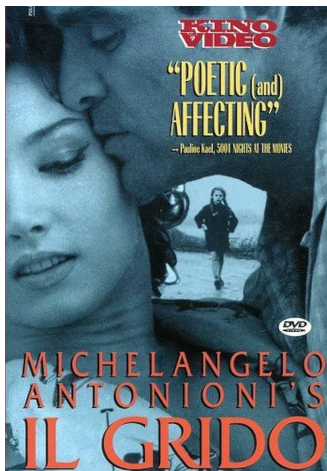
Philippe Le Sourd

Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, Ziyi Zhang, Jin Zhang

A film about the life of Kung Fu Grandmaster Ip Man, martial arts and the fate of China in mid-20th, particularly north-south tensions and the Japanese Occupation. It also centrally concerns Gong Er, the daughter of a Grandmaster from a rival school. Ip Man spent his later life in Hong Kong where he popularized his school of Kung Fu; the most famous of his few pupils was Bruce Lee.

It's a fragmented narrative with one long flashback (Gong Er's encounter with Ma San) but martial arts action (at times becoming an erotic dance), character and theme (the code of honour and the vicissitudes of Fate) are much more important than developing a coherent story (moving one critic to call it "*a biohistorical muddle*"). It's elaborately choreographed and there are plenty of fights (during which my attention sometimes wavered). The film alternates between frenetic but shapely fight scenes and leisurely narrative sequences. Tony Leung and Ziyi Zhang bring a formal grace and gravity to their roles. I enjoyed the soundtrack. The family motif is left frustratingly undeveloped on Ip Man's side of the story. Chuck Bowen (*Slant*): *The film, more likely to invite comparisons to Marcel proust's than the previous Ip Man films, is a gorgeous folly that never entirely emerges from its creator's head. Well, maybe...*

Ziyi Zhang was the young woman in Jimou Zhang's **The Road Home** (1999)



## GRIDO, IL

1957    F    4.50    7.8    ITA

## Antonioni, Michel.

Steve Cochran, Alida Valli, Dorian Gray, Betsy Blair, Lyn Shaw, Ganriella Pallotti

Postwar Italy. Factory worker and mechanic Aldo (Cochran) flees his life in a north Italian town after his lover and mother of his child refuses his marriage proposal, taking the daughter with him. He embarks on a nomadic existence through a depressing and changing landscape of the Po Valley (Antonioni's birthplace). Most of the characters he meets – workers, itinerants, old folks, some lunatics, a prostitute (sort of) – are trapped in dead-end lives. The story is structured by Aldo's relationships (all unsatisfactory) with his daughter and with four adult women: Irma (Valli), Elvia (Blair), Virginia (Gray), Andreina (Shaw). A bleak story of a man, a culture, a landscape in decline. It's about half-way between Antonioni's early neo-realist/political concerns and the increasingly stylized anatomy of bourgeois ennui (most notably, of course, in the **L'Avventura**, **La Notte**, **L'Eclisse** trilogy). The fact that Antonioni chose to work with foreign actors is one of the keys to its transitional position in Antonioni's oeuvre (though it is by no means the case that what preceded this was simple "neorealism" – think, for instance of **L'Amiche**.) Its deceptively simple narrative surface should not deflect our attention from the fact that is a very sophisticated and carefully crafted film, permeated by Antonioni's recurrent themes and preoccupations (loneliness, alienation, desire etc) and by his highly individual aesthetic. As usual, light, love, warmth and humour are in very short supply. As so often in Antonioni we get that slightly dissonant admixture of grim narrative material and exquisite visuals. A powerful and haunting work. It's not a lot of fun but it's cinematic poetry. I can't see any immediate reason why this film should have suffered apparent critical neglect: I rate it up there with the best of Antonioni (and that's a big call).

Steve Cochran was most often seen in American B movies, perhaps most famously in **White Heat**. Cochran and Antonioni didn't get on at all – but that was apparently no impediment to the fine performance Cochran gives here as the inarticulate, unaware, damaged and lost man for whom neither love/family, nor work, nor eroticism, nor politics provide any kind of haven in an increasingly alienated and alienating environment.



## GUILTY, THE

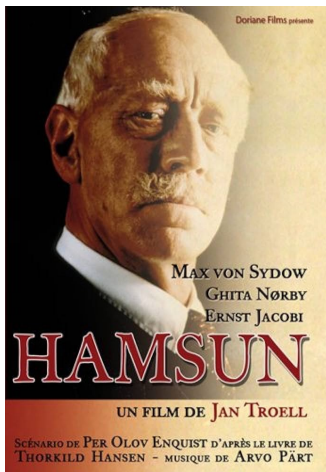
2018 F 4.00 7.5 DEN

### Möller, Gustav

Jakob Cedergren, Jessica  
Dinnage, Omar Shargawi

Denmark. Three people on the edge of a nervous breakdown, only one of them in view. Emergency Services cop gets a garbled call about a kidnapping, and soon finds himself personally involved in a nasty turn of events. The entire narrative takes place within the claustrophobic confines of the office and is carried forward by phone calls. The pace accelerates, the tension ratchets up and there is a good deal of serious worry going on.

There are a few peripheral characters in the office but the film is more or less entirely taken up with the protagonist's phone calls. So, the narrative structure is reminiscent of **Locke** while the one-person-under-extreme-pressure recalls films like **All is Lost** and **Arctic**. As in all such films, almost everything depends on the protagonist delivering a compelling performance, as does Jakob Cedergren here, and on the film-makers' ability to exploit the visual/aural possibilities of the medium; not easy! An impressive directorial debut. Best not to read anything else about this film before viewing.



## HAMSUN

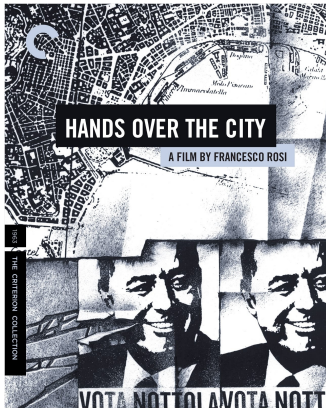
1996 F 4.00 7.1 NOR

### Troell, Jan

Jan Troell

Max von Sydow, Ghita Nørby,  
Anette Hoff, Ernst Jacobi

WWII. Nobel Laureate for Literature, Knut Hamsun, supports the Nazi regime in Norway. Why? With what consequences? Art, politics, family, self-deception, hubris, betrayal, death. Big themes intelligently handled. Exploratory rather than polemical. No easy point-scoring anywhere to be seen. The narrative spans the years 1935 to the year of Hamsun's death, 1952, largely based on a book by Hamsun's wife Marie and told from her perspective. Her own complex role in his complicity with the Nazis is not without its own ironies, ambiguities and unanswered questions. Hamsun himself fell prey to some of the noxious mythology about "blood and soil", the Germanic peoples, a new Europe, the Führer cult and so on. Part of his misguided attraction to the Nazis was fuelled by his loathing of the British. To what extent his ostensible ignorance about the fate of the Jews and other sinister aspects of Nazism was wilful remains a vexed question. The challenging two lead roles are well handled, characters full of paradoxes and contradictions, strengths and weaknesses, fatal flaws. The film exposes the fissures and fault-lines in the marriage and the family. The last scene was rather too tidy and reassuring but overall this was a story in which I became seriously involved. Sad that a DVD with English subtitles is so hard to find.



## HANDS OVER THE CITY

1963 F 4.50 7.7 ITA

**Rosi, Franco**

Rod Steiger, Salvo Randone,  
Guido Alberti

Naples. Imminent city council elections are thrown into turmoil by the scandal surrounding the collapse of a city building (amazing sequence!) and the sale of public land to a private developer (a brooding Rod Steiger). The narrative concerns itself with council chamber plots and swarming street scenes; the personal lives of the characters are almost completely ignored with a couple of notable exceptions — a very unHollywood strategy where political themes are almost always elaborated through individual characters, their personal lives, their inner conflicts and the interface between the public and the private. This film evinces little interest in the latter and where it apparently does so (eg. Nottola in church) it is only to intensify rather than to resolve an enigma. The style of the film is also an interesting mix of doco-realism and bravura visuals/sounds (eg. the powerful soundtrack during the long sequence where Nottola is alone in his office, apparently considering his options). Stewart Klawan: *From that moment [the 1962 appearance at the Berlin Film Festival of Salvatore Giuliano] through the release, in 1976, of his Illustrious Corpses, Rosi created a series of political dramas that were at once provocations, exposés, thrillers, puzzles, and acts of virtuosity...Rosi had taken the immediacy of neorealism —its quasi-documentary presentation of real people, in real locations, acting out real social problems—and merged it with a Wellesian love of showmanship, melancholy, baroque contrivance, and enigma... Nowhere is this combination more outlandishly theatrical, yet absolutely authentic, than in Hands over the City, where actual members of the Naples City Council, playing themselves, in their own chamber, lift up their arms in protest to cry, 'Our hands are clean!' Of the three Rosi films seen in recent times (the others being **The Mattei Affair** and **Lucky Luciano**) this is by far the most impressive.*





## HANNAH ARENDT

2012 F 3.75 7.1 GER

Von Trotta, Margarethe

Barbara Sukowa, Janet McTeer,  
Axel Milberg, Klaus Pohl

A serious film about intellectuals and ideas and the intellectual life, and about issues of real historical and philosophical weight, deserves a lot of credit for trying, even if aspiration and execution do not always meet. The film focuses on Arendt's controversial coverage of the trial of Adolf Eichmann and doesn't give us much sense of Arendt's importance as a political philosopher beyond this immediate subject — but a film can only do so much. The Eichmann trial, Arendt's involvement and the subsequent fallout are dealt with in an intelligent, thoughtful and dramatic way. Contrary to what some critics have said (film is too didactic, too much like a lecture etc) the film does allow room for the viewer to make their own judgements. Arendt is not romanticized and one is given enough to understand why her more thoughtful critics might have felt the way they did. The integration of archival footage was very effective; seeing Eichmann himself gives the film an added frisson. I also liked the use of music. Good acting all round. Sukova deserved her plaudits. (Sukova doesn't look remotely like Hannah Arendt, which probably doesn't matter.) The relationship with Heidegger remains enigmatic, to say the least. Did we need quite so much smoking? (Too many shots of HA thinking and smoking — a difficult subject for a visual medium!). Stylistically and structurally the film is pretty conventional. Its merits derive from the treatment of its themes (credit to Von Trotta and her co-writer, Pamela Katz) and its performances rather than from its style. The only sequence in which the film shows much stylistic daring is the trial itself (which only occupies a small amount of diegetic time). Way back when I loved von Trotta's **The Second Awakening of Christa Klages** and **The Lost Honour of Katherina Blum** (based on a Heinrich Böll novel and co-directed with one-time husband Volker Schlöndorff); how would they stand up today I wonder? Commercially released feature films made by predominantly female crews are still all too rare. Nice to see a film with joint German-Israeli funding.





## HAVRE, LE

2011 F 4.25 7.2 FIN

## Kaurismäki, Aki

Blondin Miguel, Andre Wilms,  
Jacques Daroussin, Kati Outinen

Ageing shoeshine man with ailing wife gets involved in protecting a young African boy who has been people-smuggled into France. Most of the characters are humble working folk, drifters, losers and oddballs. Droll absurdist comedy (with more than a touch of Tati), observant social document, off-beat but feel-good humanistic drama, moral fable, reflexive cinematic homage/spoof. Jean-Pierre Leaud (of Truffaut film fame) is the nasty neighbour. Daroussin (the comically named “Monet”) has wandered in from a Melville film of the 60s, even down to his garb. Not quite as deadpan as **The Man with No Past**, and certainly not as melancholy. I suppose one might say that Kaurismäki's film gives a slightly sentimentalized view of the poor and the working class who all have their hearts in the right place in this story. But that's OK.



## HE WHO MUST DIE

1957 F 4.50 7.5 FRA

### Dassin, Jules

Gilbert Chain

Pierre Vaneck, Jean Servais,  
Meline Mercouri Carl Möhner,  
Grégoire Aslan, Gert Fröbe, René  
Lefèvre

Nikos Kazantzakis published *Christ Recrucified* (aka *The Greek Passion*) in 1948; it appeared in English translation in 1954. Jules Dassin, now in exile from Hollywood and based in France, put this film together in Crete (Kazantzakis' birthplace) in 1957. The story is set in the early 1920s and concerns the seven-yearly staging of the Easter story in a Greek village ruled by Turkish overlords, a wealthy mayor and a wordly priest. The village is "invaded" by a large group of refugees from a distant village where the Turks have massacred much of the population. The mayor and the local priest expel these folk from the town. The unfolding drama features the characters chosen to play the lead roles in the Passion Play, including the widow/prostitute Katerina/Mary Magdalene (Melina Mercouri, soon to be Dassin's wife). [Some folk would prefer it if I called Katerina a "sex worker" — but I ain't gonna!] Shot in Cinemascope with harsh light and a more or less neo-realist style, the film does justice to Kazantzakis' highly dramatic story and his not entirely convincing attempt to marry the gospel message and socialist politics. Manolios (Vaneck), the illiterate shepherd chosen to play the role of Jesus, is vaguely reminiscent of Dostoevsky's Myshkin. (Kazantzakis was certainly familiar with the work of the great Russian.) Most of the cast and crew were French, in which language the film was made (disconcerting at first but one gets used to it). Many cast members familiar from *Rififi* and other classics of the period. Interesting that two of the most powerful renditions of the Gospel story came from ostensible atheistic lefties (Pasolini's **Gospel According to Matthew** being the other conspicuous case); their theology may be suspect but they both avoided the cloying sentimentality which has marred Hollywood's attempts, and both captured something of the human drama and the radical message of the Easter story. Pity this novel/film is not as well known as Kazantzakis' **Zorba the Greek** and Dassin's noir classics.



## HEART IN WINTER, A

1992 F 4.00 7.7 FRA

### Sautet, Claude

Daniel Auteuil, Emmanuelle  
Béart, André Dussollier

Romantic, musical and professional triangles: violin-maker, his friend and business partner, and a beautiful young violinist. Very little happens and the narrative doesn't unfold in quite the manner that one might have expected. The title signals the central theme. A lot of music (diegetic and otherwise), elevated conversations, cafes and bars, music studios. Really enjoyed all the business about violin restorations etc. The Ravel music didn't move me — but each to their own! The characterisation of all three principals calls for some subtlety; very deftly handled. Emmanuelle Béart does an amazing job of pretending to play the violin! Echoes of various French dramas/romantic comedies, most obviously perhaps **Jules et Jim** and a touch of **My Night with Maud**. Intelligent, polished, sophisticated cinema for an adult audience. I liked it a lot. (Before putting this on I watched a little of **We Own the Night**, directed by the dreadful and massively over-rated James Gray — what a contrast! Enough said.)

Claude Sautet directed the marvellous **L'arme à gauche** (seen a year or two back).



## HEN IN THE WIND, A

1948    F    4.00    7.7    JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Kinuyo Tanaka, Shuji Sano,  
Chieko Murato

A minor-key melodrama about a young woman forced into prostitution, and subsequent trouble with her husband returning after four years away in the war. Its themes of self-degradation, humiliation, jealousy, revenge and reconciliation take on larger significance and resonance in the immediate post-war context. Includes Ozu's usual concerns with the tension between the old and the new, the position of women, the pressures on the family. Beautifully shot with all the Ozu hallmarks — low camera angles, stationary camera, restrained editing, fluid tracking shots, the use of architectural shapes and spaces, haunting music, pillow shots etc. And, of course, Ozu's superb handling of his players and the humane, compassionate sensibility he brings to all his material. Interesting and effective shift of perspective about two-thirds of the way through. The whole thing is exquisite even if it doesn't have quite the richness of his later masterworks. Whenever we see an Ozu we reach for the same epithets — elegant, poetic, poignant, fine-grained...

A couple of the soliloquies seem a bit contrived.

If I had to pick only one director's oeuvre to preserve for posterity Ozu would be a very serious contender — no, he wouldn't be a contender, he'd be the one. (Oh, I hear you cry, what about Ray, Ford, Hawks, Sirk et al... yes, yes, I know!)



## HERO, A

2021 F 4.50 7.5 IRA

### Farhadi, Asghar

Ali Ghazi

Amir Jadidi, Mohsen  
Tanabandeh, Shar Goldust

Shiraz, Iran. Rahim is in the clink because of an unpaid debt. His girlfriend finds a bag of coins. Can he buy his freedom which will require the consent of his creditor? A complex story in which an ordinary, flawed but basically decent and honest person finds himself in a cascading series of predicaments because of some seemingly minor but ill-advised decisions, and because, under some provocation, he momentarily loses his temper. Various other characters with mixed motives are involved in the case. Superbly played and made. Scripted by Farhadi from a real-life case. Possibly about 10 minutes too long but it maintains its hold; as we expect from Farhadi, it's a gruelling.

This is very much in the vein of Farhadi's earlier work, particularly *A Separation* which remains his best: intense and morally complex drama involving legal issues, the bureaucracy, the media, family tensions and relationships, all played out against the backdrop of contemporary urban life in Iran. Confirms Farhadi's standing as an accomplished and serious-minded director resisting the dumbing-down tendencies of so much modern cinema.



## HIGH AND LOW

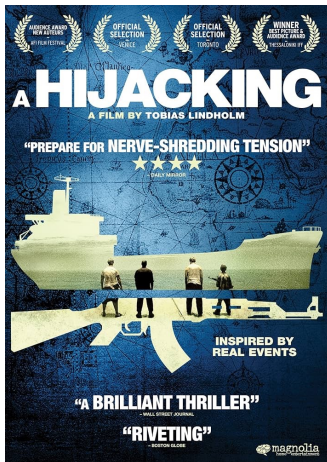
1963 F 4.75 8.4 JAP

**Kurosawa, Akira**

Toshiro Mifune, Tasuya Nakadai,  
Kyoko Kagawa, Yutaka Sada,  
Tatsuya Mihasi

Kurosawa transmutes Ed McBain's pulp noir, Dostoevsky, a bit of Sam Fuller and some Japanese sociology into a compelling film about the effect of a kidnapping and murder on a wealthy businessman, the police investigators and the killer himself. The film explores corporate greed, social and economic inequality, poverty, addiction, the urban wasteland (Yokohama). The final prison sequence is high voltage, as is the central train sequence and the drug den scene. A film in three parts — the apartment (as on a stage), the police procedural (the streets and the police HG), the descent into the killer's world (his hideout, nightclub, streets, drug den, prison) with the very dynamic train sequence as the pivot. Each "act" is shot in a different style, each with various resonances and echoes: the first is theatrical, very deliberately choreographed and with long takes; the middle third is shot in the style of the American gangster/crime classics; the last third is the most expressionistic with a touch of the surreal. An ambitious, complex and impressive film, one of Kurosawa's major works.

(Must watch **The Seven Samurai** again one of these days.)  
Later: Despite **High and Low's** very elevated reputation I like **The Bad Sleep Well** better.



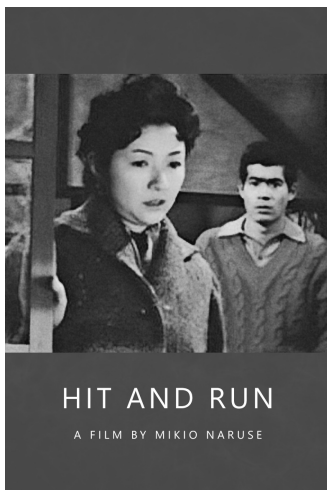
## HIJACKING, A

2012 F 4.00 7.2 DEN

Lindholm, Tobias

Pilou Asbaek, Soren Malling,  
Abdihakim Asgar, Dar Salim

Danish cargo ship is hijacked by Somali pirates somewhere in the Indian Ocean, leading to a stand-off of several months while the shipping company and the pirates carry on fraught negotiations. The story intercuts the stories of the company CEO and the ship's cook with the pirates' negotiator playing a third hand. The film-makers have gone to some trouble to achieve as realistic a picture as possible. (The ship and some of the crew we see in the film had actually undergone a hijacking.) The tension is nicely balanced with a feeling of monotony, fatigue and despair. Not a lot of jokes! The film is primarily interested in the psychological tension experienced by crew and the company negotiators; the hijackers and the Somali context are only of peripheral interest. Grim, absorbing and enervating rather than a thrill-ride. Significantly better than **Captain Phillips** (made soon after).



## HIT AND RUN (Hikinige)

1966 F 4.00 7.1 JAP

Naruse, Mikio

Hideko Takimine, Yoko Tsukasa,  
Eitaro Ozawa, Toshio Kurosawa,  
Jin Nakayama

Widowed mother seeks revenge on a woman who has killed her son in a hit-and-run which has been covered up by her wealthy business-executive husband — who is involved in the production of high-speed motor-cycles. Things get complicated: the woman has a son the same age as the dead boy... Has Naruse been watching Hitchcock? This is the least Narusian Naruse film I've yet seen: it has a distinctive European feel (music, *mise-en-scène* especially, the symbolism of the car — a Renault Caravelle!), and is quite torrid and over-heated both in its narrative material and its treatment of the divine Hideko playing a woman who becomes seriously unhinged. Some of the effects (the scenes in Hideko's fevered imagination) are rendered in an uncharacteristically clumsy manner. Naruse's penultimate film and certainly one of his lesser works but I'm somewhat puzzled by the almost complete critical neglect of this film. It's a very interesting addition to Naruse's *oeuvre*: on one level an intense crime story with the sexual undercurrents of the classical melodrama and the tension/suspense of the noir thriller, on another level a more disturbed treatment of one of Naruse's abiding themes (the position of women), and thirdly a angry swipe at modernity as symbolized by the car, the motor cycle, the accident, the traffic and the corporate bosses. So, a film which doesn't have the poise, elegance, restrained pathos and austere beauty of Naruse's best but which is a work of some complexity and power. Hideko, as always, is splendid. Well worth a look! The story shares some ground with Chabrol's **This Beast Must Die**. aka: **Moment of Terror**





## HOME AND THE WORLD,

1984 F 4.50 7.7 IND

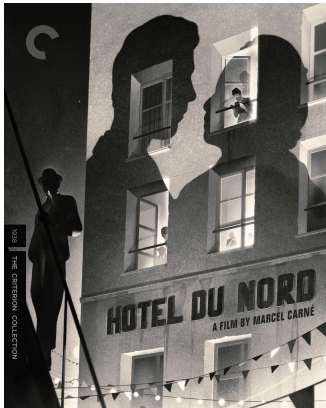
Ray, Satyajit

Soumitra Chatterjee, Victor Bannjee, Swatilekha Chatterjee

An adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's 1919 novel, set in Bengal in 1908 when the *swadeshi* movement is a divisive response to the cynical British stratagem of partitioning Hindus and Muslims. Like many of Ray's **The Chess Players** it combines the political and the domestic to provide a riveting story about politics, identity, love and the position of women, recuperating many of Ray's abiding themes. As usually happens in a Ray film the internal domain — the hearts and minds of the characters — is where the deepest and most intense drama takes place. It's both aesthetically and morally beautiful, elegant, subtle, sad, deeply moving and profoundly humane — everything we expect when Ray is at the top of his game. Compelling cinema of the highest order. Less humorous than many of Ray's films, less dynamic, more meditative, more stately. Some echoes of **Jalsaghar** and **Charulata** (also based on a Tagore novel and covering much of the same thematic terrain). If it's not quite as good as those two masterworks it remains a film of very considerable distinction.

Where does Ray find this apparently endless stream of captivating women??

Ray suffered a heart attack during filming which had to be completed by his son Sandip. (I couldn't see the joins!)



## HÔTEL DU NORD

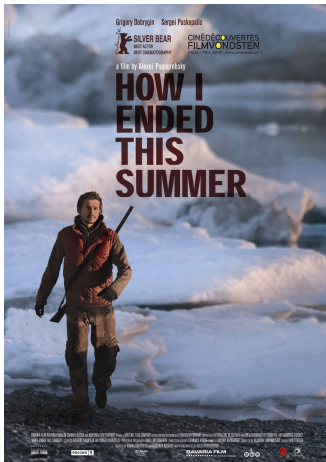
1938    F    4.00    7.6    FRA

### Carné, Marcel

Louis Né & Armand Thirard

Annabella, Jean-Pierre Aumont,  
Arletty, Louis Jouvet

Story of two apparently ill-starred lovers played out against a panorama of life along a low-rent Parisian canal. Although the love story unfolds under the shadow of Fate – death, suicide, prison, guilt, murder, maybe redemption (all with a touch of the Dostoevskys) – the general atmosphere is rather sunnier than in Carné's other films from the same period. There is a good deal of insouciant charm and humour, both subtle and rambunctious, in the treatment of a whole gallery of characters. The transformation of Edmond-Paulo-Robert from an ill-tempered and sinister pimp into a more sympathetic would-be lover is nicely done. Arletty and Annabella attack their roles with zest. All beautifully shot. I preferred the two Carné films flanking HDN – **Port of Shadows** (38) and **Jour se leve** (39) – but the trilogy makes an attractive showcase for Carné's "poetic realism".



## HOW I ENDED T SUMMER

2010 F 4.00 7.0 RUS

**Popogrebskiy, Aleksey**

Grigoriy Dobrygin, Sergey  
Puskepalis, Igor Chervich

Two men on a remote meteorological station in the bleak but beautiful Russian Arctic, one a middle-aged old-school worker who is conscientious and methodical, the other younger, a bit erratic and self-preoccupied, listening to heavy metal and playing violent video games. The station is dilapidated and surrounded by rusting barrels of old fuel and toxic waste (a microcosm of Russia). The men are nearing the end of their tour of duty. Small irritations and tensions escalate into something much more sinister and life-threatening. A slow-burn thriller about psychic fragility, the collapse of the Soviet system, and environmental despoilation. The Arctic sea and sky, the rugged coastline and the austere beauty of the tundra all contrast with the squalid conditions and personal frictions within the station. There is a gap between the film's aspiration and its dramatic realisation; in some ways a not entirely successful reaching for a Zvyagintsev-style allegory about Russia such as we saw in the later and vastly superior **Leviathan**. **How I Ended This Summer** never quite attains either the level of tension or the thematic weight it aims for. But it's a film of admirable ambition and well worth a look for its evocation of a landscape and for its ruminations on a period in Soviet-Russian history.

Many of the critics seemed altogether impervious to the film's wider political and historical concerns, treating it simply as an adventure/thriller. The *Slant* reviewer, in characteristically negative mode, was unable to find anything whatever of merit in the film. Sometimes critics outsmart themselves!



## HUNT, THE

2012 F 4.00 8.3 DEN

### Vinterberg, Thomas

Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo  
Larsen, Annika Wedderkopp,  
Susse Wold, Alexandra Rapaport

Small Swedish community. Kindergarten teacher is falsely accused of molesting a small girl; things go from bad to worse in an escalating nightmare for the innocent man... hysteria, self-righteousness, cruelty, mob mentality. It's a wonderful script, full of ambiguities and discomforting provocations, and it's superbly acted by the whole cast. It's gruelling, upsetting, traumatizing... and, mostly, all too believable.

Didn't like the style of shooting in some scenes (handheld cameras and the like). Can't see anything good whatever in the horrible "sport" of deer-hunting. Killing the dog – it works quite well but heck, it's a bit of a cliché by now... The ending is too reassuring even if the very last sequence does disrupt the ostensibly happy resolution. The more logical conclusion would have been to show a man's life ruined... the damage all round impossible to repair.



## HUNTING & GATHERING

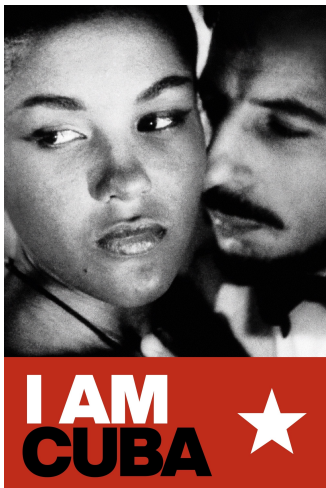
2007 F 3.75 6.8 FRA

**Berri, Claude**

Audrey Tautou, Guillaume Canet,  
Lawrence Stocker, Françoise  
bertin

Three young people and one old in contemporary Paris inadvertently get involved in each other's lives. Audrey Tautou (darling of the French cine-literati) is the centre of attention. It's artfully and tastefully done and persuades us that we are looking at "real life". A nice mix of social observation, featherweight comedy and delicate sentiment. It has some touching moments but it's really a bit vaporous to ever be deeply moving. A catchy title which has absolutely nothing to do with the narrative.

Like a good soufflé — not very substantial but made with a light touch and pleasing on the palette. One of the last works from prolific French film-maker Claude Berri whose principal claim to fame is the double-bunger **Jean de Florette** and **Manon of the Spring** (both 1986).



## I AM CUBA

1964 F 4.50 8.2 RUS

**Kalatazov, Mikhail**

Sergei Uresevsky

Sergio Corrieri, Salvador Wood,  
José Gallardo

Cuba in the last days of the Batista regime. Four vignettes: Maria a young woman who sells herself to wealthy tourists (the urban poor); Pedro, an ageing tenant farmer who has worked the land all his life but whose house and land are sold off by the landowner to the United Fruit Co (the rural poor); Enrique a student involved in the protest movement (students and intellectuals); Mariano, a peasant who is driven to join the revolutionaries in the mountains (the revolutionaries). Imagine, if you can, a blend of Eisenstein (referenced in the **Potemkin**-like sequence in Havana), Italian neo-realism (real life in the streets, so to speak), Soviet agitprop, **The Battle of Algiers** (documenting a revolution), Tarkovsky (the visionary epic) and Dziga Vertov (the delirium of the cine-camera). Quite apart from the film's narrative content and strident ideological purpose, **I am Cuba** is a quite extraordinary and creative exercise in the visual possibilities of the medium — “revolutionary cinema” in an aesthetic sense. There is minimal dialogue and almost no narrative exposition; instead, an endless flow of imagery veering between the surreal-nightmarish and the lyrical-poetic. Visually and technically this is bravura cinema, daring, inventive, sometimes ravishing. It is altogether easy to now dismiss the film's ideological impulses and the somewhat cartoonish depiction of heroes and villains, as many American critics have done. It is also easy to refer to what are now truisms about the failures and the appalling human costs of Marxist revolutions, all of which have “devoured their own children”, in Cuba as elsewhere. It is bitter and telling irony that the Cuban and Soviet governments, which had done so much to sponsor and support this extravagant project, should have immediately disowned it once it was completed, consigning the film to an oblivion which lasted for the next three decades. Nevertheless, it is perhaps salutary to be reminded of what drove millions of people into revolutionary fervour, in this case the utterly venal and murderous regime of Batista, supported by the likes of the American United Fruit Company which ravaged and exploited almost every country in Latin America. Batista, American capital and organized crime had turned Havana into a squalid sink-hole for wealthy tourists, and the country as a whole into nothing more than a feudal estate. **I am Cuba** reminds us of this terrible history. And let's not forget that the film was made in 1964, not 2020. Yevtushenko had a hand in the script. The film's revival was promoted by enthusiasts such as Martin Scorsese and Francis F Coppola.



## I VITELLONI

1953 F 3.75 8.0 ITA

### Fellini, Federico

Alberto Sordi, Franco Fabrizi,  
Franco Interlenghi, Leonora  
Ruffo, Riccardo Fellini

Fellini's semi-autobiographical bitter-sweet film about a group of young men in his hometown, Rimini, after the war; they are unemployed, living rather aimless lives, enjoying each other's company, looking for sex/love/happiness, playing pool, idly dreaming of something better, indulging their lassitude. Life is punctuated by festivals, cheap vaudeville, sexual escapades, marriage, births, movies, family fights. There is little explicit reference to the war but we are clearly living in its sorry aftermath. The central narrative drive is sustained by the relationships of Fausto, the local Lothario, his wife Sandra and her brother Moraldo. There is quite a lot to like in **I Vitelloni**, not least the admixture of neo-realist observation and surrealist flights ... but it never really gripped me; I have yet to be deeply engaged, in any way, in a Fellini film. Nonetheless, I liked this much more than **La Strada** (these being the only Fellini films I've seen in recent times).



**IDA**

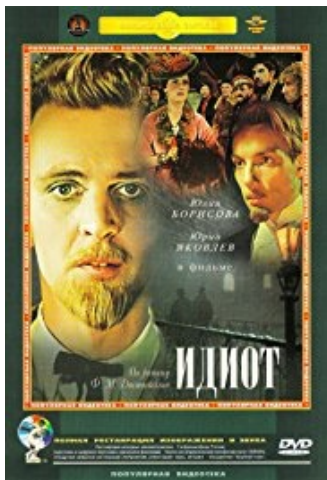
2013 F 5.00 7.4 POL

**Pawlikowski, Pavel**

Agata Kulesza, Agate  
Trzebuchowska, Dawid Ogrodnik

Ida, a young orphan and novice in a convent, comes out into the drab communist Poland of the early 1960s to discover the truth about the fate of her Jewish parents. She's accompanied by Wanda, a world-weary former State Prosecutor and judge whose son was killed by anti-Semitic Poles in the war. It's a film of severe but hypnotic austerity which eschews anything histrionic and sensational but which, on a very intimate scale, quietly peers into the heart of darkness. Intelligent, haunting, disturbing... but also extraordinarily delicate, beautiful and wondrous. More than a few Bressonian reverberations (both Robert and Henri!) and has something of the feel of the best European art cinema of the 60s, touches of Antonioni. The two principals could hardly be better. It's shot in a squarish format in a style which evokes Vermeer as well as the great artists of black and white photography. It's full of the most resonant images and some nerve-tingling sequences (eg. late on the film, Wanda laying out the photos which evoke an entire lost world, a lost generation, a lost family: it takes up very little screen time but it is unbearably sad, and what follows is heart-wrenching). Film-making of the very highest calibre, creating a deeply moving experience; cinema doesn't get any better. How many other 21st century films can bear comparison with the best of Bresson? Dreyer? This one can.





## IDIOT, THE

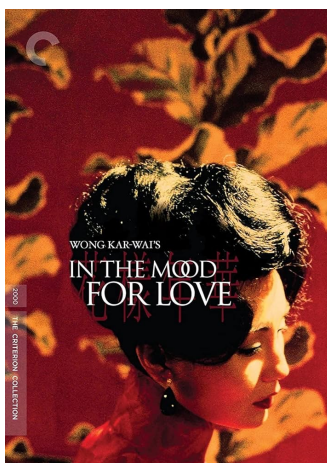
1958 F 3.75 7.8 RUS

## Pyryev, Ivan

Nikita Podgorny, Yuri Yakovlev,  
Yuliya Borisova

Prince Myshkin returns to Russia after a long absence in Switzerland where he has been treated for a serious illness (undisclosed in the film; in the book, epilepsy). He inadvertently becomes embroiled in a sordid contrivance to marry off a rich man's mistress. Dostoevsky's massive novel has a sprawling and complex plot which is interwoven with philosophical, theological and mystical strands. Myshkin is Dostoevsky's dream of a perfectly good, Christ-like man. The film tells only the very first part of the story and almost everything is stripped away apart from the somewhat lurid melodrama about the fate of Natasha Filipovna. It's shot in over-ripe colour and a sub-Viscontian operatic style; fortunately the performances, while short on subtlety, are powerful enough to turn this into quite an arresting drama (much more successful than Richard Brooks' similar project with **The Brothers Karamazov**, made in the same year). The final sequence with Yuliya Borisova pulling out all the stops, is a melodramatic *tour de force*. Yuri Yakovlev is very appealing as the Prince but the last part of the film is overwhelmed by Borisova. As far as the thematics go we are left with a puzzle about the nature of love and a denunciation of acquisitive materialism — all well and good but one doesn't thereby get more than a glimmer of the novel's deepest concerns and its towering achievement; not an uncommon problem in adaptations of great novels; generally better to start with pulp and turn it into gold through some sort of cinematic alchemy. Once you accept that the bulk of Dostoevsky's novel is missing, and you tune into the feverish atmosphere and highly theatrical style of the film, it's pretty good. They're a passionate lot, the Russians! The film was envisaged as Part 1 of a very much larger project; this was as far as they got. Pity.

I saw this in the late 60s; I could have sworn that it was in B&W! Not so!



## IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE

2000 F 5.00 8.1 HKG

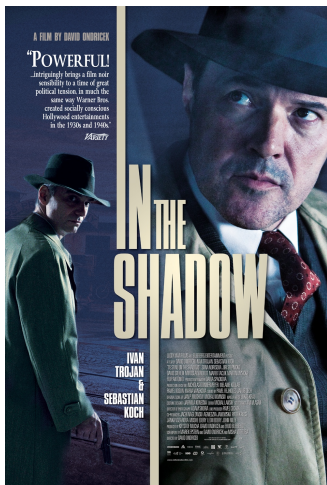
**Wong Kar-Wai**

Tony Chiu-Wai Leung, Maggie Cheung, Ping Lam Siu

No-so-brief-encounter in Hong Kong. Life in a small space. 1960s, Chinese enclave, neighbouring man and woman whose spouses are having an affair, come together in a slow, restrained and erotic waltz but they are hemmed in by the mores of the time, by gossip and the enclosed community, by physical and social claustrophobia, but more importantly by an ambiguous admixture of moral scruple, a kind of aesthetic distaste for adultery, and each's uncertain sense of the other. It's an enthralling mix. Then too there's the meticulous evocation of a time, a place, a milieu, full of closely observed details, including the unexpected presence of Nat King Cole singing in Spanish. And time (which is somewhat fragmented) is charted by the changing food!

Wong Kar-wai's aesthetic is a beguiling mix in which one senses (rather than precisely identifies) both Chinese and Western influences. In its austerity, delicacy, grace and restraint (all highly valued in traditional Chinese art) it is sometimes reminiscent of Ozu and Bresson (both of whom Wong Kar-wai mentions, as well as Antonioni, in the Extras interview) but there are obvious modernist influences at work as well, evident in the ellipses, transitions, ruptures, compressions and reflexivity. The treatment of the characters also brought Sirk to mind. The whole film is like a beautiful, fugitive, bitter-sweet memory/dream.

Maggie Cheung is not only entrancing — she has a smashing wardrobe!



## IN THE SHADOW

2021 F 4.25 7.1 CZE

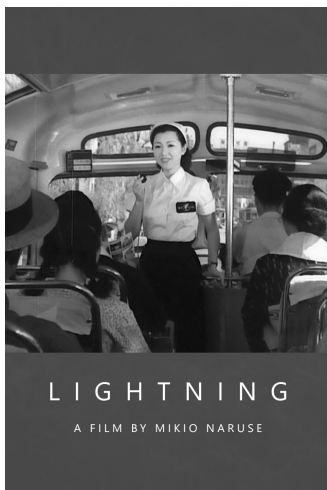
**Ondricek, David**

Adam Sikora

Ivan Trojan, Sebastian Koch,  
Sonia Norisova, Filip Antonio

Czechoslovakia, 1953. The country is in a state of tension and crisis: tightening Soviet repression, precarious monetary situation, resurgent anti-Semitism. A jewel robbery leads a police captain into a quagmire of corruption, deception and prejudice. Soon his family is in peril as the forces of totalitarian darkness close in. Shot in a claustrophobic noirish style with a shadowy palette and an oppressive atmosphere of dread.

A slow-burn political thriller which leaves a lot of historical questions unanswered but which hammers home its message. Sebastian Koch (**Lives of Others**) plays an under-developed character, a former SS guard who has been captured by the Russians and is now entangled in dirty tricks. Both Trojan and Norisova deliver fine performances. The father-son motif is a little hackneyed but overall this is an impressive film of its kind. It seems to have received almost no attention outside Europe.



## INAZUMA (Lightning)

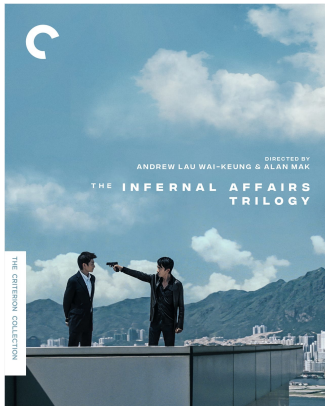
1952 F 4.25 7.7 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Hideko Takmine, Kumeko Urabi,  
Mistuko Miura, Chieko Murata

Family Problems. A mother, four children by four different men, family tensions. There's a brother (completely useless, of course), two married sisters, one whose husband dies early on and the other married to another write-off, the rebellious unmarried youngest sister (Hideko), and a gross suitor. Based on a novel by Fumiko Hayashi. (Naruse made six films based on her works: **Meshi**, **Inazuma**, **Tsuma**, **Late Chrysanthemums**, **Floating Clouds** and **Chronicle of my Vagabondage** as well as the biopic based on Hayashi's autobiography, **Notes of a Wanderer**, 1962.) Position of women, the ravages of war, postwar Tokyo, money problems, marriage... the usual. (I don't mind one little bit!) Mitsuko Miura (the sister Mitsuko) is something special too. The opening half felt a bit crude and forced by Narusian standards — but it gets into the groove after that.

Keith Ulrich on **Inazuma**: *superbly modulated second-tier Naruse*. Yep, though as Ulrich also notes, the final scene is pretty well perfect. A French blogger interestingly, and only by way of an aside, compared Naruse with Sirk and Minnelli in terms of the director's respect and love for his characters ; I can go with that.



## INFERNAL AFFAIRS

2002 F 4.75 8.0 HKG

### Lau, Andy & Alan Mak

Andy Lau and Yiu-Fai Lai

Andy Lau, Tony Cheung, Eric Tsang, Sammi Cheng, Elva Hsiao, Kelly Chen, Anthony Chau-Sang Wong

Hong Kong. Drug-smuggling Triads are worried about a police mole; the police are worried about a Triads mole. A cat-and-mouse game of deception, intrigue and betrayal played out at high speed in a jazzy, edgy style with occasionally bewildering narrative transitions and rhythmic disruptions. Bravura film-making. Lau and Cheung are quite riveting in this electric drama which is way more stylish than most of its successors. The two follow-ups, while quite good, couldn't match the original. Scorsese's dreadful **The Departed** is based on **Infernal Affairs**. The graphic violence is kept under control and the characters are much more nuanced than is usually the case in these high-velocity, hi-tech gangster-action films to come out of south-east Asia as well as Hollywood. As a nerve-jangling gangster-thriller this is hard to beat.



## INLET OF MUDDY WATER,

1953 F 4.00 7.3 JAP

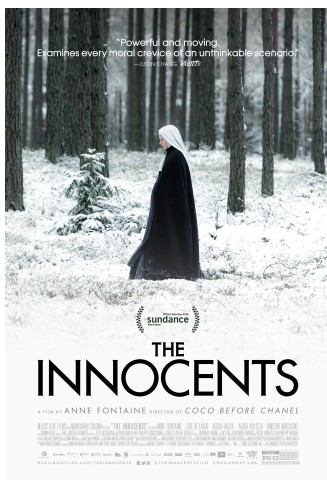
**Imai, Tadashi**

Akiko Tamura, Yatsuko Tan'ami,  
Ken Mitsuda Yoshiko Kuga,  
Chikage Awashima, Haruko  
Sugimura

Immensely popular in Japan but little known in the West. Three stories, all centering on women: lost love, a loveless marriage, an impossible predicament; a housemaid who compromises her honesty for compassionate reasons; a geisha story about romantic obsession, fatalism and a bitter ending. Expressionistic in style, highly melodramatic, and in the third story, verging on hysterical, putting me in mind of short stories/novellas by Dostoevsky and Gogol. I preferred the first two stories to the last (which is the longest, giving its title to the whole film).

There is much to like here but one can't avoid the inevitable comparisons with Ozu, Mizoguchi and Naruse, all of whom explored the same terrain but with more grace and depth. Nonetheless, always good to see quality work from Japanese directors other than the Big Four (Five if you include Ichikawa). Japan's long and rich film history puts it up there with USA, Britain, France and Italy as the most powerful engine rooms of quality cinema.

(The poster is Polish.)



## INNOCENTS, THE

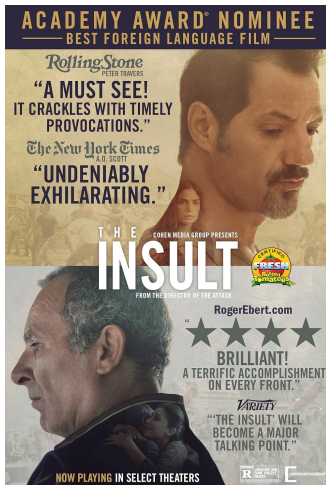
2016 F 4.75 7.3 FRA

Fontaine, Anne

Caroline Champetier

Lou de Laâge, Agata Buzek,  
Agata Kulesza, Vincent Macaigne

Poland, 1945. A young French doctor, working with the Red Cross at the end of WW2, is summoned to a convent where she discovers a group of nuns repeatedly raped by Soviet soldiers, many now pregnant. A tense, harrowing but ultimately uplifting narrative unfolds in the bleak winter landscape, exploring tangled issues of faith, obedience, duty, acceptance and love against the appalling backdrop of wartime bestiality and violations of the most horrifying kind. Shot in a fluid and austere beautiful style without resort to any kind of trickery: the style is very much the servant of the dramatic material and its troubling themes. One hesitates to use the word – and I do only so in respect of certain aspect – but Fontaine achieves a certain *Bressonian* effect, a stylistic asceticism one might say, a visual correlate of the film's moral seriousness. Grégoire Hetzel's score and Caroline Champetier's camera-work deserve special mention. The superb cast includes Agata Kulesza (**Ida**) as the abbess. Based on real events. My only reservation concerns the the last scene in the convent which is too tidy and reassuring; the coda of Mathilde reading the letter from Maria, on the other hand, is quite beautiful and altogether apposite. One might also have expected a little more development of the psychic reverberations of the other rape. But heck, the film gets so much right – and much of it pitch-perfect – that we shouldn't make too much of these small blemishes. One goes on watching a certain kind of film in the hope of discovering something like this, a film of rare intelligence, tact, poise and warm human sympathies in which various values and viewpoints and experiences are treated with sensitive respect. It's also that rare thing, a film about women, made by women, but without any overt ideological agenda. (Not that one objects to ideological motivations *per se*!) I have only seen one other film by Anne Fontaine, **Gemma Boveri**, for which I felt little enthusiasm; there was nothing there that suggested Fontaine could make a film of this sort of distinction.



## INSULT, THE

2017 F 4.25 7.7 LEB

## Doueri, Ziad

Tommaso Fiorilli

Adel Karam, Kamel El Basha,  
Camille Salameh, Diamand Bou  
Abboud, Julia Kassab

"The personal is the political", as they say. Political-legal drama about a festering dispute between a Lebanese Christian and a Palestinian, and the ensuing court case which becomes a major media/political event. Anger, old tensions, bitter memories, families, marriage, violence, hatred, politics, hysteria. Beyond the immediate personal dramas played out in this engrossing story there are the age-old enmities of the Middle East at play. Good to see the female characters given screen time. The film is intense, well-acted, professionally put together. Its only significant weakness is the not very convincing final "resolution". Some found the film too didactic, too schematic, too earnest in its analysis of Lebanon's political-social-moral malaise. I found it to be an intelligent, arresting and humane exploration of some complex and volatile issues. I also found it quite engrossing throughout. (An obvious comparison is with Fahardi's **A Separation** which is even better.





## INTERROGATION, THE

2016 F 4.00 6.9 ISR

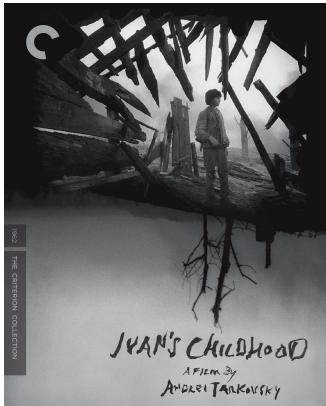
**Pery, Erez**

Boubkar Benzabat

Maciej Marczewski, Romanus Fuhrmann

1946, Poland. Rudolf Höss, former commandant of Auschwitz, is interrogated by a young Polish lawyer who is trying to extract a confession of war crimes. This is an intense, minimalist two-hander, a confrontation of the interrogator who is searching for some sort of understanding of how the Holocaust could happen, and Höss, a more or less ordinary man who allowed himself, against his better instincts, to completely surrender to the ethos of the SS and to the orders of Himmler and the Führer, now struggling to retain some shred of self-respect. The portrayal of Höss is largely based on his own 'autobiography', written while in jail awaiting trial and execution. He's an interesting case. Unlike Himmler and many other leading Nazis, he wasn't a man temperamentally disposed to evil deeds. In another time he might have lived an undistinguished but worthy and useful life — which is not to excuse his role in the most monstrous and nightmarish crimes.

I read Höss' book at the age of about fifteen and was deeply disturbed by it. Sixty years later I'm still pondering the imponderables of the Holocaust which George Steiner rightly called the signature event of the 20th century.



## IVAN'S CHILDHOOD

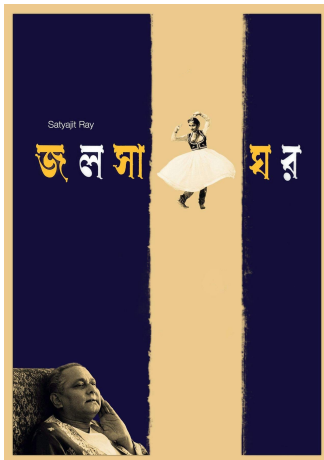
1962 F 4.50 8.1 RUS

**Tarkovsky, Andrei**

Nikolay Burlyakov, Valentin  
Zubkov, Evgeniy Zharikov

WW2. 12-year old Ivan's family has been killed by Germans. He joins a military group and acts as a scout, striking up a kind of friendship with three Soviet officers. The story takes place in an unspecified landscape of forests and swamps and fields, alternating between a paradisaical beauty and a nightmarish battle front. The war turns young children into adults before their time, and turns young men into old men. A film of extraordinary dramatic intensity and visual power, swooping vertiginously between lyricism, surrealism and the squalor and destruction of war. A closing *tour de force* sequence in Berlin followed by a flashback (dream) to childhood innocence is tremendously effective. The film has a more coherent and intelligible narrative than Tarkovsky's later and increasingly visionary works. Stylistically it was shaped by the collaboration of Tarkovsky and poetic cinematographer Vadim Yusov.

One of the cinema's most impressive debuts. It opened a new chapter in the cinema of war. The only thing I can think which is vaguely comparable is Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*. The film had limited exposure in USSR because Krushchev insisted that Russian soldiers could not have used a child in that way. Elsewhere it took the European arthouse circuit by storm. I like this as much as any of Tarkovsky's works.



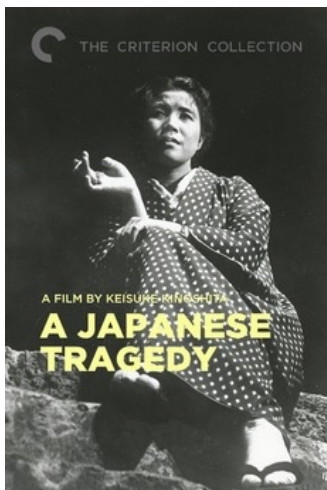
## JALSAGHAR

1958 F 5.00 8.1 IND

Ray, Satyajit

Chhabi Biswas, Padma Devi,  
Pjnaki Sen Gupta, Gangapada  
Gose

Ray's haunting and hypnotic elegy for the old zamindar culture of Bengal, particularly its patronage of classical Indian music. Centres on the ageing, self-indulgent feudal lord whose estate is crumbling around him, decaying from within and eroded from without by the encroachments of modernity (capitalism, technology etc). Age, loss, decay, art, memory, ennui, death — universal themes explored through the distinctive particularities of early 20thC India. A quite extraordinary feat of imaginative sympathy and psychological acuity. Ray beautifully balances his aristocratic and egalitarian sympathies (example of the latter: the scene with the servant, collapsing after returning the son's body, ignored by the master). Another enchanting, melancholy and poetic masterwork full of the most delicate and felicitous touches, visually superb and beautifully modulated. The music and dance sequences, which in most films I hope will be over as quickly as possible, are wondrously good. As a portrait of the inevitable death of an old order it stands comparison with Visconti's *The Leopard* or the best of Naruse and Ozu. One might also risk the obvious but over-worked comparison: Chekhovian! Some viewers will find it "slow" and perhaps some of the symbolism is too obvious, but I can't find anything seriously wrong with this entrancing film apart from the fact that some of the narrative developments are telegraphed a little too explicitly. The cinematography isn't as balletic or as assured as it is in **Charulata** but it's pretty darned good anyway! (It was the cameraman's first outing!) Made in between the second and third parts of the Apu trilogy and radically different from them in tone and style. I've seen four Ray films in the last twelve months: **Pather Panchali**, **Charulata**, **The Chess Players**, **Jalsaghar**. While they all bear the Ray imprint it is astonishing that they are so different and distinctive. Ray is a director who can work, so to speak, in many different keys. Assuredly a great auteur.



## JAPANESE TRAGEDY, A

1953 F 4.25 7.3 JAP

**Kinoshita, Keisuke**

Yûko Mochizuki, Yôko Katsuragi,  
Masami Taura, Ken Uehara,  
Sanae Takasugi

Japan, 1953. Opens with a hectic montage of archival clips and newspaper headlines exposing Japan's humiliation and collapse into a period of corruption, political instability, cynicism and despair. After this quasi-documentary opening the film unfolds the story of a widowed mother and her two children, all brutally scarred by the war and its immediate aftermath. The film frequently and abruptly returns to the past through a series of flashbacks, alternating with collages of grim headlines about the state of the nation. The present-day story is developed through a quieter visual style with long takes through an often static camera. Like so many postwar Japanese films, this one revolves around the figure of the mother, a rather volatile personality who quickly switches between a good-time girl on the make, an over-possessive and complaining mother, and a woman struggling to find some sort of psychic equilibrium in a society which has treated her, and many others, so cruelly. The children grow up into callous, ambitious and opportunistic adults whose childhood experiences have hardened their hearts. The film derives some of its grip and moral complexity from the fact that Haruko (the mother, splendidly played by Yuko Mochizuki) is not an altogether sympathetic or admirable character, and from the unusual mix of the political and the melodramatic. Loved the scene with Haruko and the lonely singer. A few of the directorial moves are a bit crude and the climax of the film is clumsily telegraphed but overall it's a bold, interesting and powerful film, quite different from the other two Kinoshita films I've seen, **Morning for the Osone Family** (itself a much more direct treatment of the effects of the war than we usually find in the postwar cinema although it is almost always there in the background) and the much sunnier **Twenty-four Eyes**. Kinoshita is clearly in the tier of directors immediately below the great masters of the period. He actually scripted the film for Kurosawa but the studio rejected it as too daring so he made it himself for a different studio who probably didn't realize what they had on their hands. It hasn't attracted the critical attention it deserves.



## JOUR SE LÈVE, LE

1939 F 4.00 7.8 FRA

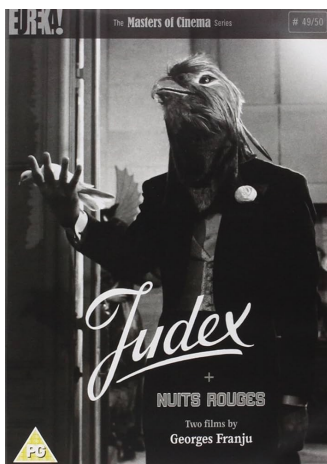
**Carné, Marcel**

Philippe Agostini

Jean Gabin, Jules Berry, Arletty,  
Jacqueline Laurent

*The Lost Moment.* Honest, knock-about workman with plenty of appetite (Gabin) is in love with young woman (Laurent) who has been seduced by a cynical old charmer who has been jilted by his lover/business partner (Arletty) who is falling for the workman – ie. a four-cornered love/lust affair. Set in Paris on the eve of the WWII and pervaded by a sense of crisis and doom with the lot of the workers looking pretty bleak. All four principals are excellent. A showcase for what was called Carné's "poetic realism", characterized by a certain lyrical melancholy, a sharp sense of time and place, skilful characterisation, a feel for the telling detail, the pivotal moment, and an elegant visual style. The story is told through extended flashbacks, leading back to the dramatic incident with which the film opens. Cleverly written by Jacques Viot and Jacques Prévert (a regular collaborator with Carné). Is often hailed as a precursor of noir, particularly in reference to the fatalistic mood of the film as well as its lighting scheme. It's all very French.

Hollywood remade this as **The Long Night** (1949, d. Anatole Litvak) with Henry Fonda (it was pretty good though not in the class of this film). I found much to enjoy and admire in this film but couldn't quite fathom its status as one of the landmarks of the French cinema.



## JUDEX

1962 F 4.00 7.3 FRA

**Franju, Georges**

Channing Pollock, Edith Scob,  
Sylvia Koscina, Jacques  
Jouanneau, Francine Berge

Homage to Louis Feuillade (an early filmmaker in the silent era) and a remake (of sorts) of his 1916 12-part serial **Judex**. A mélange of silent film techniques and conventions (iris, keyhole, intertitles, costumes, music etc) woven through a story about a corrupt banker, an incompetent detective, a venomous *femme fatale*, and sundry others. Echoes and reverberations of vaudeville, circus, pantomime, the early serials, comics, melodrama... the works! Much better than **Batman**! Franju has a very inventive and graceful visual sense, an extraordinary ability to synthesize an admixture of styles and to modulate the shifting tone. Elegant, poetic, sometimes surreal, often funny, always engaging. A most enjoyable and sometimes thrilling ride. But Franju's **Eyes without a Face** and **Thérèse Desqueyroux** are much more substantial.



## JUHA

1999    F    4.00    6.8    FIN

### Kaurismäki, Aki

Timo Salminen

Kati Outinen, André Wilms,  
Sakari Kuosmanen, Elina Salo

The simple rural life of a farming couple is disrupted when the young wife is seduced by a somewhat moth-eaten city playboy. Turns out she is being kidnapped to become a sex slave in his city nightclub/brothel.

Kaurismäki set himself the task of making a “silent” film with music, sound effects, and sparse intertitled dialogue. Knowing this I approached the film with some apprehension. But it’s altogether accessible, has an involving storyline and is more than an experimental exercise. Like all of Kaurismäki’s films it’s quirky, quite dark, and embellished with a very eclectic soundtrack while somewhere near its centre there is an ironic but compassionate and tender sensibility at work. A must-see for Kaurismäki enthusiasts. (All done in 78 minutes.)

Enjoyed the sideways reference to Sam Fuller.



## JUSTE AVANT LA NUIT

1971 F 4.25 7.6 FRA

### Chabrol, Claude

Jean Rabier

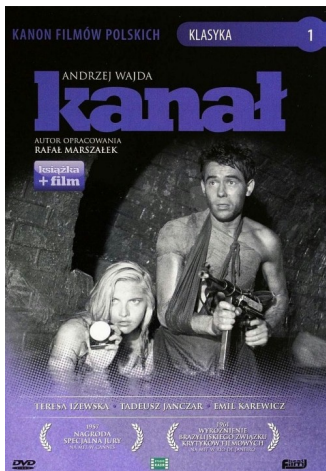
Michel Bouquet, Stéphane  
Audran, François Perier, Henri  
Attal

(2016) Another sly psycho-chiller from Chabrol who starts the film with a nod to **Psycho**. The story came out of the same drawer as **La Femme Infidèle**: happy bourgeois family disrupted by unleashed subterranean forces... but in this one there's no jealousy, no revenge. It's a variation on Dostoevsky's inquiry into the psychology of guilt. It's also a study in the price of bourgeois respectability. Chabrol directs with icy detachment and forensic efficiency. There's also the usual quota of eating and drinking. (The ending poses a conundrum which will not be discussed here.)

This was the last of Chabrol's top-shelf thrillers in this vein: what followed became increasingly silly, murky, perverse and shop-worn. (There was one very mixed number which interrupted the golden streak of **La Femme Infidèle**, **This Beast Must Die**, **Le Boucher: La Rupture**, 1970. The best of the later thrillers is probably **La Cérémonie**, 1995, but there are several which remain unseen.)

**2020:** Returned to Chabrol's film after seeing Naruse's **The Stranger within a Woman**, based on the same novel. Chabrol's film is more complex and layered than Naruse's but now I'm not sure I don't prefer Naruse's rather more spare and understated treatment of the material. In any event, both films of considerable interest. Would be good to see a better print of the Chabrol.





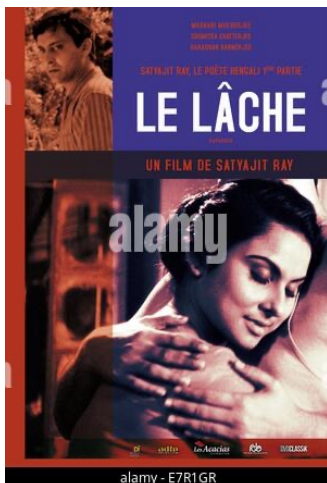
**KANAL**

1957 F 4.25 7.9 POL

## Wajda, Andjrez

Teresa Izewska, Tadeusz  
Janczar,  
Wienczyslaw Glinski

Warsaw Uprising, 1944. A group of Resistance fighters flee into the sewers to escape the encircling Nazis. The narrative focuses on a young wounded soldier, on the woman who is helping him to survive and the commander who is trying, against all odds, to keep his men alive. The first half, above ground amidst the carnage and debris of a city shredded by bombing and artillery attacks, is done in semi-documentary style while the second half, in the filthy and claustrophobic sewers, is more abstracted and expressionist in style but sufficiently realistic to be a nightmarish and repulsive experience. “Harrowing” and “unbearable” just won’t do it! A gut-wrenching, anti-romantic, anti-heroic depiction of the degradation and wastage which war always entails. Scripted by Jerzy Stawinski who commanded the squad which figures in the film. **Kanal** takes the view that the Uprising was ill-advised, futile and needlessly destructive of human life. It manages to refer only obliquely to the volatile issue (in 1956) of the Polish attitude, so to speak, to the invading Red Army. **Kanal** inaugurated a “Thaw” in the restrictions imposed by Moscow. It won a major prize at Cannes and helped put Polish cinema onto the international arthouse circuit. The interview with Wajda and others on the Extras is worth a look. Wajda fought in the resistance in the war. **Kanal** was the second in his war trilogy, flanked by **A Generation** (1955) and **Ashes and Diamonds** (1958). He cited Buñuel as the most important influence on his early work. Wajda died in 2016, aged about 90. Sadly, Teresa Izewska, the female lead in the film, died of a drug overdose in 1982, aged 49.



## KAPURUSH (The Coward)

1965 F 4.25 7.8 IND

**Ray, Satyajit**

Madhabi Mukherjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, Haradhan Bannerjee

Another minor-key Ray story about love and loss. Restrained, beautiful, sad, mysterious and compassionate. Chekhov and Ozu again come irresistibly to mind (again!). There's nothing left to say about the divine Madhabi Mukherjee except this: anyone who wants to appreciate her wondrous talents needs to see **Charulata**, **Mahanagar** and **Kapurush** in which she plays three quite different characters — all compelling. We know all three actors from previous Ray films — how wonderful they are!

Ray described **Kapurush** as focusing on *a certain type of cowardice and a certain selfishness, which seem to be concomitants of modern middle-class sophistication. The stress of modern living, and the uncertainty of getting a foothold and retaining it, are important causes of these complexes.*

It's not one of his major works but, like **Two Daughters**, a small gem, and largely forgotten until recently. Ray liked the film a lot but it was never picked up by any American or British distributor. Yep, go figure.



## KITCHEN STORIES

2003 F 4.00 7.3 NOR

**Hamer, Bent**

Tomas Norström, Joachim  
Calmeyer, Bjørn Floberg

Remote Norway, early 50s. The Swedish Home Research Institute is conducting a detailed mapping of the kitchen habits of bachelors, especially their physical movements — a “scientific” survey no less! “Observers” are sent out to bachelor households with strict instructions not to talk to or get involved with their subjects. Our story concerns an old phlegmatic farmer with a slightly odd friend and a sick horse. (Not a woman in sight anywhere!)

Droll, quirky, deadpan and sometimes absurdist humour; attentive social observation; a compassionate eye for human frailties and eccentricities, especially amongst society’s fringe-dwellers — if this all sounds like Kaurismäki, so it should ... but done in a slightly warmer climate (only metaphorically!) and with a very light touch.

I was slightly apprehensive about what this film might deliver; I needn’t have worried. Quiet, modest, gentle, amusing and heartwarming, and with a neatly skewered satiric barb for bureaucracy, business and science. An appealing mix!

If you imagine a mix of Ivan Passer’s **Intimate Lighting**, Jiri Menzel’s **Secluded, Near Woods**, and Umberto Pasolini’s **Still Life**, you’ll be getting into the right sort of territory. Add a dash of Tati too.



## KNIFE IN THE WATER

1962 F 3.75 7.6 POL

### Polanski, Roman

Jerzy Lipman

Zygmunt Malanowicz, Jolanta  
Umecka, Leon Niemczyk

Contemporary Poland. Well-heeled couple heading out for a sailing trip pick up intense young man hitch-hiking. He ends up landing a ride on the yacht as well. He has a very big knife! (Where's Freud when you need him?) The weather and the psychological climate darken. Tension, menace, black humour. There are various physical mishaps and confrontations but this intense three-hander is really a study in sexual politics as each of the protagonists – none of them sympathetic – tries to assert control over increasingly threatening proceedings. The whole thing has a very Film School look: lots of strange camera angles, off-centre compositions, idiosyncratic use of screen space, abrupt edits and the like, accompanied by a jazzy score (1960s arthouse film: jazz = cool), as well as an East European sensibility. There's no doubting Polanski's talent: a *wunderkind* (somewhat reminiscent of a young Kubrick). Polanski manages to make a great deal out of a fairly thin narrative and the film is seeped with a sense of threat. It's a clever, accomplished, powerful and enigmatic film about unpleasant people. I recall John Ford's remark that he had no interest in making films about disagreeable people doing nasty things which is precisely what Polanski is interested in. **Knife in the Water** is a warm-up for **Cul de Sac** where the dynamics of sexual intimidation, manipulation and humiliation are played out in more explicit and more bizarre form. Love the Polish title: *Noz w wodzie*! Same to you!



## KOKORO

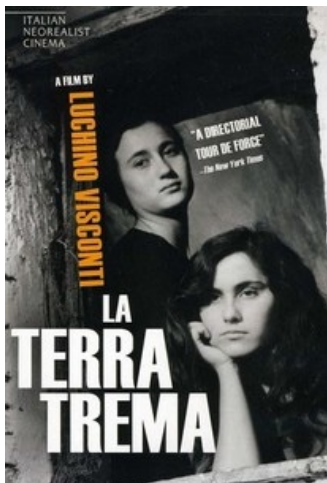
1955 F 4.25 7.4 JAP

**Ichikawa, Kon**

Kumenobu Fujioka

Masayuki Mori, Michiyo Aratama,  
Tatsuya Mihasi, Shoji Yasui

Meiji Japan, 1899-1912. Nobuchi (Mori) is a lonely, introverted, unemployed scholar, married to a loving but frustrated and unhappy wife. He befriends a young student, becoming a kind of informal mentor and teacher (*sensei*) but this relationship triggers some disturbing memories from the past. A study of desire, loneliness, guilt, self-loathing, and cruelty which manages to be both intense and meditative. Ichikawa handles difficult material which might easily have gone off the rails with a good deal of sensitivity and poise in a manner which displays some European influences, more flamboyant than the comparatively restrained style of some of his famous contemporaries. His use of facial close-ups, narrative transitions, and the treatment of space and time occasionally put one in mind of Bergman, as did his pivotal use of creative ambiguity in the characterisation and development of the theme. The domestic melodrama is paralleled, as is so often the case in Japanese cinema, by an unsettling study of disturbing currents in the public domain and in the national psyche. Not a lot of laughs and it certainly won't pass muster as light entertainment; rather, a challenging film with dark themes, made with great assurance and some panache. A minor criticism: the attempts to make Mori look younger in the flashbacks don't really work, unlike the much more credible depiction of the wife as a very young woman. However, the performances are altogether excellent. A few of the highlights in Masayuki Mori's career: **Roshomon** (50), **Ugetsu Monogatari** (53), **Floating Clouds** (55), **Forever a Woman** (1955), **When a Woman Ascends the Stairs** (60), **The Bad Sleep Well** (60).



## LA TERRA TREMA

1948    F    3.75    7.9    ITA

### Visconti, Luchino

GR Aldo

Antonio Arcidiacono, Giuseppe Arcidiacono, Nicola Castorino, Rosa Catalano

Visconti's second feature about the grinding dirt-poor life of a Sicilian family in the fishing village of Aci-Trezza. The film has a strong Marxist message, a semi-documentary story with a narration which Visconti added later, and a beautiful visual rhythm with several striking sequences, most notably the fishing fleet leaving at night and coming home before dawn. (As Andrew Sarris noted, *Visconti is torn between the conflicting demands of dismal documentary and grand opera*. Incidentally, Sarris seems more comfortable with "arthouse" message films than he does with the Hollywood variety.) The actors were all inhabitants of this area of Sicily, none of them professional actors. Visconti, always good with his players, coaxes very convincing performances out of all of them. The heartless and sneering wholesalers seem too awful and heartless to be true but life in poverty-stricken villages can certainly be cruel. Nonetheless Visconti does rather load the dice with an over-insistent political message. Echoes and premonitions of several films including **Edge of the World** and **Stromboli**. It's bleak and fairly unrelenting though not without pathos and tenderness. It's a long haul and sometimes hard going but an intermittently rewarding and impressive film. Certainly not as engrossing or as inventive as his first feature **Ossessione**, and a fair distance behind the best of the neo-realist catalogue. (It's often, and wrongly, reckoned to be one of the masterpieces of neo-realism.)

The full version was not screened in a commercial cinema anywhere in the world until 1963.

Pauline Kael: *It may be the best boring movie ever made.*



## LABYRINTH OF LIES

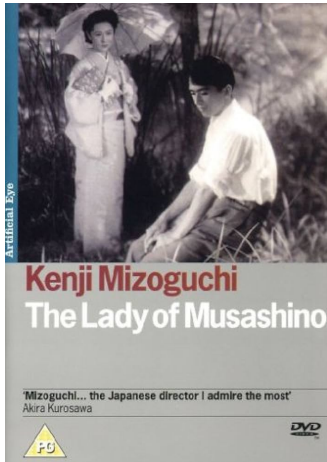
2014 F 3.75 7.3 GER

**Ricciarelli, Giulio**

André Szymanski, Alexander Fehling, Fiedrike Becht, Johannes Krisch, Hansi Jochmann, Gert Voss

Germany, late 50s. A small group of lawyers are battling against the odds to bring some Nazi war criminals to justice. They are butting their heads against the largely wilful collective amnesia about the Nazi past, particularly the atrocities of Auschwitz. The film's protagonist is a fictional composite of three real-life lawyers who, with considerable courage and persistence, brought about the first large-scale trial of Nazis in German courts (as distinct from the international tribunal at Nuremberg). Our main man, Johann Radmann (Fehling), starts out as a naive and green young prosecutor who finds himself drawn into a darkening vortex of guilt, complicity, hypocrisy, cover-ups and political expediency. There's a not very interesting romantic sub-plot and a narrative thread concerning the hunt for Josef Menegle.

A first-up feature for Italian director Ricciarelli; it shows in awkward and mannered camera work, some clumsy devices and predictable narrative moves. But, to its credit, the film eschews sensationalism, sentimentality and mock-heroics to present a sober and disturbing story about deeply significant historical events. Like most films about Nazism and its aftermath it's not altogether able to do justice to its very challenging subject matter but it does enough to make this a worthwhile and interesting film.



## LADY OF MUSASHINO

1951    F    3.75    7.3    A JAP

**Mizoguchi, Kenji**

Kinuyo Tanaka, Yukiko Todoroki,  
Masayuki Mori, Akhihiko  
Katayama, So Yamamura

Post-war Japan, on the outskirts of Tokyo. An unhappy marriage of Michiko, “the Lady of Musashino”, a woman committed to a traditional moral code, and her weak and unloving husband, a writer, university teacher and a Stendahl translator. Michiko’s younger cousin returns from the war and falls in love with her ... Another loveless marriage is going on next door and neighbour Tomiko is looking for some action.

The film bears Mizoguchi’s stamp: long takes, a graceful gliding camera (but only intermittently), the almost exclusive use of the medium and long shot (we only get one real close-up in the whole film, close to the end and at a particularly dramatic moment). But it’s an odd film which doesn’t have the poise and the sure touch of Mizoguchi’s best work. It’s also difficult to know quite what to make of Mizoguchi’s position viz the central theme of fidelity to one’s word (possibly ill-advised) and to an inflexible code at the expense of love. I found the whole thing a little flat — like a footy game in Round 22 between two teams from the bottom half of the ladder. There is still plenty to enjoy but one wanted more from a Mizoguchi film.





## LAND OF MINE

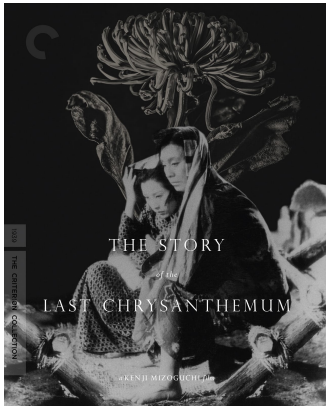
2015 F 4.00 7.8 DEN

**Zandvliet, Martin**

Roland Møller, Louis Hoffmann,  
Joel Basman

After-the-war war movie. West Coast of Denmark, post WW2. A group of very young German POWs are forced to dismantle and clear thousands of landmines, supervised by a hard-man sergeant. "Taut" is the word here: it's a grim, tight, terse film with very little flab, plenty of tension and grit. No back stories. The narrative trajectory and thematic development are fairly predictable but the film generates plenty of electricity nonetheless. Shot in a clean minimalist style with an interesting score.

The title is a bit corny: the Danish title translates as *Under the Sand* — better! Writing in *Entertainment Weekly*, Joe McGovern was not happy with this film; he called it "bomb porn" ... ?



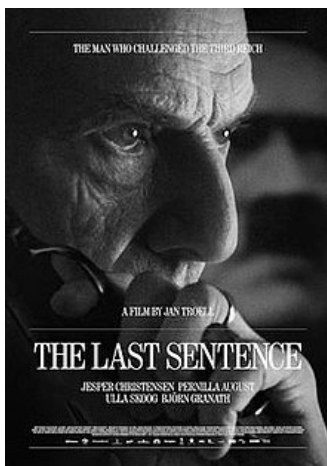
## LAST CHRYSANTHEMUM

1939 F 3.75 7.2 A JAP

**Mizoguchi, Kenji**

Shataro Hanayagi, Kokichi Takada, Gonjuro Kawarazaki

Adopted son of a great Kibuki actor is exiled from the family because of his love for one of the family maids. He goes on the road but life is hard...a story about 19thC century social divisions and class attitudes, and the position of women (Mizoguchi's abiding theme). By now Mizoguchi has a distinctive and coherent aesthetic and his film-making style is perfectly refined. In the end it's a heart-breaking story told with great tact and delicacy. But: the narrative pace is a bit too leisurely for me.; couldn't muster any interest in the theatrical scenes; the acting is fine but not out of the box (where are Setsuko and Hideko when you need them?). Lacks the magic and power of **Ugetsu**. But these things are all relative. (Not be confused with Mikio Naruse's **Late Chrysanthemums**, 1954, which I liked a lot more.)



## LAST SENTENCE, THE

2012 F 4.00 6.1 SWE

**Troell, Jan**

Mischa Gavrjusjov

Jesper Christensen, Pernilla  
August, Ulla Skoog , Bjorn  
Granath

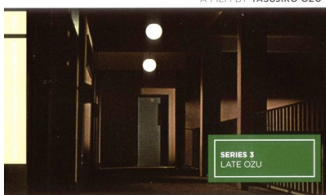
Sweden, 1933-1945. The story of anti-fascist Swedish journalist, Torgny Segerstedt, bracketed by Hitler's rise to the Chancellorship in 1933 and his grisly end in 1945. At first blush this looks like a political thriller/morality tale about fascism, *realpolitik* and the press but it turns out to be a somewhat muted Bergmanesque chamber piece about the interstices of private, social and political life, focussing on the problematic case of Segerstedt — handsome, charming and sophisticated in his social life, an implacable, articulate and courageous opponent of fascism, and a cold fish in his private life. The film tracks his relationships with his wife and his lover (the wife of one of his best friends) while narrative tributaries concern his dealings with his daughter, his secretary and his dogs. The rise of Nazism and the political predicaments of the Swedish establishment form the backdrop. The film suffers from a lack of thematic focus. Segerstedt's private life isn't really quite interesting enough to support the weight that Troell places on it while the political themes are underdeveloped. However, the film offers two conspicuous pleasures: the exquisitely crafted and limpid BW camera work; the performances of the four principals, uniformly excellent.

It would seem that this was the last of Troell's works, made when he was 82, but he is still alive — and hopefully kicking as well. Jesper Christensen is a veteran of the Swedish cinema and stage and, by his own account, has specialized in playing "worried men". (The look and visual texture of the film is not unlike Haneke's **The White Ribbon** but the sensibilities of the directors are miles apart, Troell's being much the more congenial.)

Don't be diverted by the low IMDb score (6.1) which is quite undeserved.



LATE AUTUMN  
A FILM BY YASUJIRO OZU



## LATE AUTUMN

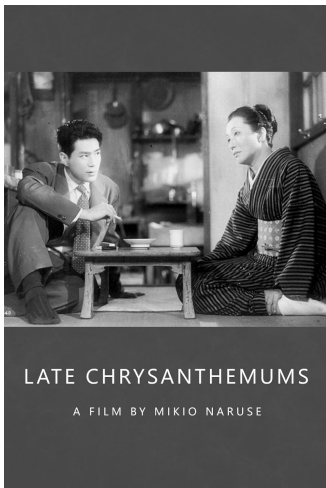
1960 F 4.75 8.2 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Yuhara Atsuto

Setsuko Hara, Yoko Tsukasa,  
Mariko Okada, Shin Saburi, Ryuji  
Kita, Yuriko Tashiro

A group of ageing business-men, friends from way back, plot the marriage of their deceased friend's beautiful daughter. She lives with her widowed mother and is devoted to her ... you're starting to think **Late Spring**. Yep, same story, but this time it's mother and daughter rather than father and daughter. Similar narrative structure but a very different film for many reasons, two of the most obvious being the much greater agency given to the women characters here and the lighter, more comic and more mellow treatment of what we might call, following Kawabata, "Beauty and Sadness". The three female protagonists — mother, daughter and friend — are fully individuated here while the men remain, for the most part, in the background. Without over-schematizing, it might be said that the mother represents tradition and the old ways, the friend Western modernity, with the daughter caught somewhere in the middle. The three older men are also sharply and characterized. The other theme (very Ozu-esque), played out with the most exquisite delicacy, is the passing of time, the sorrows and losses that life inevitably brings, the ephemerality of life itself. Quite a lot of saki goes down the hatch. The last 15 minutes are sublime. Superb ensemble playing by the mostly familiar faces from other Ozu films, but the previously unseen Yoko Tsukasa (the daughter) is herself quite heavenly. I always like Shin Saburi (Mamiya). Ozu's style has attained a poise and equilibrium, as well as a new level of abstraction, which is quite seductive. The exploitation of space, the use of costume, colour and sound, the *mise-en-scène* and choreography, of repetition, parallelism and narrative elisions, all part of Ozu's familiar stylistic repertoire, are here deployed in the most accomplished fashion imaginable. Superb print, as we expect from BFI. The notes in the accompanying booklet suggest that the comparative neglect of **Late Autumn** is that it is a remake of an indubitable masterpiece which inevitably, it falls short of the original. Probably right. But **Late Autumn** has its own distinctions and merits and is a truly wonderful film. While it's not quite the miraculous work that **Late Spring** is, and probably no better than several other Ozu films (**Early Summer**, **Tokyo Story**, **Equinox Flower**, **Autumn Afternoon**), as they say in the vernacular, it blew me away. I like Peter Bradshaw's capsule statement in *The Guardian*: "a masterpiece of tenderness and serio-comic charm, as tonally ambiguous and morally complex as anything he made... within the reticence there is something profound, and genuinely beautiful". Yes, quite!



## LATE CHRYSANTHEMUMS

1954 F 4.75 7.5 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Haruko Sugimura, Yuko Mochizuki, Chikako Hosokawa

Postwar Japan. Four ageing ex-geishas: one has become a wealthy, cold and bitter money-lender in whom human feeling has almost dried up completely, but not quite; another, with her husband, is struggling to keep their small business afloat; the other two are widows, now losing their son and daughter respectively, and facing a lonely old age as well as more immediate money problems. The plot is permeated with money but the main themes are to do with lost love, faded hopes, regret, loneliness, the passing of time and the gulf between generations in post-war Japan. It's a restrained, sombre and formally elegant film with beautiful performances from the three leading players. When are we going to see a mediocre Naruse film? Not any time soon I suspect! His strike record so far is 100% (unlike Collingwood's kicking efficiency). This is his most accomplished film since the very early **Wife! be Like a Rose!** Some critics describe this as a tragi-comedy, usually adducing the drunk scenes: can't see anything comic here myself! It's harrowing. I now badly need some Hollywood lite-trash!

Haruko Sugimura's glittering CV includes, amongst many others, **Late Spring, Repast, Tokyo Story, Early Spring, Floating Weeds and An Autumn Afternoon** — a veritable Honour Roll of the Japanese Cinema! In *Slant* Magazine, Keith Uhlich reckons this to be Naruse's "most perfect film" — leaving aside the question of whether perfection can have degrees, I understand his claim ... but I would rate most of the Naruse films we've seen slightly higher than **LC**. But heck, when we're talking about films this good, does it really matter? (What's the best Hawks film — **Red River, Rio Bravo, His Girl Friday, Bringing Up Baby, To Have and Have Not.....??**) Uhlich goes on to say that **Yearning** is less than perfect but is Naruse's "fullest and most expressive achievement". I wouldn't argue with that but I think it's matched by **When a Woman Ascends the Stairs**.



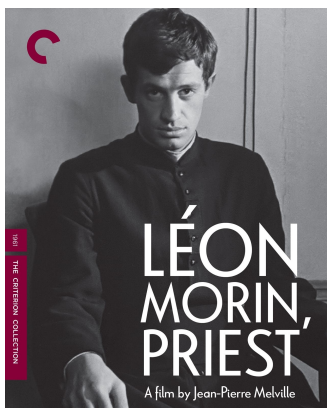
## LATE SPRING

1949    F    5.00    8.3    JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Chisu Ryu, Setsuko Hara,  
Haruko Sugimura

Quite simply, one of the most beautiful and poignant films ever, wondrous beyond any singing of it. The story is told with exquisite delicacy, poise and depth of feeling, as is the rendering of traditional Japanese culture through the tea ceremony, the Zen gardens, the monks chanting, Noh theatre, and the grave customs and courtesies of everyday life. The synthesis of the traditional and modern, operating on many different levels of the film, including the stylistic as well as the thematic, is quite extraordinary. Ozu's contemplative style is used to astonishingly powerful effect — and all without histrionics of any kind. The austere aesthetic and the simple but deep story are perfectly harmonized. Chisu Ryu personifies the adage that “less is more” while Setsuko Hara is one of the most enchanting women to ever grace the screen. Haruko Sugimura, whom I liked so much in **Floating Weeds**, gives another fine performance. All the characters are utterly convincing and so human. The film is also quietly humorous (a Gary Cooper lookalike indeed!). The music/score by Senji Ito is amongst the most haunting I've ever heard; lyrical, ethereal, even celestial, profoundly moving, and perfectly attuned to Ozu's concern with the evanescence and fragility of life, the inexorability of time and change, especially as they impinge on family relations. When a friend said it was as good as **Tokyo Story** I was skeptical, even incredulous; how could such a thing be possible?? It's not only as good as **TS**, it might even be better! Apparently it was Ozu's favourite... and why not! Just as Satyajit Ray's work is both profoundly Indian and absolutely universal, so too is Ozu's cinema deeply rooted in “Japanese-ness”, if one may so express it, but also transcending it. Quite amazing how even intelligent and discerning critics can so badly mis-read a film — eg: Roger Ebert reckons that the film is a kind of anti-marriage testament and that the aunt is a sinister character who manipulates father and daughter into a marriage that neither really wants. Another made the altogether predictable but absurd claim that it's about father-daughter incest. What's with these guys? (I must say that Roger is usually more sensible — but not without his lapses. At least he recognizes that the film is a masterpiece.)



## LÉON MORIN, PRÊTRE

1961 F 4.50 7.8 FRA

Melville, Jean-Pierre

Jean-Paul Belmondo,  
Immanuelle Riva, Irene Tunc,  
Nicole Mirel

WW2, Occupation France. A sceptical woman with Marxist convictions is fascinated by a young parish priest, embarking on an emotional, intellectual and spiritual journey with unforeseen consequences. The film is a rigorous examination of certain themes (faith, desire, friendship, commitment, the search for meaning, spiritual turmoil), some of them articulated in the dialogue between Riva and Belmondo. But it is also an austere visual and concrete film which derives much of its effect from *mise-en-scène*, from look and gesture, from acutely observed physical details, and from what is not said. A film of ambiguities, paradoxes and provocations. I found it quite mesmerizing. In some respects it recalls Rohmer's **My Night with Maud**.

Who would have thought that Belmondo (a very expressive and sensual actor) could have played the priest so convincingly? (On the other hand, Belmondo's playboy persona is deliberately exploited to create some of the sexual frisson in the story.) Melville's aesthetic, in its asceticism, rigour and control, shares something with Bresson's. When a critic remarked that Melville's films were becoming "Bressonian", Melville tartly retorted: "It's Bresson who's always been Melvillean!". He had a point!

On the evidence of this film Melville is best described as "an atheistic Jew" rather than a "Jewish atheist", if you see the point. Excellent exposition by Ginette Vincendeau in the extras. Volker Schlöndorff, the German director who worked for a time as Melville's assistant, is also worth watching though not as interesting as GV.



## LEOPARD, THE

1963 F 5.00 8.1 ITA

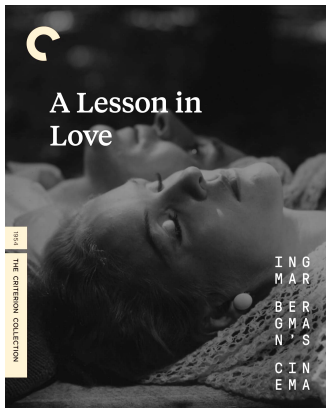
## Visconti, Luchino

Burt Lancaster, Claudia  
Cardinale, Alain Delon, Paolo  
Stoppa, Romolla Valli

An elegy for a decadent and morally ambiguous order (feudal, Catholic, both opulent and squalid) whose necessary compromises with the new order (bourgeois, materialistic, nationalistic and semi-democratic) ensure its own demise. Visconti's romantic, aristocratic and traditional impulses win out over his ostensibly Marxist and progressivist sympathies. Lancaster is commanding, graceful, noble, stoic and compromised; Delon is for once playing an animated and energetic role which he does with some panache; Cardinale is sensuous and beautiful (what a surprise). The film is, needless to say, lavishly mounted, full of graceful and languid camera movement, superbly choreographed and shot in sumptuous Technicolor. The performances are uniformly excellent and the film conjures a meticulously observed but disappearing world. The final ballroom stanza is a *tour-de-force* and quite magnificent... but perhaps goes on just a little too long! One of the most interesting characters, Father Pironne, fades away in the second half. It's long but the rewards are commensurate. A great novel made into a great film – doesn't happen very often.

Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, perhaps the doyen of Visconti critics: *Visconti's strength is shown when he can use his decorative and operatic talents for a totally original construction.* Well, half right given that his two best films, **White Nights** and **The Leopard**, were not "totally original constructions", deriving in part at least from literary texts (Dostoevsky and Lampedusa respectively). Surely Visconti's finest film and one of Lancaster's very best. (When Lancaster was first suggested to Visconti he said, "Oh no, a cowboy!") This film most surely must have influenced on Coppola, Scorsese and Leone. I can't imagine **The Godfather** without it. **The Leopard** is immensely impressive... stupendous is the word. Arguably the pinnacle of the Italian cinema in its richest period.





## LESSON IN LOVE, A

1954 F 3.75 7.1 SWE

### Bergman, Ingmar

Martin Bodin

Eva Dahlbeck, Gunnar  
Bjornstrand, Harriet Andersson,  
Ake Gronberg, Yvonne Lombard

*Scenes from a Marriage*, or *Marriage as Absurdist Comedy*, or *All About Eva Dahlbeck*: sex, fidelity and infidelity, boredom, jealousy, memory, death, the passage of time, the ephemerality of passion, male vanity, the bonds of marriage and family life... sound familiar? Yep, pure Bergman...but played for laughs (mainly). Bjornstrand and Dahlbeck in a more or less screwball routine... but Bergman can't help himself: from time to time things turn serious. Sometimes charming, sometimes caustic, often ironic. As always with Bergman films, one gets a powerful sense of an intelligent, sharply observant and restless creative sensibility at work. It's by no means his most impressive or satisfying film — far from it — but it has the indelible Bergman imprint. And GB and ED are superb. Much of the framing story takes place on a train.

Theatricality, so often exploited brilliantly by Bergman, here sometimes seems a bit awkward. The shift in tone is sometimes disconcerting. The use of flashbacks is less deft than in some of the masterworks (**Wild Strawberries** et al). Harriet Andersson overplays her rather boring role. Some of the film feels heavy-handed. It's a warm-up for the more complete **Smiles of a Summer Night**. But, in any event, comedy is not Bergman's natural métier.



## LEVIATHAN

2014 F 5.00 7.6 RUS

**Zvyagintsev, Andrey**

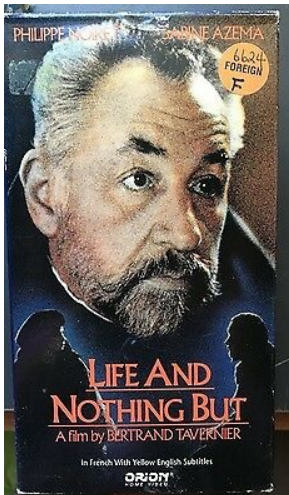
Mikhail Krichman

Elena Lyadova, Aleksey

Serebryakov, Vladimir

Vdovichenkov, Roman Madyanov

Putin's Russia, a remote fishing town on the Barents Sea. Local fisherman, Kolya, is being done over by the corrupt mayor who is after his property. The mayor, his snout very deep in the trough, is in cahoots with Big Bosses, the cops and the local bishop: corruption is pervasive and the justice system a mockery. The town itself is surrounded by decrepit relics, dilapidated buildings, a burnt-out church, rubbish. Kolya's family and friends get involved in a battle against the authorities but there are complications on the domestic side of the fence as well. The film manages at one and the same time to convey the claustrophobia, cramped horizons and the violent, alcohol-soaked undercurrents of life in the town, and the mystical majesty of the landscape which suggests something mythic, spiritual, metaphysical. The title has many references, most obviously Biblical and Hobbesian. Impressive on all fronts: the poised and carefully choreographed cinematography; the beautiful controlled performances, resisting the histrionics and sentimentality to which the story might easily have lent itself; the creative ambiguities inhering in the narrative; a haunting score featuring music by Phillip Glass. It's a film of high ambition and daring, fully realized in a human drama which is powerful and engrossing as well as offering a desolate and devastating critique of political corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude, ecclesiastical collusion and hypocrisy. (Is Putin's Russia really this bad? It seems, depressingly, that it probably is.) A strangely beautiful and disturbing film and surely the best out of Russia in quite a while, perhaps since Tarkovsky. It strikes me as intensely Russian with echoes of Gogol, Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Solzhenitsyn — with some Kafka thrown into the mix! As several reviewers remarked Zvyagintsev bids fair to become one of the contemporary cinema's genuine heavyweights.



## **LIFE AND NOTHING BUT**

1989      F    4.00    7.5    FRA

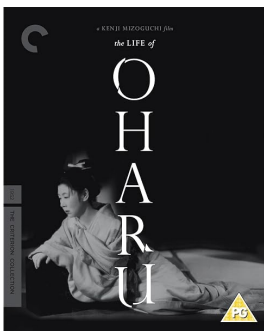
### **Tavernier, Bertrand**

Bruno de Keyzer

Philippe Noiret, Sabine Azema,  
Pascale Vignal

France 1920. Major Dellapane (Noiret) has the grisly task of trying to account for 350,000 missing soldiers at the end of WW1. He is dedicated to this daunting assignment but becomes obsessed with keeping precise statistical records, partly to document the appalling human cost of the war which should (but doesn't) provide an antidote to the postwar patriotic rah-rah evident in pompous ceremonies and the rash of memorials of one sort and another. The story turns on his relationships with two women – one a haughty, aristocratic woman to whom he feels a growing but partially repressed attraction, the other a young school teacher – who are both in search of their missing husbands (dead, maimed, deranged?). He also has to attend to the excavation of a tunnel in which a French train has been buried in rubble after detonating the land mines of the retreating German army. Shot in muted and misty colour with plenty of mud and damp.

The attractions of the film include the depiction of the postwar milieu, an interesting story about a little-publicized aspect of war, fine performances by Noiret and Azema, the humour provided by a cynical sculptor (business has never been better!), and an embryonic love story. The two most conspicuous weaknesses of the film are a rather contrived and implausible twist in the plot and the fact that the story about the school teacher collapses into an empty space. Nonetheless, a powerful if oblique critique of militarism and sentimental patriotism, dominated by the complex character of Dellapane and the splendid performance by Noiret.



## LIFE OF OHARU

1952    F    4.50    8.2    JAP

**Mizoguchi, Kenji**

Kinuyo Tanaka, Ichiro Sugia,  
Toshiro Mifune, Jukichi Uno

Based on a 17th century literary classic but with some radical changes, **Life of Oharu** tells the story of a woman who is crucified by the mores and conventions of the time, falling from the elevated position in the imperial court to become a degraded prostitute. It's a heartbreaking and harrowing narrative, made all the more so by Mizoguchi's elegant, graceful and very deliberate style characterized by long fluid takes and plenty of crane shots. (Ozu films from below, Mizoguchi from above.)

One of the great post-war Japanese films, no doubt, a cinematic masterwork which is hugely impressive in many ways, as **Ugetsu Monogatari** was. But I personally find the films of both Ozu and Naruse more deeply affecting. I'm not enamoured of the Japanese period films, such as this, of which Mizoguchi was the undisputed master. And as fine an actress as Kinuyo Tanaka is she ain't Setsuka and she ain't Hideko either. Kinuyo T played in 14 of Mizoguchi's films.

Mizoguchi's sister, who raised him, was sold by their father as a geisha. Mizoguchi thought this his best film; it was certainly one that put him on the map in the West after it was shown at the Venice film festival, to much acclaim from the *Cahiers* clique.



## LIGHT, THE

2004 F 4.00 7.0 FRA

## Lioret, Philippe

Patrick Blossier

Sandrine Bonnaire, Philippe Torreton, Grégori Derangère, Ann Consigny, Emilie Dequenne

Young woman comes to a remote Breton island to sell her late father's stone cottage. While there she discovers the story of her father, mother and a damaged vet of the Algerian War who came to "the end of the world" to work as a lighthouse keeper. Filmed in muted greys and blues the film interweaves a portrait of the harsh and circumscribed life on the island and the drama of the three protagonists. Austere in tone, style and dramatic development. The love-triangle story is, in many respects, predictable enough but its treatment is quiet, sensitive and engrossing. Sandrine Bonnaire, Philippe Torreton and Gregori Derangère all deliver performances of some grace and subtlety. Sandrine Bonnaire was in Chabrol's **La Cérémonie** (95) and Varda's **Vagabond** (85). Some of the critics grizzled about its "old-fashioned" and "conventional" treatment of the material. Hooey! My only small problem with the film was a not-very-subtle use of geographical/meteorological symbolism – occasionally clumsy. Otherwise I found it a very satisfying if somewhat low-key experience.

Aka: **The Wife of the Lighthouse Keeper**

**French title: L'équipier**



## LIVING IS EASY

2013 F 4.00 7.1 SPA

Trueba, David

Javier Camara, Natalia de Molina, Francesc Colomer

*Strawberry fields forever!* Spain, 1966. Middle-aged bachelor, teacher and Beatles obsessive, Antonio, skips school to search for John Lennon who is on a film shoot in the south of Spain (Richard Lester's **How I Won the War**). On the road he picks up 20-year old Belen, young, beautiful and pregnant, and Juanjo, a sixteen year old who is escaping home. They end up in Almeira where they encounter the locals, the film crew ... and, fleetingly, John Lennon. It's off-beat, leisurely, whimsical and charming, quietly amusing, gentle and touching. As well as offering us low-key comedy and deft character sketches it's a portrait of a time and a place, and a tribute to the Beatles' music. The bare bones of the narrative – school teacher-Beatles fan searching out, and finding, Lennon – are based on real-life events. An acoustic version of "Strawberry Fields" is the only Beatles song on the soundtrack, most of which is slightly jazz inflected and very pleasing.

The film was a huge hit in Spain and did well on the arthouse circuit.



## LOS OLIVADOS

1950 F 4.25 8.3 MEX

**Buñuel, Luis**

Gabriel Figueroa

Alfonso Mejía, Roberto Cobo,  
Estela Inda

Buñuel's raw, brutal and beautiful film about the moral corruptions and humiliations of poverty, told through the stories of a bunch of street kids in Mexico City. Theft, violence, murder, degradation, despair, injustice, pedophilia ... but also moments of tenderness, love and compassion. It's relentless and harrowing yet full of a kind of beauty and poetry. The visual work by Buñuel's collaborator, Gariel Figueroa, is outstanding, leaving us with more than a few memorable images: the beating of the old blind man, Meche washing her legs in donkey milk, Pedro's dream, the assault on the legless man, to name a few. Neorealism meets poetic surrealism in the grungy backstreets of Mexico City. (We know that Buñuel was a great admirer of De Sica's **Shoeshine**.) It's an ordeal but one worth undergoing. Made in 21 days in the slums and shanty towns of Mexico City.

Aka: **The Young and the Damned**



## LOVE LETTER

1953 F 4.25 7.3 JAP

**Tanaka, Kinuyo**

Hiroshi Suzuki

Masayuki Mori, Yoshiko Kuga,  
Jukichi Uno, Juzo Dozan

Postwar Japan. The war separates Reikichi from his childhood sweetheart Michiko. Later, heartbreak when he finds she has married, not knowing that it was under severe family pressure. Five years pass until he discovers that she is widowed... The story involves not only these two would-be lovers but his younger brother and a friend who runs a teashop where women pay him to write letters to their departed American lovers. A tangled mess. The story grapples with issues raised by the war, and the American occupation: racism, jealousy, humiliation, self-respect, conflict, and forgiveness, themes playing out on both the personal and the national level. Apparently this was the very first Japanese film to make any mention of the American occupation, a sensitive and traumatic subject. Even here we do not actually see a single American. The script sometimes verges on the 'melodramatic' (in the pejorative sense) and Mori perhaps overstates the understating, if you see what I mean. (Too much of "Less is more", so to speak!) ... but the thing as a whole is beautifully shot, nicely acted, engrossing, moving, and who could argue with its central message? Loved the characters (and actors), especially enjoyed Juzo Dozan as the friend. Also Tanaka's treatment of the material. No real villains to be found though some of the characters sometimes behave badly: that's life! This, Tanaka's debut feature, is impressive indeed as was **Forever a Woman**, and only confirms one's earlier suspicion that she is a film-maker of considerable distinction who deserves a much more lofty status as a director. (Tanaka, of course, is known primarily as an actor – 216 credits! – one of the glittering stars in the Japanese constellation but much less well known as the director of six features.) Love Letter is a remarkably accomplished debut, quite fluid and supple, and stylistically not at all a would-be clone of any of the great directors with whom Tanaka made so many extraordinary films. Probably closer to Naruse than any of the other heavy hitters. Chisu Ryu appears for a fleeting moment and Tanaka herself has a small but significant role. Scripted by Keisuke Kinoshita from a novel by Fumio Niwa. Excellent review on the JapanonFilm website — but beware of spoilers.





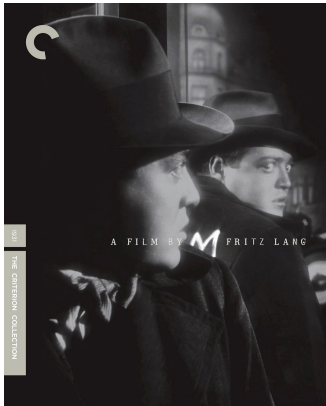
## LOVELESS

2017 F 4.25 7.7 RUS

**Zvyagintsev, Andrey**

Maryana Spivak, Aleksey Rozin,  
Matvey Novikov

A bleak and intense drama about a loveless family, a messy and acrimonious divorce, generational tensions and the disappearance of the ten-year old son... and more generally, a loveless and graceless world. The mother works in a beauty salon, the father in an office, both shallow, selfish and unpleasant, both in new relationships. The boy's disappearance, unnoticed for a day or two, triggers a lengthy search through the wintry landscape, streets, apartment buildings, forests and the scarred ruins of a large and now decrepit building complex. Along the way we see/hear references to contemporary social/political problems while the characters spend an inordinate time on their phones and taking selfies — a multivalent metaphor. The narrative is cast as family drama/procedural thriller but, like **Leviathan**, it's a cold and unflinching look at the spiritual sterility of contemporary Russia. Impressive certainly ... but I liked **Leviathan** a lot better. This seemed more cerebral, more punitive, less heartfelt, and closer in tone and style to **Elena**. Some critics have made comparisons with Haneke's films: both obviously highly accomplished film-makers dealing with challenging material ... but Zvyagintsev has a heart and a soul — on the evidence of his films I'm not at all sure that Haneke's heart and soul haven't atrophied into something cold and inert.



**M**

1931    F    5.00    7.4    GER

## Lang, Fritz

Fritz Wagner

Peter Lorre, Otto Wernicke,  
Gustaf Gundrens

Mean Streets! Fritz Lang's astonishing film, in the earliest period of sound cinema. A serial killer, a city on the edge of hysteria, urban corruption, mob rule, the cynicism of politicians and press, class, madness, pathology, the rule of law. It's about Germany 1931. It's also about looking and hearing — ie. the cinema itself. Powerful, intense, mesmerizing, disturbing. It's also a meticulously and deliberately constructed film which draws equally on Lang's impeccable craftsmanship and on his imaginative flair and daring. One of the cinema's towering landmarks. (There doesn't seem to be any point in detailed commentary on the many and now widely-celebrated distinctions and innovations of the film: Lorre's performance, the extraordinary use of sound and silence, the way the particular story is inseparable from the milieu and, perhaps less obviously, its moment in German history.) Not surprisingly the Nazi bosses didn't like this film, especially under its original title, "Murderers Among Us". The seeds of noir are already present in Lang's film: expressionistic cinematography; the claustrophobic, violent, paranoid, corrupt city; the pathological killer; police procedure and the documentary-like accumulation of realistic detail; the paralleling of police and criminal; moral ambiguities. The only conspicuously absent staple of film noir is the Spider Woman. Lang's mastery of the medium irresistibly invites comparisons with Hitch: both revealed their genius early in the sound period. The screenplay was ostensibly by Thea von Harbou, the pro-Nazi wife whom Lang left behind when he fled Germany. Lang himself had a big hand in the scripting. Lorre was Jewish and he too fled Germany in the early 30s. Gustaf Gundrens was a famous actor who was for a time sexually involved with Klaus Mann before marrying Klaus's sister Erika in what was called a 'lavender marriage', Erika herself being entangled with Klaus' fiancée Pamela Wedekind. Klaus pilloried the actor in his novel **Mephisto**, subsequently filmed by István Szabó (1981). Vituperative recriminations and lawsuits all around!



## M. HULOT'S HOLIDAY

1953 F 3.75 7.6 FRA

**Tati, Jacques**

Jacques Tati, Nathalie Pascaud

Bumbleton Hulot goes to the beach for a holiday and inadvertently creates havoc. The film comprises a series of anecdotes and visual gags, often reminiscent of the silent cinema. It's whimsical, witty, visually clever... but I didn't actually find it all that funny. However, I did really enjoy the charming ambience of the film and its quirky and affectionate insights into the absurdities of human behaviour. Not hard to see why this has become a classic. But not quite my thing.



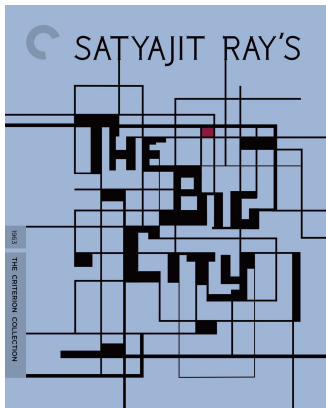
## MADAME DE...

1953 F 4.50 8.0 FRA

Ophüls, Max

Charles Boyer, Vittorio de Sica,  
Danielle Darrieux

*Fin-de-siècle* Vienna. A general gives his unhappy wife a pair of diamond earrings which subsequently change hands several times. Romances, affairs, elegant society, gambling, the high life, unhappiness. A textbook study of the Ophülsian style: long takes, waltzing camera, ornate *mise-en-scène*. Characteristic themes: the interplay of superficiality/depth, sentiment/feeling, artifice/reality, romanticism/classicism, farce/tragedy; the inexorability of time; the desire for the unattainable. The pathos of romanticism. Superb principals. Formal perfection but comparatively “cold”. Andrew Sarris thought it the most perfect film ever made! Heck! Max Ophüls’ sensibility and preoccupations parallel, precisely, those of Stefan Zweig (author of **Letter to an Unknown Woman**, also filmed by Ophüls). Aka **The Earrings of Madame de...**



## MAHANAGAR

1963 F 4.75 8.3 IND

Ray, Satyajit

Madhabi Mukherjee, Anil  
Chatterjee, Jaya Bhaduri

Mid-1950s Calcutta: wife of lowly bank clerk has to go out to work to keep the three-generation extended family financially afloat. A beautiful depiction of changing social pressures and values, and of a young woman becoming conscious of the wider world. Has any director dealt with the situations and predicaments of women better than Ray? Has any (male) director shown such respect and love for women? (The contenders would be Ozu, Naruse, Mizoguchi, Dreyer, Sirk ...) **Mahanagar** is also a touching portrait of a marriage and a family. What to say about Madhabi Mukherjee (**Charulata**)? — she is quite wonderful ... again: a superb actor in the very finest register — subtlety, delicacy, nuance, capable of conveying deep feeling without any showiness. And, of course, she is ravishingly beautiful. But as is typical of Ray works, all the actors deliver more or less perfectly realized performances (the one problem is Vicky Redwood as the Anglo-Indian). The last ten minutes are slightly problematical.

The film does nothing to jeopardise Ray's standing as a director in the highest pantheon of the cinema. Ray writes, composes, directs — and to all these roles he brings extraordinary creativity, intelligence, sensitivity and compassion. He also seems to have been a modest, likeable and admirable human being, which certainly can't be said of all great directors! In fact, of just how many can it be said? This is a whisker's breadth behind **Pather Panchali**, **Aparajito**, **Charulata** and **Jalsaghar**, as good or better than any other Ray film I've seen.

Some critics complained the film was "slow"; I guess they're the same folk who make that complaint about Ozu!

English title: **The Big City**



## MAKIOKA SISTERS, THE

1983 F 4.50 7.3 JAP

### Ichikawa, Kon

Keiko Kishi, Yoshilko Sakuma,  
Sayuri Yoshinga, Yukeo  
Kotegawa, Juzo Itami, Thoshiyuki  
Hosokawa, Koji Ishizaka

1938, Osaka. Story of four sisters from an old family, their relationships, marital and money issues, class, status and family honour, war, changing times and the tricky business of finding a husband for the second youngest sister. And a lot of kimonos (the old family business)! Elegaic, sumptuous, visually ravishing, with deep currents of sadness, yearning, emotional complexities and erotic desire beneath the more or less placid surface, the Chekhovian ambience and the mostly detached treatment of the story (which only dissolves in the final passages). Yes, no need to worry, there is a train station scene. Based on the novel by Junichiro Tanizaki (1948).

The narrative material and to some extent the style irresistibly recall Ozu and also Satyajit Ray (especially **Jalsaghar**) but Ichikawa has a busier and more “modern” approach to film-making. A lot of critics had trouble with the synthesized musical score. I didn’t mind it. Some critics found the film “slow”, “boring”, “uninvolving”, “confused”, “too decorative”. (Leonard Maltin gives it 2\*!) Not me! ... although I don’t think **TMS** has either the stylistic grace or the emotional depth of the best of Ozu and Naruse. But it’s magnificent nonetheless!

Ichikawa was 68 and had recently lost his wife and collaborator when he made this demanding film. Interesting that the director of **The Burmese Harp** and **Fires on the Plain** should give such a reticent treatment of the war and its aftermath.



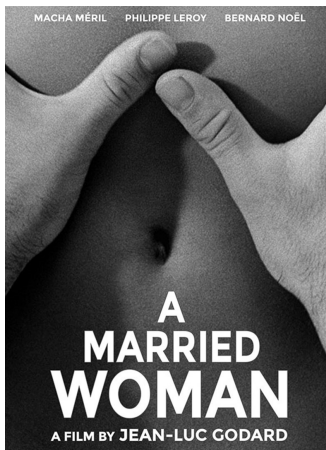
## MAN WITHOUT A PAST

2002 F 4.00 7.7 FIN

**Kaurismäki, Aki**

Markku Peltola, Kati Outinen,  
Juhani Niemela

Life in Container Park. Quirky, off-beat, melancholy and touching film about a man who is mugged and bashed, loses his memory and ends up with the Helsinki down 'n outs and a Salvation Army band. Full of deadpan humour and some amusing allusions to 1950s B-movies, zombies and rock 'n roll as well as close observation of the underworld of lost souls, unemployed, marginalized and losers who still have more heart than the outside world. There's a very funny bank robbery and an appealing dog as well. Oh, there's also a tender and very understated love story. Quietly amusing, gentle, droll, affecting. Well, everyone ought to see at least one film set in Helsinki.



## MARRIED WOMAN, A

1964 F 4.50 7.1 FRA

**Godard, Jean-Luc**

Raoul Coutard

Macha Meeril, Bernard Noël,  
Philippe Leroy, Roger Leenhardt,  
Rita Maiden

Jean-Luc ponders ponders the Mystery of Woman/Sex/Marriage, perplexing himself even further – and us as well. Beautiful and slightly ditzy young woman is oscillating between her husband and her lover, the choice made more difficult when she discovers she is pregnant, by whom she knows not. An endless stream of images and collages: the beautiful body of Macha Méril, arms, legs, torso, skin; the hands of lovers; street scenes, advertisements, taxis, glass, cement, traffic, billboards; the rudiments of a fractured story; monologues by philosopher Roger Leenhardt and the housemaid (recounting a sex romp); images of Auschwitz; frequent allusions to the cinema, Hitchcock, Resnais, Bergman, Truffaut, Bresson, Rossellini and no doubt many others. Visually mesmerizing. An altogether extraordinary production. Someone called it “pure calligraphy”. In so far as we can speak of any narrative “content” it has a strange quality for a movie which lingers on bodies and sexual attraction: it’s quite chaste and tender-hearted. If allowed a paradox one might speak of ‘an ascetic sexuality’. Is it also misogynistic (the treachery of woman etc)? Don’t know, don’t think so, don’t care.

A couple of months before the 1964 Venice Film Festival its director accosted Godard and asked why he didn’t have an entry. G replied that if he could be assured that it would be shown, he would whip up something in the very short interim. *Voilà*: **A Married Woman**, planned and scripted in a week, shot in four. Wow and Wow! I am not, generally a Godard enthusiast but this one knocked me sideways, as did **Breathless**.





## MATCH FACTORY GIRL,

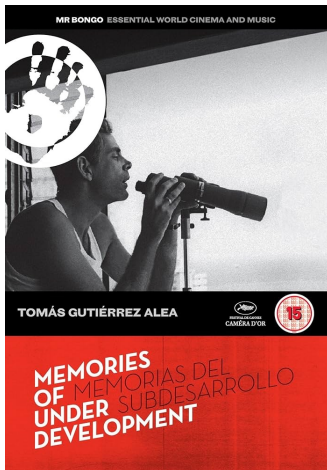
1990 F 3.75 7.6 FIN

**Kaurismäki, Aki**

Kati Outinen, Elina Salo, Esko Nikkari

Finnish Urban Grunge. Working-class young woman lives with her worn-out Mum and her unpleasant partner, works at a match factory and is on the lookout for friendship and love; the prospects are not good ... a heartrending story which turns very dark.

Much of what I previously wrote about Kaurismäki's **Ariel** applies just as well to this: "One of Kaurismäki's early films with many of his trademarks: a downbeat and quirky narrative about losers and those on the margins of society; a drab and depressing physical and social milieu; a mixture of characters, variously weird, lost, unlucky, and downtrodden, and some nasty types as well; deadpan humour of a pretty dark kind and a rather bizarre but strangely effective soundtrack. The climate of the film is chillier than some of his later offerings and there's less comic relief. ... Completely devoid of Hollywood gloss, glamour and sentimentality — what we have here rather is stoicism, irony, sadness and quiet compassion. Although this is less impressive than his major works (**The Man without a Past**, **Le Havre** and to a lesser extent, the recent **The Other Side of Hope**) it's still an interesting and appealing work." **MFG** perhaps has a little more emotional charge than **Ariel**.



## MEMORIES OF UNDER-D

1968 F 4.00 7.6 CUB

### Alea, Tomás G

Ramon Suarez

Sergio Corrieri, Daisy Granados,  
Eslinda Núñez, Omar Valdés

Post-Bastista Cuba in the interlude between the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile crisis. Sergio is a 38-year, self-styled intellectual who owns a business and some property, and is left on his own after his wife has scarpered to USA, as have several other family members and friends. He initiates an ill-advised affair with a nubile 16year old. Trouble looming. All the while he is surrounded by turmoil as the post-revolutionary situation is in a volatile state of flux and rapid change. Sergio has rather lost his bearings, falling in and out of memories of the past, nostalgia, ennui, and confusion about the political and social changes in which he is unwillingly caught.

Alea was a supporter of the Cuban Revolution but by no means an uncritical one. **MU** merges a fictional narrative with still photos and archival footage to produce an interesting, arresting and provocative story and a searching inquiry into the significance of the revolution. Hemingway's Cuban sojourn is woven into the narrative, quite effectively. **MU** is less powerful but more subtle, ironic and ambiguous than Kalatazov's full-on **I am Cuba** (1964), also featuring Sergio Corrieri.



## MEN OF THE BLUE CROSS

1955 F 4.00 6.3 POL

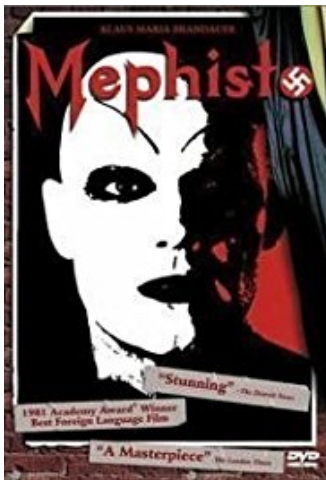
**Munk, Andrzej**

Segiusz Sprudin

Stanislaw Byrcyn, Stanislaw  
Wawrykto, Ludwic Ziembec,  
Elzbieta Polkowska

Poland, 1945. Quasi-documentary recreation of a hazardous rescue mission in the inhospitable Tara Mountains at the tail-end of the war. Several injured Russian and Polish soldiers are holed up in a makeshift 'hospital' hut behind the Nazi lines. A small group of tough mountaineers, most of them not young, set out to defy the weather, the forbidding mountains and the Nazis. A must-see for aficionados of survival/rescue/war stories set in inhospitable and treacherous terrain. It's a tribute to the real-life rescuers who showed extraordinary courage, resourcefulness and determination to complete a most improbable mission. Graphic use of weathered faces and skiing sequences. Many of the "actors" are the real-life individuals involved in the actual rescue mission.

This short film (55m) was the first feature from Andrzej Munk whose death in 1961, at the age of 40, interrupted but did not derail the making of one of the first and most extraordinary films of the Polish New Wave, **Passenger** (1963), a radical and disturbing treatment of the Nazi concentration camps. It was completed by Munk's friends and collaborators. **Passenger** is one of the few films which comes somewhere near capturing the horrific and unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust, taking an honourable place next to Resnais' more muted but equally effective **Night and Fog** (1956). **Men of the Blue Cross** is not in the same league but is well worth seeing.



## MEPHISTO

1981 F 4.00 7.9 HUN

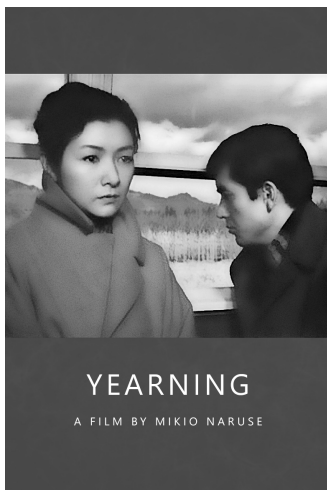
**Szabó, István**

Klaus Maria Brandauer, Krystyna Janda, Ildiko Bansagi, Karin Boyd, Rolf Hoppe

Based on Klaus Mann's novel, the story of an ambitious and clever actor, also weak and somewhat cowardly, who sells his soul to attain fame in Nazi Germany. Powerhouse performance from Brandauer who gets plenty of good support from the rest of the cast, especially Rolf Hoppe as the general. Szabó, influenced by Béla Belázs, makes dramatic use of the human face. The central theme of the film — about art, identity and power — is pertinent to any totalitarian society. An operatic and somewhat mannered visual style (sometimes in wannabe-Max-Ophüls fashion, sometimes sub-Visconti) and a narrative that occasionally stumbles under its own weight. The film becomes ponderous and is certainly at least twenty minutes too long.

The novel is based on the career of the actor Gustaf Grundgens with whom Klaus Mann (son of Thomas) had a sexual entanglement before Grundgens' "lavender marriage" to Klaus's sister Erika who in turn was conducting an affair with Klaus' fiancée Pamela Wedekind. (This is real life, not a film script!) Part of the despair that drove Mann to suicide in the late 40s was his failure to find a publisher for his novel. When it was finally published in West Germany Grundgens' son took (unsuccessful) legal action to prohibit it. Hungarian director Szabó's credits include **Colonel Redl** (also with Brandauer); Szabó also directs operas and lectures at a film school. Brandauer (like Brando!) is apparently an extremely talented but hugely difficult actor to work with.

This film has a massive reputation. It's certainly serious, intelligent, "arty", handsomely mounted, well-acted and widely celebrated. But a great film? Not for mine. (**The Conformist** dealt with some of the same themes more effectively.)



## MIDARERU (Yearning)

1964 F 5.00 8.2 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Hideko Takamine, Mitsuko  
Kusabu, Yuzo Kayama

Reiko is a war widow running a grocery business with her husband's family. Things get complicated when her brother-in-law finally declares his love for her. Difficult family relationships, economic pressures, traditional values vs. personal freedom, social conventions, duty, love. A film full of sadness, hope, tenderness, despair, pain, self-sacrifice ... and done with Naruse's usual austere delicacy. Hideko Takamine is beyond description and Yuzo Kayama is very impressive as Koji. The last sequence is as good as it gets (reminded me of the famous street scene with Anna Magnani in **Rome Open City**). An absolute must-see Naruse... along with at least half a dozen others. It didn't affect me quite as much as **When a Woman Ascends the Stairs** but it's very fine, poignant, moving, deeply humane and a superbly accomplished piece of film-making. In some places this was released as **A Woman in Turmoil** or **A Woman in Torment**; **Yearning** is better.



## MIDDLEMAN, THE

1975 F 4.25 8.4 IND

Ray, Satyajit

Soumendu Roy

THE  
MIDDLEMAN

Pradip Mukherjee, Satya  
Bannerjee, Lily Chakravaty,  
Soven Lahiri, Aparna Sen

Somnath graduates from university and finds it difficult to find a job, causing his widowed father some anxiety. He eventually establishes himself as a self-employed salesman of 'everything from pins to elephants' but the world of business confronts him with some unexpected challenges. He finds himself as 'the middleman' not only between suppliers and buyers but between a disappearing world and a newly-arrived world of industrial capitalism, 'modernization' etc. A portrait of modern Calcutta. Pradip Mukherjee is very engaging in the lead role but there's a whole gallery of nicely developed characters. **The Middleman** is part of a trilogy exploring the 'new world'; the others are **The Adversary** and **Company Limited**, all three fine films. Whilst this isn't in the very front rank of Ray's films it is yet another showcase for Ray's genius – the rendering of the milieu and its undercurrents; subtle characterization; the interplay of sound, image and dialogue; sharp social observation, sometimes in satirical mode; the modulation of comedy (sometimes of a dark kind) and pathos. The films sags just a little in the middle but then revs up for an affecting finale. A restored print but of somewhat patchy quality – but one becomes so engaged in the narrative that the visual/sound imperfections hardly matter.

Original title: **Jana Aranya**



## MIRROR

1975 F 4.25 8.2 RUS

### Tarkovsky, Andrei

Margarita Terekhova, Filipp Yankovsky, Ignat Daniltsev

The past is always with us, or as Shakespeare said, “What is past is prologue”. A hypnotic collage of images about the life of a 20thC Russian woman and her family, covering the period from the early years of the century to the late 1960s. Eventually the film reveals itself to be the memories, dreams and imaginings of a dying middle-aged man whom we first meet as a young boy living in the forest with his mother, sister and often-absent father. The fluid stream of images intermingles BW & colour, “reality” and “dream”, archival newsreel of the century’s dislocations (war, revolution, political turmoil), mystical epiphanies, and the conjurings of memory and imagination. The film also obviously concerns the nature of time and the elusive relations of past, present and future, often mediated through poetry written by Tarkovsky’s father and the writings of Russia’s national poet, Pushkin (along with allusions to Dostoevsky who in some ways is a kindred spirit to Tarkovsky). Love, hope, fear, dream, despair, regret, art, sorrow, family, reverie, place, time. It’s a kind of poetic “autobiography”, a profoundly sad one. Like most of Tarkovsky’s work **Mirror** is a challenging, difficult and enigmatic work which abandons the conventions of narrative cinema. Mercifully it clocks in at a modest 100 minutes; it’s not the endurance trial of **Andrei Rublev** and **Solaris**. The Soviet State was not happy with **Mirror** and designated it an “elitist work”: code for “we’ve got no idea what the film is about but we don’t like it anyway”. They made life difficult for both the film itself and Tarkovsky. The doctor’s wife (in the ear-ring episode) is Tarkovsky’s own wife, and the grandmother is his mother.



## MOMENT OF TRUTH, THE

1952 F 4.00 6.9 FRA

**Delannoy, Jean**

Michèle Morgan, Jean Gabin,  
Walter Chiari, Daniel Gélin

The lives of well-heeled Parisian couple, a doctor and his actress wife, are thrown into turmoil when he discovers that she is having an affair with a bohemian artist. The story of the marriage and their extra-marital entanglements unfolds through a series of flashbacks covering the previous ten years. A cleverly constructed study of a marriage: trust and betrayal, infidelity, emotional atrophy and the ties that bind. Shot in a polished and elegant style, and superbly acted by Gabin and Morgan (working together again after Carné's **Port of Shadows** in the late 30s; Garbo-like Morgan is even more beautiful while Gabin has thickened somewhat). It's too well-mannered to be called a melodrama-proper; better described as serious adult drama. Once again one regrets the puerile attack of Truffaut and the *Cahierists* on film-makers like Carné and Delannoy who became whipping boys for the classical "bourgeois" cinema of the 40s and 50s; whatever their limitations they were both film-makers of considerable intelligence and style (though it must be conceded that Delannoy made quite a number of very mediocre costume dramas).

Walter Chiari (who appears in the cabaret scene) starred in Michael Powell's ill-fated **They're a Weird Mob** (1966). Michèle Morgan died in 2016 at the age of 96. As well as a long career in acting she was also a painter and designer. She spent the war years in Hollywood but, unfortunately, failed to land any decent roles. She was slated for Hitchcock's **Suspicion** but it was decided that her English wasn't up to speed. Delannoy died in 2008, aged 100.

This film is not to be confused with Franco Rosi's 1965 film which in English release had the same title.





## MONTARNASSE 19

1958 F 4.25 7.4 FRA

### Becker, Jacques

Christian Matras

Gérard Philipe, Lili Palmer, Anouk Aimée, Gérard Sétý, Lino Ventura, Lila Kedrova

Love in the Rain. Paris and Nice, 1919. The last year in the troubled life of Italian painter Amedeo ('Modi') Modigliani. Exhibits some of the tropes and clichés of the artist biopic – the struggling and misunderstood genius, impoverished, life in the garret, tempestuous sex/love life, the demon drink, self-doubt, alienation, psychic disturbance ... and so on and so forth (Van Gogh is the paradigmatic case). Becker transforms this hackneyed story (a mix of history and fiction) into something quite beautiful through the subtle performances, the stylized *mise-en-scène* and the exquisite BW cinematography of Christian Matras (Ophüls' first choice DoP). Stylistic asceticism, austere elegance. A study of a milieu and of character rather than an exploration of the paintings (which, clearly, would require colour). The contrapuntal roles of Lili Palmer and Anouk Aimée give the story added resonance. Becker shows no interest in making a lavish period piece, nor a squalid melodrama, telling the story with considerable restraint. Based on a novel by Michel Georges-Michel and a script by Max Ophüls, both freely adapted by Becker who inherited the project after Ophüls' death. One of Becker's moves is the introduction of an entirely new character, Morel, the sinister art dealer (played by Lino Ventura). The early café sequence starting with the mirror image of the dancers is surely an homage to Ophüls. Gérard Philipe was seriously ill during filming and died within a year. **M19** was Becker's penultimate film, followed by **Le Trou** (60).



## MORNING FOR OSONE F

1946 F 4.25 7.0 JAP

### Kinoshita, Keisuke



Haruko Sugimura, Toshinosuke Nagao, Shin Tokudaiji, Mitsuko Miura, Shiro Osaka

Japan, 1942-45. The experiences of one Japanese family during the war. The key players are the widowed mother trying to tread a tightrope between opposing the war and protecting her family, her brother-in-law, an army officer and militarist, her three sons — a liberal intellectual, an aspiring artist, and a knock-about young fellow — and her daughter whose romance is thwarted by events. Haruko Sugimura is magnificent as the mother; one of her many fine performances.

The film is obviously made on a tight budget, is studio-bound, is talky and has a gratuitous scene of patriotic uplift at the end, sitting uncomfortably with the rest of the film. But the narrative is developed with considerable skill and sensitivity. The characterization is deft and psychologically textured while the family tensions and predicaments are altogether convincing, showing the terrible toll of the war on ordinary citizens and critiquing the militarist-nationalist ethos which had caused it. The film packs a lot into its 80 minutes. I liked it a lot.

During WW2 Kinoshita, like Kurosawa, had to work within the circumscriptions of the heavily censored and regulated film industry. This was his first post-war film, off the leash — although films were still censored but now by the American Occupation; hence, perhaps, no reference to the hideous bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki which brought the war to an end.



## MOST DANGEROUS MAN

2020 F 4.50 6.7 SPA

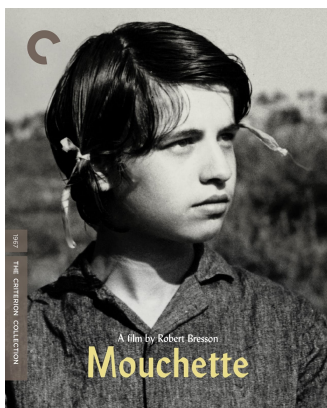
De Echave, P et al

**Full title: The Most Dangerous Man in Europe: Otto Skorzeny in Spain**

Rigorously researched doco about Otto Skorzeny, Hitler's favourite "Action Man", famous for his rescue of Mussolini in 1943. Traces Skorzeny's adult life from his early participation in the Nazi movement, his rise through the SS, and his wartime exploits, through to his post-war career in Spain as business entrepreneur, spy, mastermind of the escape from Europe of many top-level Nazis, his friendships with 'the worst of the worst' (Kaltenbrunner, Klaus Barbie, Eichmann, among others), and his involvement with Mossad (!!), the CIA and various other agencies. Some think he may even have been involved in JFK's assassination although there is a distinct lack of any credible evidence. But the idea, given the rest of S's career, is not implausible. The talking heads are all articulate, thoughtful, well-informed. Skorzeny was a man of many talents and considerable charm, a committed Nazi, altogether amoral, a 'gun for hire', altogether a 'most dangerous man' indeed. The film-makers do little editorializing; the appalling story speaks for itself.

The doco has a dynamic structure, flashing back and forth over a forty year period, making assured use of archival footage and of inter-titles. I found it intensely interesting as well as a depressing reminder – though none be needed – of the cynical opportunism of international *realpolitik*.

[Netflix]



## MOUCHETTE

1967 F 5.00 7.8 FRA

### Bresson, Robert

Nadine Nortier, Jean-Claude  
Guilbert, Marie Cardinal, Jean  
Viminairez

French village. Young peasant girl Mouchette suffers humiliations at the hands of her family, schoolmates and others in the village. An unbearably heartrending and painful experience which no one but Bresson could have pulled off. Spare, rigorous, austere. Unflinching look at human venality, corruption, cruelty, and cowardice. Bresson paradoxically deepens our involvement with Mouchette by making her unattractive. The rape scene is as intense and as disturbing as anything in the cinema.

Dodgem car scene went on too long. (Despite thinking hard about it, this is the only criticism, a trifling one, which I can come up with.

What does the ending (no body in the water) signify? Was Mouchette never an embodied mortal? Is it the resurrection of the body as well as the soul? What is it about George Bernanos' books that makes them so amenable to Bressonian transformation on the screen? Is there a more distinctive and imposing corpus of films in the whole of cinema than Bresson's? A luminary in the cinema's pantheon for sure but one quite beyond the reach of a certain kind of critic: I don't think either Sarris or Bogdanovich have ever mentioned Bresson!



## MUDDY RIVER

1981 F 4.25 7.9 JAP

Oguri, Kohei

小栗康平監督作品  
**泥の河**  
キネマ旬報 日本映画ベスト・テン 第一位  
 ミスウ映画賞 最優秀賞  
 アメリカアカデミー賞「外国語映画賞」ノミネート

Takahiro Tamura, Nobutaka  
 Asahara, Yumiko Fujita, Munro  
 Sakurai

Postwar Japan. Ten year old Noburo lives with his parents, riverside in Osaka. The father is a war vet with dark memories of Manchuria. He and his wife run a small noodle shop. A dilapidated house-boat turns up on the other side of the river. Noburo strikes up a friendship with the two children, a ragged and rascally boy of his own age and an older girl, quiet, polite and sad. Turns out their widowed mother has a swish parlour at one end of the boat where she sells her favours in the nocturnal hours. The story focuses on the three children, and the narrative unfolds largely through Noburo's eyes.

This looks and feels like a 1950s film which has strayed into the 80s. I'm not complaining! It's visually stylish and the story is pervaded by a humane and compassionate sympathy for all of the characters. It's a pleasant change to see a more or less happy family, and to enjoy a story in which, on the whole, people are kind to each other. There are several sequences which, in their different ways, are quite affecting: the death of the horse-cart man, the visit to the hospital, Ginko refusing the gift of the dress, the torching of the crabs, Noburo peering into the prostitute's room, his final pursuit of the departing houseboat. The husband-wife relationship is beautifully intimated with a few light touches. All in all it's a film with that distinctively Japanese blend of "beauty and sadness". I found it both enjoyable and admirable. After causing a momentary flurry in the West, including a nomination for Best Foreign Picture, this seems to have fallen into obscurity. It deserves better. This was Oguri's debut feature, apparently another case of a very impressive start which wasn't followed up.

Interesting that the war and the postwar period should still be a raw nerve in the collective psyche. Not surprising really.

Houseboats (more or less) in films: **L'Atalante, Moontide, African Queen, Cape Fear, Houseboat, Tony Rome, Dead Calm, The Cat's Meow.**



## MY NIGHT AT MAUD'S

1969 F 4.50 8.1 FRA

**Rohmer, Eric**

Jean-Louis Trintignant, Françoise Fabian, Marie-Christine Barrault, Antoine Vitez

Wintertime, Clermont (provincial French city, Pascal's birthplace): Involves a serious-minded Catholic with an interest in Pascal, his more worldly-wise Marxist friend, and two very attractive women but is mostly taken up with a night-long philosophical-theological dialogue between Jean-Louis and Maud. There are also sequences in the nocturnal streets, in the cathedral and on the beach. Nothing very dramatic happens. Sounds like a really boring film, right? I found it completely absorbing, as I did first time around, half a century ago. Austere but elegant and seductive BW cinematograph (Nestor Almendros), compelling performances (which don't seem to be performances at all), moral and emotional complexities, and the mysterious subtleties and paradoxes of human intercourse. In short, a wonderful film... though obviously not to everyone's taste. Some similarities to Melville's extraordinary film, **Léon Morin**, in which philosophical discussion is interwoven, as it is here, with more or less submerged erotic currents. Melville's film is the more striking but both are fine accomplishments. There are also echoes here of several other distinguished French film-makers, most obviously Bresson and Truffaut. Nestor Almendros was responsible for **Days of Heaven** which, in terms of visual style, is about as far removed from **MNWM** as can be imagined. (Incidentally, how can such an attractive and vibrant woman be called "Maud"??) Fabian was married to Jacques Becker for three years before his death in 1960. The Extra discussion between a philosopher and a priest about Pascal, is quite fascinating even though I could only partially understand it.



## NAGARERU (Flowing)

1956 F 4.25 7.8 JAP

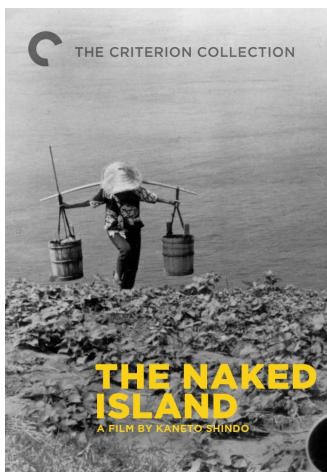
**Naruse, Mikio**

Kinuyo Tanaka, Isuzu Yamada,  
Hideko Takamine, Haruko  
Sugimura, Natsuko Kahara

Flowing: the flow of time, of ageing, of changing circumstances. Poignant story of past-their-prime geishas and various relatives and dependants, living together in an all-female household. The old ways are disappearing, times are hard and money worries pervade their lives. Naruse's films are almost invariably concerned with the predicaments and plights of women in postwar Japan, as this one is: here the tensions and problems are not so much familial/patriarchal but rather related to economic and business stresses, summed up in the finale where the traditional arts of the geisha are juxtaposed with the mechanical and industrial slavery which is Katsuyo's only alternative. The new commercial ethos is embodied in the money-lending elder sister and the duplicitous Madame Mizuno. Oharu (the maid, a middle-aged widow) and Katsuyo (Hideko Takamine) offer different vantage points on the world of the geishas. It's a remarkable film, not only because it is almost exclusively peopled by women with just a few peripheral male characters, but in its treatment of their viewpoints and experiences. It's an ensemble piece in every sense: narrative structure, identification patterns, shifting sympathies. The comparisons with Mizoguchi are obvious enough, accented by the prominent role of Kinuyo Tanaka (**Life of Oharu**) and Isuzu Yamada (**Osaka Elegy** and **Sisters of Gion**). It's not one of Naruse's very best, perhaps because the narrative is too dispersed and diffused, but it's a film of considerable subtlety and complexity.

Aka: **A House of Geisha**





## NAKED ISLAND, THE

1960 F 4.25 8.3 JAP

**Shindo, Kaneto**

Nobuko Otowa, Taji Tonoyama,  
Shinji Tanaka

Toil in the Sun. Peasant family on a small Japanese island live a life of almost incessant and back-breaking toil to supply themselves and their crops with fresh water, carried from the mainland. There is no dialogue and very little drama until a family tragedy about three-quarters of the way in. Sounds and images do all the work in conveying a small pocket of a medieval way of life in contemporary Japan — carrying water, irrigating crops, feeding the animals, harvesting, fertilizing, thatching... an endless cycle. There is a brief interlude when the family has a day out in the city and there is a long set-piece to wind things up. Reminiscent of the great ethnographic films of Robert Flaherty, especially **Man of Aran**. Testament to the director and cinematographer's skill that a film with very little drama and no dialogue can hold our attention for 93 minutes. Nobuko Otowa was soon to marry director Kaneto Shindo.





## NAYAK (The Hero)

1966 F 4.25 8.3 IND

Ray, Satyajit

Uttam Kumar Chatterjee,  
Sharmila Tagore

Strangers on a Train. A middle-aged Indian film star, handsome but a bit weathered and looking as if he has had rather too much of “the good life”, is travelling by train to Delhi to receive a major award. (Uttam Kumar Chatterjee was, in some ways, playing himself; at the time he was a wildly popular actor.) A young woman journalist, somewhat skeptical about his celebrity status, “interviews” him about his life; both achieve a new level of self-awareness in the process. A meditation on fame, success, wealth and the corrosion of self-respect, and a reflexive piece about cinema and the film industry. The sub-plots don’t generate much interest. The dream sequences and flashbacks are sometimes a touch heavy-handed. The film is impressive, a very fine achievement, but is decidedly inferior to **Jalsaghar**, **Charulata** and **The Chess Players** (which isn’t saying much at all!).

I was struck by several similarities between Ray and Bergman, and between **Nayak** and **Wild Strawberries**: the centrality of women in their narratives, often wiser, stronger and more perceptive than the men; the interest in dreams, and the alternation of naturalism and surrealism; the physical journey as the visible correlate of the journey of self-discovery and the examination of a life which in some respects has been wasted; both auteurs write their own scripts; both are interested in the demands of art and the price of fame (think, for instance, of **Autumn Sonata**).

A plethora of train films (all good) in the last few weeks: **Night Train**, **The Narrow Margin**, **Nayak**, and the first part of **The Major and the Minor**.



## NAZARIN

1959 F 4.50 7.9 MEX

**Buñuel, Luis**

Francisco Rabal, Marga López,  
Rita Macedo

Itinerant priest in the poorest parts of Mexico does his best to live by the teachings of the Gospel which brings him all sorts of trouble. He is surrounded by poverty, ignorance, superstition, hysteria, small minded superiors, whores, beggars, rascals, violence and the power of the state. But he maintains his faith and his commitment to his vocation. The Christ-like priest is a very appealing figure, not too idealized, nor treated with undue sentimentality. A film of raw beauty and considerable power, a pleasant surprise from Buñuel who is known for his caustic anti-clericalism. In tone and visual style this is neo-realist but without the technical rough edges.

The history of cinema is not overburdened with films which seriously and overtly address religious/spiritual themes. This one is somewhat reminiscent of Pasolini's **Gospel According to St Matthew** and Rossellini's **The Flowers of St Francis**. More generally it belongs in the company of such things as **Ordet**, **The Passion of Joan of Arc**, **Diary of a Country Priest**, **Au Hasard Balthazar**, **Diary of a Country Priest**, **Silent Light**, **Winter Light**, **Of Gods and Men**, **The Goddess**, **The Reluctant Saint**, **The Tree of Wooden Clogs**, **Amore II...** . (The religiously-themed film is something that Hollywood, generally, doesn't do well — to somewhat understate the case!)



## NEVER LOOK AWAY

2019 F 4.00 7.7 GER

**Donnersmarck, Florian**

Tom Schilling, Sebastian Koch,  
Paula Beer

A sumptuous, sweeping, swirling historical drama about Germany from the 30s down to the late 60s, told through the life story of an artist, his childhood traumas, his encounter with a well-to-do family of an SS obstetrician, his marriage, his search for his artistic vocation. Along the way we confront Nazi sterilization and euthanasia programs, the destruction of Dresden, the de-Nazification of the post-war years, the substitution of one form of totalitarianism for another, the psychic ravages of guilt and despair, “socialist realism”, and the absurd posturings of the artistic avant-garde of the 60s (“installations”, “happenings”, “body art” etc) — all this informed by an underlying question: what has art to do with all this? It’s a gripping drama which doesn’t loosen its hold until the last half hour where most of the narrative material is quite superfluous (eg. the “press conference” at the exhibition which seemed completely pointless to me; did I miss something?), and some of the effects over-wrought; it might better have concluded with Seeband’s final visit to the studio (perhaps the film’s most riveting moment). I like the way the film avoids the seemingly inevitable denouement and final reckoning with the Professor; always good to leave something to the spectator’s imagination. I also like the way the case for “social realism” is not ridiculed and satirized in a smart-alec fashion, even though it is repudiated. There is much to like and admire. The cast is excellent, particularly Sebastian Koch, and there is no doubting Donnersmarck’s talent as a director. The soundtrack is stirring (though perhaps a little over-ripe in the bedroom scenes, of which there are too many). I found the film powerful, absorbing, provocative. However, on reflection I have some misgivings: is the film perhaps a touch self-important? Is Donnersmarck too intent on producing effects, as distinct from “looking at the truth”, the film’s ostensible purpose? Is there a whiff of bombast? I am moved to a comparison with another recent German film which also deals, more obliquely, with some of the traumas of WW2 and the Nazi period, Christian Petzold’s **Transit** (in which Paula Beer also figures) — a less ambitious film but, in my view, more heartfelt, more fully realized and, in the end, more affecting. I wish **Transit** had attracted half the attention that **Never Look Away** has! There is a roiling controversy about Donnersmarck’s use of the life and work of Gerhard Richter who, initially at least, cooperated in the scripting of the film. I leave that aside here as I have not yet read any of the accounts of this controversy.



## NIGHT AND FOG

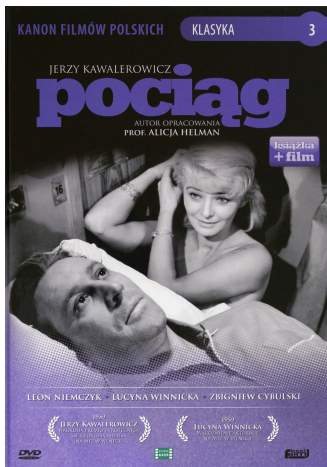
1955 F 4.75 8.6 FRA

Resnais, Alain

Resnais' chilling, haunting and almost unbearable film about the Holocaust and the concentration camps. Very difficult viewing but should be seen by everybody. A film which concedes the impossibility of comprehending its appalling subject but which, through a cool commentary, counter-point, irony, detachment and the most poignant and tender music, juxtaposed with the most horrific images imaginable, gives us intimations, glimpses, glimmers.

You can't really rate a film like this. Suffice it to say that it is intelligent, compassionate, deeply felt and an altogether impressive attempt at an impossible and terrible task of conveying something of the human realities of the Holocaust. (The film, wisely I think, eschews any attempt to "explain" the Holocaust.)

The credits on this film are like a *Who's Who* of the French avant-garde cinema. The last time I mentioned Truffaut it did not reflect well on him: he walked out of **Pather Panchali** saying he didn't want to watch a film about peasants eating with their hands. But he rightly said of **NF**, *Not a documentary or an indictment or a poem but a meditation on the most important phenomenon of the twentieth century.*



## NIGHT TRAIN

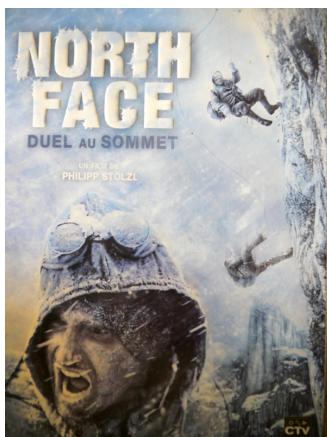
1959 F 4.00 7.9 POL

### Kawalerowicz, Jerzy

Lucyna Winnicka, Leon  
Niemczyk, Helena Dabrowska,  
Zbigniew Cybulski

One of the seminal Polish New Wave films of the late 50s. The fragmented and enigmatic narrative takes place on an overnight train journey and involves the search for a murderer. But the film is by no means a conventional thriller, more a study of a mood, a time, a cross-section of individuals, as well as being a bravura exercise in avant-garde film-making. Technically complex and accomplished, visually interesting and strangely involving. Very cleverly creates the sensations of nocturnal train travel, helped along by a complex and seductive soundtrack. One to add to the list of Train Movies! Someone called it “a derailed homage to Hitchcock” — well, yes and no.

Like a lot of New Wave (whether French, Polish, Czech or whatever) it's more interesting and more satisfying as a cinematic exercise than as narrative or drama. Not surprisingly, it's pretty bleak though it has more warmth than **Ashes and Diamonds**.



## NORTH FACE

2008 F 4.50 7.4 GER

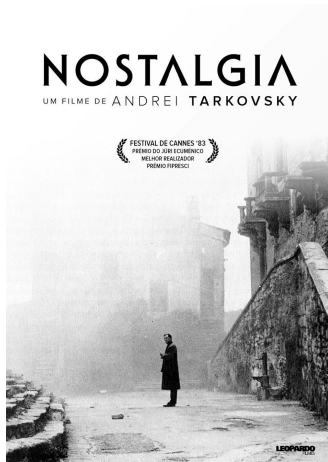
**Stolzi, Philipp**

Benno Furmann, Florian Lukacs,  
Johanna Wokalek, Ulrich Tukur

Factually based story of the epic Eiger catastrophe of 1936 when four climbers attempting the first ascent of the awesome North Face ran into some serious problems. It's a white-knuckle, nail-biting, nerve-jangling, spine-chilling, heart-pounding experience with some truly astonishing cinematography. If you ever wanted to know what climbing the Eiger might be like, this is for you! The evocation of the mid-1930s milieu in Germany and Switzerland is nicely handled with some light but telling touches about the ways in which politics and the media contaminated the noble pursuit. The cast are excellent. One of the best of the true-life adventure/action genre. (Possibly a little over-long: bring in Don Siegel to cut 5-10 minutes from the first half, and 5 from the last 20.)

Just for the record: Hinterstoisser did not cut the rope but was almost certainly swept off the face by either an avalanche or rockfall; the fatally-injured Angerer was strangled by a rope during the descent; Toni Kurz was cheerful and extrovert rather than saturnine; the behaviour of the press was even more cynical and Nazi-motivated than the film allows. The romantic sub-plot is completely fictional. (A lot of critics wasted a good deal of time uselessly whinging about the romance and about the politics.)

The best written accounts of the tragedy are to be found in Heinrich Harrer's classic *The White Spider* and Joe Simpson's *The Beckoning Silence*.



## NOSTALGHIA

1983 F 4.00 8.2 RUS

### Tarkovsky, Andrei

Oleg Yankovsky, Erland Josephson, Domiziana Giordano, Patrizia Terrano, Delia Boccardo

God, faith, art, madness, unhappy families, existential angst, alienation, ennui, exile, dreams and memories, spiritual hunger: all the usual Russian preoccupations! *Arthouse in extremis*: very little linear narrative plot; unmotivated imagery; only fragmentary and intermittent psychological causation (and mostly of a baffling kind); a fractured soundtrack; no resolution, no closure. A study of the tracking and zoom shots and the wide angle composition. An enigmatic, profoundly melancholic and somewhat taxing film of considerable beauty and power.

How do you rate this kind of film? What does it all mean? Who knows? It means what it is. Recall Susan Sontag's dictum: *Real art makes us nervous*. Can't quite figure out the final image...beyond the obvious fusion of the two imaginative worlds of "Russia" and "Italy"...but there is a lot I can't figure out! Somewhat reminiscent of Herzog in his more romantic-mystical mood, with some Chekhov and Dostoevsky thrown in (neither Herzog nor Tarkovsky are big fans of modernity, to say the least!) Interesting to see a latter-day Erland Josephson who has wandered in from Ingmar Bergman-land.

The literal translation of the film's title is more like "Homesickness".



## NOTTE, LA

1961 F 4.50 8.0 ITA

## Antonioni,

Marcello Mastroianni, Jeanne Moreau, Monica Vitti

Antoniennui amidst the Glass and Concrete or 24 Hours in a Marital Ruin. The second of Antonioni's celebrated trilogy, coming between **L'Avventura** and **L'Eclisse**, all concerned with ennui, boredom, alienation, apathy, emotional atrophy, amidst the sophisticated life of the wealthy Milanese bourgeoisie. Elliptical, abstract, reflexive. No denying Antonioni's visual brilliance and his instinct for registering inner states in striking and powerful images. It's impressive but pretty cold, despite Moreau's heart-wrenching performance. Monica Vitti doesn't do anything for me — at all. (Later: changed my mind!) Manny Farber: "Monica Unvital and Jeanne Morose".

Clearly massively influenced by Rossellini's **Voyage to Italy**, a film I preferred. Even so, an interesting, even beautiful film about boredom and lassitude. Quite a task he set himself!





## OMAR

2013 F 3.75 7.5 PAL

**Abu-Assad, Hany**

Adam Bakri, Leem Lubany, Eyad Hourani, Waleed Zuatier, Samer Bisharat

Thriller/love story about a young Palestinian baker who gets involved in the violent resistance to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank; his inner and outer lives are thrown into turmoil. The film tracks his relations with his fellow “freedom fighters”, the student with whom he is in love and who gets entangled in a volatile situation, and the Israeli operative on his trail. One gets a real sense of daily life on the West Bank and of the constant intrusion of “the political” into the personal domain: lives deranged and ruined by dark forces which surpass the control of individuals. Bakri and Lubany are very engaging as the young lovers and the story moves along rapidly. The film never really resolves the larger issues it explores but it does achieve a certain intensity and power. Worth a look.



## ONCE UPON A T. IN

2011 F 4.50 7.9 TUR

### Ceylan, Nuri Bilge

Görkhan Tiryaki

Muhammet Uzuner, Yilmaz  
Erdogan, Taner Birsal

A night and a day in a Turkish police investigation in the remote countryside of Anatolia: a long nocturnal search for the body; interactions between the prosecutor, the police chief, a doctor, the suspect, and various functionaries; a spell in a down-at-the heel village; the return to the city for the autopsy on the corpse. Not a great deal of overt action, spare dialogue, but a lot of subterranean currents. It eventually turns out to be primarily a film about the doctor and the prosecutor and about betrayal (as well as its more obvious themes). It takes 151 minutes.

It's an ordeal, partly because of the narrative material, partly because of the measured pace and the sparsity of dialogue. Nonetheless, it's engrossing, intense and powerful, even beautiful.

One is not surprised to find that Dostoevsky and Chekhov are amongst the directors' influences. The comparisons with Zvyagintsev and Tarkovsky are also obvious though Ceylan is perhaps not quite in that league. Still, the fact that the comparison is so easily made suggests that he is indeed a formidable talent. (The other comparisons which crop up several times in the reviews are with Haneke and Antonioni.) No doubt some viewers will find it infuriatingly slow, obfuscatory and opaque: I have some sympathy with them but I think this film has a great deal to offer the vigilant and patient viewer. Won the Grand Prix at Cannes and numerous other awards.



## ONLY SON, THE

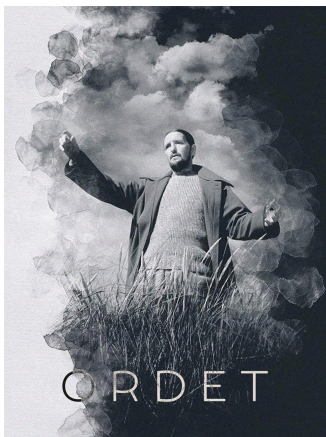
1936     F    4.25    7.8    JAP

### Ozu, Yasujiro

Chôko Iida, Shin'ichi Himori,  
Masao Hayama, Chisu Ryu

Widow sacrifices all to send her son away for schooling, hoping that he will be a success in the wider world. Years later she visits her son and his family in Tokyo. Thwarted hopes, faded dreams, misunderstandings in the depressed industrial environs of the big city. A deceptively simple and poignant story shot in a limpid style: stationary low level camera, meticulous composition and *mise-en-scène*, pillow shots, choreographed movements in and out of screen space, evocative music, the meditative tone. **The Only Son** is a forerunner of the extraordinary run of masterly works in the two decades after WW2, demonstrating that Ozu's thematic preoccupations and his cinematic style were already well-developed in his first talkie. He had resisted the seductions of the talkies for several years but his first venture into sound showed a creative awareness of its expressive possibilities. **The Only Son** was shot in very difficult circumstances in a makeshift studio assembled in a railway station. Daily shooting could not commence until midnight. A gruelling experience for all concerned.

How grateful we should be to those dedicated people in places such as the BFI for restoring and preserving the neglected treasures of the early sound period! How easily this film could have been lost for ever.



## ORDET

1955 F 5.00 8.2 DEN

### Dreyer, Carl

Henning Bendsten

Henrik Malberg, Emil Hass  
Christensen, Preben Lerdorff Rye

Wowzeroni!!! A slowly intensifying drama which culminates in one of the most stunning, mesmeric and beautiful sequences in the whole of cinema. One of the few works which finds a visual and dramatic correlative for the life of the spirit and which intimates the transcendent. (Bresson is probably the closest kindred spirit here, though his style is both similar and different). A film of sublime formal beauty, achieved through Dreyer's visionary genius and the extraordinary talents of cinematographer Henning Bendsten (who also contributed so significantly to **Gertrud**). Almost everything about this film is astonishing, from the minute visual details (all the more effective because of the spare *mise-en-scène*) and the fluid but stately camera movements and long takes, the hypnotic compositions and the use of facial physiognomy (but not through Bergman-style close-ups), through the radical hieratic performance style and the dramatic rhythm of the narrative to its evocative resonances, creative ambiguities and profound themes which are both disquieting and uplifting. Hard to imagine a single film which more completely realizes the possibilities of cinema, a film of acute intelligence and the deepest moral seriousness (in the Leavisite sense of the phrase), a hard-earned affirmation, in the face of life's many sorrows and perplexities, and without a shred of sentimentality, of the Spirit, of Life, of Art — one might even recall the Platonic equation of Beauty, Truth and Goodness. Dreyer: three indisputable masterworks: **The Passion of Joan of Arc** (one of the supreme achievements of the silent era), **Ordet** and **Gertrud**. Which is the best of the three? I can't say — they are all stupendous! Just at the minute I would have to pick **Ordet**. **Day of Wrath** is perhaps marginally behind these but it too is a formidable work. As to rating **Ordet**, I recall a friend's wonderful phrase about Holy Scripture: "you don't judge it; it judges you!" The accompanying Extra on Henning Bendsten is itself a must-see marvel. The final word (or two): sublimely awesome, or, if you prefer, awesomely sublime!



## OSSESSIONE

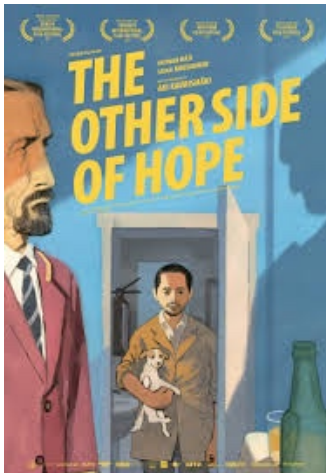
1943 F 4.25 7.8 ITA

### Visconti, Luchino

Massimo Girotti, Clara Calamai,  
Dhia Cristiani, Elio Marcuzzo,  
Juan de Landa

James M. Cain meets Dostoevsky by way of proto-typical Italian neo-realism (1943!) and Luchino Visconti. Loosely based on Cain's pulp novel **The Postman Always Rings Twice** (later twice filmed in USA) Visconti's film is a long way from Hollywood noir. Style: outdoor locations, natural light, long tracking shots, some amateur actors. Subject: sex, money, murder and despair in the midst of everyday life, the itinerant poor, the ambience of semi-rural post-war Italy. As scriptwriter Giuseppe De Santis so pithily put it, the film is steeped "in the air of death and sperm". Not much romance here! It's long and slow. We never get inside the skin of the central characters. Not as much tension as the story required (although there is plenty of sexual heat).

While working as an assistant director under Renoir, Visconti was given a copy of Cain's novel which he subsequently used for this film without permission. MGM actually owned the rights; thus the film was not shown outside Italy for many years. Visconti was a gay Marxist of aristocratic background. Some internal tensions! Primarily interesting as an historical document and as one of the seminal (if that adjective be permissible) neo-realist films.



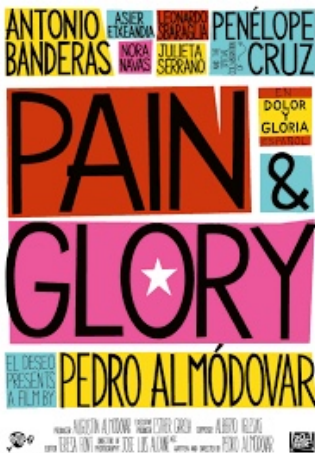
## OTHER SIDE OF HOPE,

2017 F 4.00 7.2 FIN

### Kaurismäki, Aki

Sherwan Haji, Sakari  
Kuosmanen, Kati Outinen, Ville  
Virtanen

A Syrian refugee in Finland has tragi-comic encounters with the Finnish bureaucracy, the police, Nazi skinheads, some geriatric gamblers and musicians, a shirt-salesman turned entrepreneur and his motley crew trying (mostly unsuccessfully) to run a cafe/restaurant. (The foray into Japanese mode doesn't turn out well: salted herring instead of salmon!) Great opening sequence (man leaving his wife)! As with two of its predecessors, **The Man without a Past** and **Le Havre**, what we have here is a pleasing mix of deadpan humour, sharp social observation, melancholia and a diseased social/political/moral order in which the most disadvantaged are often the most charitable (but not forgetting the skinheads). **MWP** and **LH** are both funnier and a bit sharper than this one, the least of the three but it's still an enjoyable and provocative watch. Recommended. Kaurismäki is one of the more interesting European/Asian directors at work today. In this context mention may be made of Zvyagintsev, Christian Petzold, Pawel Pawlikowski, Wong Kai Har, Asghar Farhadi, each with a distinctive cinematic sensibility, each with their particular concerns. Kaurismäki is the only one of this lot with a joke-book. Trying to get a handle on Kaurismäki's humour: it's about halfway between Jacques Tati and Milos Forman.



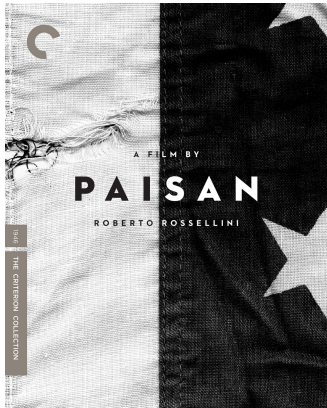
## PAIN & GLORY

2019 F 4.00 7.7 SPA

**Almodovar, Pedro**

Antonio Banderas, Asier  
Etxeandia, Leonardo Sbaraglia,  
Penelope Cruz, Julieta Serrano,  
Asier Flores

Antonio Banderas plays Salvador Mallo, an ageing film director who is struggling to come to terms with a whole medical textbook of ailments, depression, pain, mortality, guilt, creative sterility... He lives in a hermetic world, spending most of his time in his lavishly upholstered apartment, surrounded by surreal paintings and *objets d'art*. He is unable to direct, ostensibly because of his physical incapacities. The film is structured around his flashbacks to his childhood and his adult encounters with an actor with whom he has had a bitter falling out, a male lover of his younger adulthood and his mother in her last days. No prizes for working out that Salvador is Almodovar himself, more or less. It's a film of some complexity, subtlety and poignancy which manages to avoid the obvious pitfall of maudlin self-indulgence and which explores a range of themes and issues: the wellsprings of art, memory, imagination, family ties, grief, love, addiction... The play-within-the-film and the complex temporal shifts are handled impressively. Banderas is wonderful and well supported by Asier Etxeandia (Crespo) and Penelope Cruz (his childhood mother), and indeed the whole cast. It's also an interesting showcase for Almodovar's flamboyant aesthetic sensibility which is indelibly Spanish! I have not been much impressed with the little I have seen of Almodovar's previous work but **PG** is clearly the work of a formidable creative talent and one of the year's more arresting works.



## PAISAN

1946 F 4.50 7.8 ITA

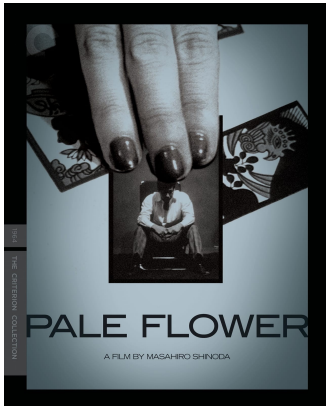
### Rossellini, Roberto

Dots Johnson, Maria Michi, Gar  
Moore, Harriet White, Carmela  
Sazio

The second in Rossellini's astonishing war trilogy, this one following the American liberation of Italy, from Sicily through to the north. A film in six episodes, each of which seamlessly blends archival and fictional footage. Each story deals with the encounter of the Italians and the Americans, exploring the possibilities of communication and understanding, as well as depicting the ravages of war. Fellini helped write the script (as did Klaus Mann, son of Thomas) and was assistant director. Like most of Rossellini's films, much of it was improvised during the shooting. (As usual, the monks were for real.) It's a wonderful and powerful film, full of Rossellini's trademarks in his neorealist period. I'd place it slightly behind **Germany Year Zero** and **Rome Open City**. The trilogy as a whole is one of the major landmarks in the history of the cinema. One critic on the final episode: *its view of the sheer arbitrariness of warfare anticipates some of Jansc 's abstractions*.

"Paista" means someone from a neighbouring village whom you know. The film was initially reviled in Italy and it was only the French who recognized its radical distinction.





## PALE FLOWER

1964 F 4.25 7.8 JAP

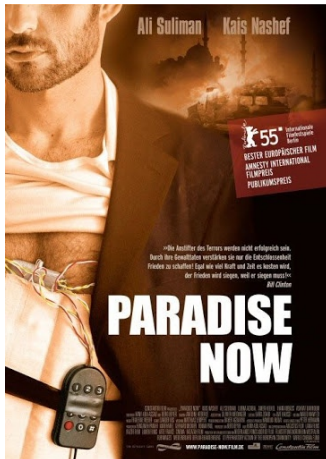
**Shinoda, Masahiro**

Ryô Ikebe, Mariko Kaga, Takashi  
Fujiki

Gangster Muraki (Ikebe) returns to the Tokyo underworld after a stint in jail to find a new set-up in which rival gangs have now formed a precarious truce in the face of a threatening third party. Muraki's life is made up of drinking, walking the night streets, gangland skirmishes, perfunctory sexual encounters and gambling, the latter bringing him into contact with an enigmatic young woman who is also trying to escape boredom and meaninglessness by living on the edge. Muraki eventually has to take on a dark assignment.

Shinoda was part of the New Wave Japanese cinema of the early 60s which wanted to move out from under the shadow of Mizoguchi, Ozu et al. Shinoda's aim, among others, was to make a gangster film which was permeated with the disillusionment, decay and nihilism of postwar Japan. In style and tone this is much closer to Godard and Melville than the Old Japanese Masters. It's edgy, hectic, abrasive, visually arresting and saturated in doom and dread.

The four narrative mainstays of Japanese cinema — the samurai epic, the feudal tale, the gangster/yakuza story and the domestic/geisha melodrama — have each produced masterpieces but, in the main I have little interest in the samurai and gangster films beyond a couple of stand-out Kurosawas (**High and Low** and **The Bad Sleep Well**). But **Pale Flower** is something special, both powerful and accomplished, and well able to stand comparison with the best European films of the same period. Shinoda demands further investigation.



## PARADISE NOW

2005 F 4.00 7.4 PAL

**Abu-Assad, Hany**

Kais Nashif, Ali Suliman, Lubna Azabal

West Bank. Two friends commit to becoming martyrs for the cause; they are recruited as suicide bombers, part of the resistance to the Israeli occupation. Structured and presented as a political thriller, the film is actually focused more on the moral conflicts and emotional complexities, and the awful costs, of life under a brutal occupying regime. It shoulders the difficult task of making the motivations of suicide bombers and their fellow jihadists intelligible without necessarily endorsing their actions. It's both dispassionate and quite intense, disturbing and thoughtful. It doesn't screw up the tension to quite the levels of the very best political thrillers but it has a lot to commend it. Interesting to note that the film crew included Palestinians, Israelis and Westerners and that it provoked the ire of people on both sides of the barbed wire.

Many of the reviewers compared it with **The War Within**, apparently about a Pakistani involved in a terrorist attack on NYC (2005, d. Jospeh Castelo), a film I've not seen. Hany Abu-Assad later gave us **Omar** (2013), another worthwhile film which returns to many of the same issues explored here.



## **PARTIE DE CAMPAGNE,**

1936    F    4.00    7.8    FRA

### **Renoir, Jean**

Sylvia Bataille, Jeanne Marken,  
George Saint-Saens, Jacques  
Borel, Andre Gabriello

Parisian ironmonger and his family venture into the countryside for an idyllic picnic by a river... an impressionist painting (perhaps by Renoir Sr!) brought to life! The daughter and mother are pursued by two local would-be Lotharios. The playful and lyrical mood turns to something darker, more melancholy, more poignant. It's fresh, charming, amusing and in the end quite touching, a story of what-might-have-been suffused with a gentle warmth. An adaptation of a Guy de Maupassant short story. The forty minutes passes very quickly, always a good sign!

Renoir's assistant director was Jacques Becker who also appears as one of the passing seminarians. Although Renoir didn't complete the film he did do all of the filming.



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## PASSENGER

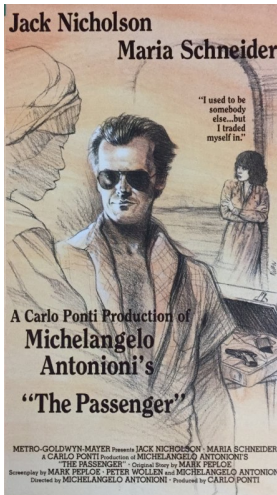
1963 F 5.00 7.5 POL

**Munk, Andrzej**

Krzysztof Winiewicz

Aleksandra Slaska, Anna  
Ciepielewski, Marek Walczewski

Lisa, now a married, middle-aged woman, a former SS officer at Auschwitz, is on an ocean voyage when she is startled by the sight of a woman with whom she had developed an intense but ambiguous relationship in the camp, one in which pity, cruelty, sadism and guilt were all involved. Most of the narrative is taken up with flashbacks to the nightmarish life of the prisoners and guards at Auschwitz; to what extent do we see what really happened and what has been reconstructed or fabricated in Lisa's tangled and disturbing memories? The film contains some brutal scenes of the humiliation, torture and murder of women and children. And the power of the dog. Andrzej Munk was killed in a car accident during filming. His friends and collaborators pieced together what footage there was, conforming to Munk's wishes as they understood them. The film makes no pretension to being "complete" — but it works remarkably well just as it is. We must allow the possibility that the film as it now stands might be at least as good, even better, than what might otherwise have appeared. The ellipses and lacunae, and the voice-over, all contribute something quite powerful, as does the eerie, real-life setting of Auschwitz. **Passenger** is clearly a benchmark in the Polish New Wave. Munk may well have taken a lofty place beside Wajda, Skolimowski, and Polanski as one of the brightest lights in that constellation. Holocaust films pose all manner of problems — historical, ethical, aesthetic, political — and are very rarely adequate to the enormity of the subject. (Hollywood films illustrate the point.) **Passenger**, just as it is, is a remarkable film of unrelenting moral seriousness, horribly engrossing and disturbing, visually arresting, deeply humane. It belongs with the very best of the films which have peered, unflinching, into the heart of darkness: **Night and Fog**, **The Shop on Main Street**, **And the Fifth Horseman is Fear**, **The Pawnbroker**, **The Pianist**, **Ida**, **Remembrance**.



## PASSENGER, THE

1975 F 4.00 7.6 ITA

Antonioni,

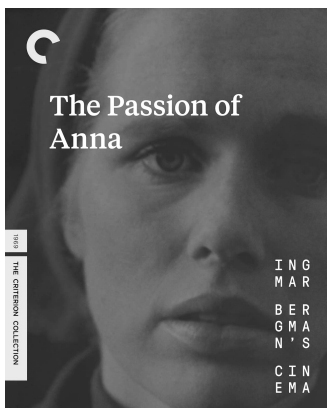
Jack Nicholson, Maria Schneider,  
Ian Hendry, Jenny Runacre

There's No Escape. A journalist on assignment in a remote African country (meant to be Chad but is actually Algeria), wishing to escape his problematic life situation, assumes the identity of a man who has died of a heart attack. His new life in Germany and Spain turns out to be no better...and much more dangerous! It's a modernist "thriller" with a heavy dose of existential ennui (*a la* Graham Greene) with the usual dislocations of time and space, fragmented narrative, unmotivated scenes, narrative ambiguity, viewer alienation, reflexivity etc. as well as Antonioni's interest in the aesthetics of time, space and movement. (Note the climactic tracking shot which is apparently seven minutes long.) It's all quite engrossing. It has a touch of the Werner Herzogs in the opening phase, and elsewhere is sometimes reminiscent of Polanski's surreal 60s films.

Could never understand the excitement about Maria Schneider — still can't. Psychology 101 intrudes at a couple of points.

Jack Nicholson owned the rights to this film and for many years kept it out of circulation. Glad he changed his mind! Nicholson is by no means one of my favourite actors but he's very good here.

Antonioni made three English-language films, **Blow Up**, **Zabriskie Point** and **The Passenger**, of which the last is the least acclaimed but best.



## PASSION OF ANNA, THE

1969 F 4.00 7.8 SWE

**Bergman, Ingmar**

Sven Nykvist

Max von Sydow, Liv Ullmann,  
Erland Josephson, Bibi  
Andersson

Winter on a remote island. Four damaged souls in a sombre chamber piece which descends into darkness, pain and madness: Andreas, the self-exiled hermit who has suffered loss and humiliation; Anna whose impaired idealism has turned to ashes; Eva who has lost her identity; Elis who has retreated into cynicism and indifference. They're all in search of love, purpose, and meaning but instead find deceptions (including, most importantly, self-deceptions), betrayals, humiliations, guilt and alienation. The four-hander is played out against a backdrop of senseless violence and cruelty in a remote island community with glimpses of a nightmarish world beyond (Vietnam, dead refugees in a boat). It's a desolate and sometimes horrific film. Some of the scenes were improvised and the diegesis ruptured by interesting monologues from the four actors – as actors. (An instance of the reflexivity that was so much in vogue in Europe in this period.)

The proper title of this film, retitled for American release, is the more ambiguous and suggestive **The Passion**. It is the last in the loose "island trilogy", preceded by **Hour of the Wolf** and **Shame**. I have a feeling that **Shame** is the best of the three but would need to see it again. A film which deals with some of the same themes as Antonioni — but how different the sensibility, the aesthetic and the approach! I was hugely impressed by this film when I saw it in about 1970. This time I'm less overwhelmed and a little troubled by its relentless bleakness.



## PAST, THE

2013 F 4.25 7.8 IRA

## Farhadi, Asghar

Ali Mossafa, Berenice Bejo, Tahar Ramin

An Iranian man returns to France to formalize a divorce from his French wife, who has two children (not his) and a Arab lover with his own son and a wife in a coma. This catalyzes a very complex series of emotional and dramatic chain reactions. An acutely observed film of considerable intensity, intelligence, and restraint. Farhadi (who wrote the script as well as directing) has a keen but compassionate eye for human foibles and for the irrationalities of our emotional lives. Superb ensemble acting which perfectly suits the shifting narrative point of view and allows us to share something of each character's predicament but without ever offering more than tantalizing glimpses of their inner lives. It's oh-so-deliberately crafted (which raises the accompanying threat of heavy-handedness and turgidity — but these are, in the main, successfully averted).

Not really by way of a criticism, but it's worth asking what we don't get in a Farhadi film?

- humour (his joke book is not small; it's non-existent);
- spectacle of any kind
- aesthetic panache or what we might call stylistic *joie de vivre*: it's all deadly serious.

Impossible not to compare it to **The Separation**, somewhat to the detriment of **The Past**. But it's quite a film anyway. Another absorbing adult drama.



## PASTORALE SYMPHONIE,

1946 F 4.50 7.1 FRA

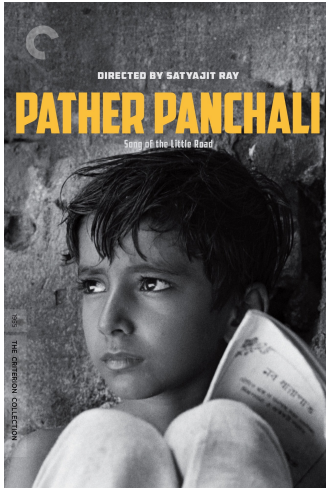
**Delannoy, Jean**

Michèle Morgan, Pierre Blanchard,  
Line Nore

The Ambiguities and Perplexities of Love, Sacred and Profane. A remote village in alpine France. Adapted from André Gide's disturbing novella, this tells the melancholy tale of a relationship between a French pastor and a blind girl who is adopted into his family. It's a carefully controlled, sombre, intense and disquieting film, partly because we are never entirely sure of the inner lives of the characters (and their inner lives are what really matters!). Superbly played by Michèle Morgan, Pierre Blanchard and Line Nore, all faced with complex and challenging roles. The film has a moral seriousness which is impressive (at times sharing ground with Dreyer, Bresson and Bergman though Delannoy is much less a stylist/auteur). Delannoy was often accused of mangling literary classics; in this case I think he has served the novella very well. Gide is well known as an anti-clerical "immoralist" (to borrow the title of his most scandalous novel) but as Schuon said of Nietzsche, in a better time he may have been a man of God, though undoubtedly a Protestant one! (This film is deeply Protestant despite Gide's disavowal of all things Christian.)

Although Bazin admired this film, most of the *Cahiers/New Wave* critics dismissed Delannoy's work (along with that of Duvivier, Carné et al) as belonging to an era of "bourgeois parlour cinema ... theatrical, stilted, artificial, polite, melodramatic, unreal, academic etc..." (my paraphrase). Their condescension is summed up in Godard's remark, *I saw Delannoy going into the Billancourt studios, briefcase in hand: you would have sworn he was going into an insurance office.* I'm with Bazin; this is a fine film.





## PATHER PANCHALI

1955    F    4.50    8.4    IND

**Ray, Satyajit**

Kanu Bannerjee, Karuna  
Bannerjee, Subir Bannerjee, Uma  
Das Gupta

Quiet, slow, poignant and poetic but unsentimental study of the rhythms of life in a Bengali village: family, childhood, poverty, thwarted dreams, sorrow and loss, the incursions of modernity. A veritable portrait gallery of Indian faces and a menagerie of domestic animals! How different an aesthetic and narrative technique from Hollywood.

Some minor quibbles: occasionally the cinematic “poetry” is a little strained; Ravi Shankar’s music is sometimes intrusive; sometimes the languid narrative pace becomes sluggish.

Remarkably accomplished and assured first feature which inaugurated Ray’s long and distinguished career as one of the foremost Asian auteurs. It was also the first Indian feature film to have any impact in the West. Won a prize at Cannes... but Truffaut walked out of the Cannes screening declaring *I don’t want to see a film about Indian peasants eating with their hands* — which just goes to show! And good ole Bosley Crowther at the *NY Times* (then one of the most influential critics in the world) wrote, *Any picture as loose in structure or as listless in tempo as this one is would barely pass as a ‘rough cut’ with the editors in Hollywood.*

The three Bannerjees in the cast were unrelated.

Reminiscent of the humanist cinema of Renoir and Kurosawa (two directors whom Ray admired) and the neorealism of De Sica whose **Bicycle Thieves** was a seminal influence. An enduring classic.



## PEOPLE ON SUNDAY

1930 F 4.00 7.3 GER

**Siodmak R & EG Ulmer**

Eugen Shüfftan

Berlin, 1930. Fresh, free-wheeling film about four young people out and about on a Sunday, and a portrait of a city at play and at work. Street life, assignations, domestic spats, music, a picnic, fun on the water at Nikolasee, flirtations, romance, a photographer at work, love in the forest, fat babies, throngs of people flowing through the streets and parks. A playful film about the respite from work and drudgery.

There is no extant original print: this BFI restoration has been cobbled together but several segments of the film are lost for ever. However, it works just fine, a charming film made by a bunch of then-unknown filmmakers, most of whom went on to fame and fortune in Hollywood: Billy Wilder and Curt Siodmak (script), Robert Siodmak and EG Ulmer (directors), Fred Zinnemann and Eugen Shüfftan (cinematography). All left Germany for Hollywood in the 30s. Schüfftan's work included **Metropolis**, **Port of Shadows**, **Eyes without a Face**, **The Hustler**, **Lilith** and **Wages of Sin**. Kurt Siodmak, the youngest of the brothers, scripted many Hollywood horrors including **The Wolf Man** (41) and **I walked with a zombie** (43).

**People on Sunday** has some of the same attractions as Vigo's **A Propos Nice**, made in the same year, though the latter is considerably more impressive. There is some discussion of **People on Sunday** in Rüdiger Suchsland's excellent doco, **From Caligari to Hitler** (2014).



## PÉPÉ LE MOKO

1937 F 4.25 7.7 FRA

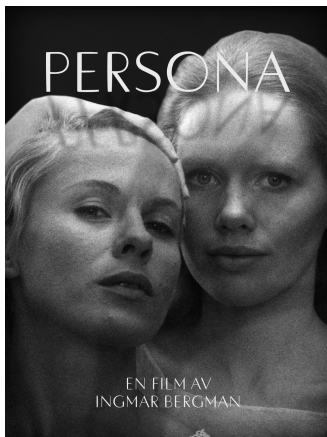
**Duvivier, Julian**

Jean Gabin, Mireille Balin, Lucas  
Gridoux, Gabriel Gabrio, Line  
Noro

Notorious jewel-thief Pépé is holed up in the Casbah in Algiers, a virtual prisoner who yearns for the streets of Paris. Jewels, women, informers and a cunning police inspector make things complicated. The Casbah (an elaborately constructed set), marvellously evoked by the cinematography, is a kind of dream world and a metaphor for exile. The film seems to have given birth to the term “poetic realism” which can be seen, in some respects, as a parent of film noir: romantic melancholy, fatalism, tough guy cynicism. **Pépé le Moko** is an irresistible mixture of action, suspense, humour, character study, pathos, exoticism and eroticism. Wonderful stuff, and no doubt a key work in the French/European cinema.

Line Noro (Ines) is a lot more interesting than Mireille Balin. Remade, unhappily, by John Cromwell as *Algiers* (1938) with Charles Boyer and Heddy Lamarr. Gabin dined out on this performance for the rest of his career.

It is sometime said that **PLM** transposes the American gangster film into French territory — not really. There’s too much Gallic charm, sly humour and that peculiarly French admixture of male chauvinism and gallantry for this to look or feel anything much like an American gangster film. More reasonable to see this as a descendent of Sternberg’s **Morocco** and a forerunner of a whole spate of Hollywood films set in North Africa, starting with **Casablanca**.



## PERSONA

1966 F 5.00 8.1 SWE

### Bergman, Ingmar

Sven Nykvist

Liv Ullman, Bibi Andersson,  
Gunnar Bjornstrand

Mute actress and patient (Ullman) and her nurse (Andersson) are in isolation on a remote island, with occasional visitors from the outside world. The boundaries between their identities and their personae are, to say the least, somewhat fluid. All manner of disturbing things happen! Who is who and who is having the breakdown? Intense is the word! A film full of arresting and unforgettable images: the cinema projector, the boy feeling his mother's face on the screen, the Buddhist monk, the merging visages, the broken glass, the burning celluloid, the erotic beach sequence ... the film is an endless stream of the most hypnotic imagery. One of Bergman's most radical, challenging, reflexive and engrossing films from right in the middle of his extended golden streak from the mid-50s to circa 1970. (Of course he made quite a number of very distinguished films outside this period but from **The Seventh Seal** (1957) to **Passion of Anna** (1969) he produced at least ten extraordinary films.) In 1966, Bergman, Nykvist, Ullman and Andersson were all at the height of their powers. **Persona** is one of the most written about of all the arthouse classics of the era, and has attracted the puzzled but generally admiring attention of just about every serious Anglophone film critic and scholar going, including Susan Sontag and Robin Wood, to name two of the more interesting. Unhappily, my favourite film critic (Andrew Sarris) had little time for one of my favourite directors (Bergman) claiming that the Swedish director's "technique never equaled his sensibility". Well, even the best critics get it wrong some of the time; Sarris actually got it wrong quite often ... but he's (almost) always worth reading (likewise Wood and Sontag.)



## PHOENIX

2016 F 4.00 7.3 GER

### Petzold, Christian

Nina Hoss, Ronald Zehrfeld,  
Nina Kunzendorf

Concentration camp survivor is badly disfigured by facial gunshot wounds. Recovering in postwar Berlin she is seeking her husband who may/may not have betrayed her to the Nazis. What I wrote a couple of weeks ago about **Barbara** applies equally as well here: *Nina Hoss and Ronald Zehrfeld give exquisitely understated performances, and the whole film is a study in creative ambiguity — narrative, moral, political, philosophical. Hoss is altogether riveting.* Guilty memories, wilful amnesia, betrayal, manipulation, facing the unspeakable... it's disturbing adult cinema. Some echoes of **Vertigo**.

Did the husband suspect she was really Nelly? It seemed to me that his conviction that this woman wasn't Nelly lasted far too long if we suppose that it is only in the final sequence that he realizes. I found **Barbara** compellingly plausible, this one slightly less so.

Can't improve on my general observations about **Barbara**: *A contemporary film which achieves all of the following has a lot going for it: it treats its characters and its audience with deep respect; it deals with ugly political/social realities without any exploitation; it refuses to indulge in grimy sex or titillating violence (though the plot could easily have accommodated both); it's intelligent, provocative and thoughtful without any 'artistic' showiness or 'postmodern' experimentation; it leaves a lot unsaid and works on the principle of less is more.*



## PICKPOCKET

1959 F 5.00 8.0 FRA

### Bresson, Robert

Léonce-Henri Burel

Martin La Salle, Marika Green,  
Jean Pelegri, Pierre Laymarie,  
Kassagi

Michel is an alienated and lost young man who becomes an adroit pickpocket and thief, not in search of wealth but as an act of self-assertion; the money itself, as with Raskolnikov, is of very little account. He plays a cat-and-mouse game with a police inspector and forms a sort of half-relationship with a young woman who has been looking after his dying mother. The story is inspired, obviously, by *Crime and Punishment*. Bresson has reduced and distilled Dostoevsky's massive inquiry into crime, punishment, self-will, guilt, grace and redemption into a simple and elemental story, and transposed it to late 50s' Paris (Camus type existentialism and nihilism is in the air rather than the Nietzschean variety we get in Dostoevsky). Dostoevsky's novel is stupendous and highly melodramatic: Bresson's film is spare and restrained. Each in its own way achieves the most powerful effects. The film is stripped of many of the conventions of mainstream cinema: psychological motivation, the cause and effect chain, identification, the resolution of narrative enigmas etc. (Not, of course, at all surprising in a Bresson film). We need not linger over those tags which always present themselves in discussions of Bresson: austerity, minimalism, formalism, spirituality, transcendence ... **Pickpocket** is a case study not only in Bresson's methods and preoccupations but in his distinctive cinematic poetry; certainly one of his front-line masterworks. Had Bresson had seen Fuller's **Pickup on South Street** with which it shares a good deal, especially concerning the pickpocketing business? In Melvillian fashion Bresson delineates the "craft" and "aesthetics" of crime. Doors, locks, stairs, pockets, hands, bars, handcuffs, caresses. There is a short but excellent discussion of this film by Rick Thompson in *Senses of Cinema*: <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/cteq/pickpocket/>



## PLAISIR, LE

1952 F 4.00 7.7 FRA

## Ophüls, Max

Jean Gabin, Danielle Darrieux,  
Simone Simon, Pierre Brasseur,  
Claude Dauphin

From three stories by Guy de Maupassant, all set in late 19thC France, mainly froth and a little pathos. The fluent, elegant, decorative and highly mobile camera (which someone described as “Mozartian”) and baroque *mise-en-scène* weaves a magical web and gives these stories the aura of fairy tales, gossamer light in the middle and longest story about happy prostitutes on an outing to the country, while the other two have more sombre undercurrents. Each story is anchored in the predicaments of women. (Ophüls has often been heralded as a proto-feminist; I have my doubts.) Ophüls is right in his favourite milieu, *fin-de-siècle* France, and the stories are narrated with his characteristic combination of playfulness, colour (so to speak) and movement, gentle irony, tenderness, wistful nostalgia and charm. The central set piece, the church sequence, alone worth the price of admission, is marvellous from all sorts of points of view. Each story takes on added resonance from its relation to the other two.

Unlike most of the critics I find Ophüls Hollywood work more interesting and engaging than his European films though there is no denying that the Ophülsian signature is most obvious in the latter. Todd Haynes is a tremendous Ophüls enthusiast and provides a commentary in the Extras.





## PORT OF SHADOWS

1938 F 4.00 7.8 FRA

### Carné, Marcel

Jean Gabin, Michel Simon,  
Michèle Morgan, Pierre Brasseur,  
Édouard Delmont, Raymond  
Aimos

Le Havre, perpetually foggy. Indochina vet and army deserter (Gabin) finds a small dog, some eccentric characters, a lovely young woman, and some troublesome gangsters in the docklands, a Port of Shadows, both literally and metaphorically. Many of the film's most striking qualities are evident in the first twenty minutes, the film's best segment: the truck scene, the cafe and the shack; great opening! Michèle Morgan: "a vision of unearthly beauty in a transparent raincoat". Gabin is a commanding figure, as usual. Scripted by Jacques Prévert and scored by Maurice Jaubert, two major talents.

"Poetic realism" is the label given to the 1930s work of Carné and others; it seems to signify a dreamy, world-weary and fatalistic romanticism, a response to the grim times, and a style which blends realism, theatricality, fantasy and visual poetry in dark narratives which feature doomed romances and unhappy endings...and often a balancing act teetering between farce and pathos (most notable here in the treatment of Half-Pint who dreams of sleeping between two clean sheets). Perhaps the most obvious antecedents are to be found in the works of the remarkable Jean Vigo. **Port of Shadows** is a companion piece to **Le Jour se lève**, made in the following year. (Carné's finest hour is reckoned to be **Les Enfants du Paradis** which I saw more than fifty years ago and which, at the time, didn't excite me — but several reputable people have told me that it is their all-time favourite film.)

French title: **Le Quai des brumes**





## POSTMAN, THE

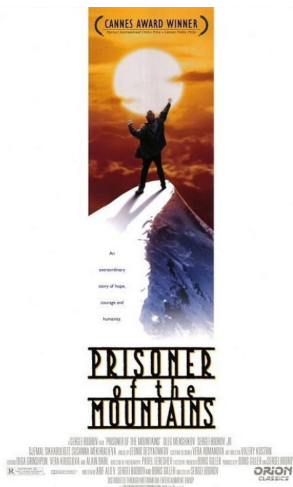
1994 F 4.00 7.7 ITA

### Radford, Michael

Franco Di Giacomo

Massimo Troisi, Philippe Noiret,  
Maria Grazia Cucinotta

Small fishing village on an Italian island. Mario (Troisi), a simple soul and perhaps a bit dopey, lands a job as the local postman. His main responsibility is delivering the mail to the famous Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda (Noiret), who is living in exile on the island. The two strike up a friendship and Mario starts to compose “metaphors” which help him to win the love of Beatrice who works in her aunt’s cafe. Amusing, charming, quietly touching. A warm portrayal of village life and the harsh beauty of the island. The film is rooted in the finely modulated performances of Troisi and Noiret. Massimo Troisi also had a hand in directing (uncredited) and scripting. He was suffering from a serious heart condition, probably caused by a severe bout of rheumatic fever in childhood, but persisted with the film. Very sadly, he died within a day of the completion of shooting, aged 41. One comparison which comes readily to mind is with the extravagantly popular **Cinema Paradiso** (the most popular foreign film in the UK by several circuits of an Italian village); I liked this better.



## PRISONER OF THE MTNS

1996 F 4.25 7.6 RUS

**Bodrov, Sergei**

Sergei Bodrov Jr, Oleg  
Menshikov, Jamal Sihouralidze,  
Sussana Mekhralyeva

Loosely based on a story by Leo Tolstoy. Two Russian soldiers are held captive by Chechens in a remote mountain village set in a hallucinatory landscape. A visually beautiful, skilfully handled film about ancient enmities and the barbarities of war, about the time-honoured customs of the village, and the possibilities of human contact and relationship despite the barriers of hatred, ignorance, prejudice and politics. An intelligent, sensitive and unsentimental treatment of the material which is sometimes brutal and horrific. Quiet, almost meditative in tone despite the violence it depicts.

The ending was problematic: I badly wanted the young soldier to be spared, and was very glad when he was. However, the logic of the narrative and the central theme would have been better served by a different ending. On the other hand, this affirmative note was counter-balanced by the sinister possibilities of the final image of the helicopters.

Vanya is well played by Sergei Bodrov Jr, the director's son. He died in a landslide in 2002 when he was directing a film in the Caucasus mountains. In some versions **Prisoner of the Mountains** retained the title of Tolstoy's story, "Prisoner of the Caucasus" which now took on another layer of tragic irony. Bodrov Sr (of Buryat-Mongolian background) lives in the USA.

(If you like this film you might also like **Tangerines**, 2013, d. Zaza Urushadze.)



## QUIET DUEL, THE

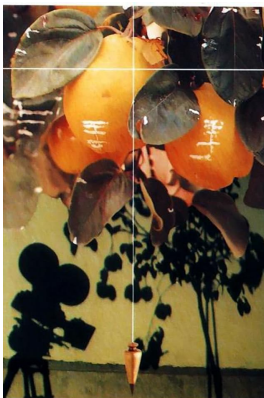
1949    F    4.50    7.5    JAP

### Kurosawa, Akira

Toshiro Mifune, Miki Sanjo,  
Noriko Sengokuy, Kenjiro  
Uemaura, Takashi Shimura

Japan. Young wartime doctor contracts syphilis from a patient during an operation and then faces a moral dilemma with his fiancée. This turns into a complex story with all manner of parallels and oppositions, as well as allusions to the effects of the war, all deftly handled. Superb performances all round. Mifune has a controlled intensity, gravity and stoicism which is quite affecting. The storyline avoids easy answers and stereotypical moves. It also needs an understanding of the moral codes of the time and place, and of medical history (something conspicuously absent in some of the film's more shallow critics).

While clearly not in the very front rank of Kurosawa's films this is still impressive and some of the criticisms levelled at it are plain silly; amongst the more common — "too slow", "too static", "too stagey", "sappy", "implausible", "didactic". I found it engrossing, painful and moving. It's not as visually dynamic or daring as Kurosawa's best work but it's serious, complex, provocative, affecting.



## EL SOL DEL MEMBRILLO

UNA PELÍCULA DE VÍCTOR ERICE  
 INSPIRADA EN UN TRABAJO DEL PINTOR ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA  
dirección de ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA — guion de ANTONIO LOPEZ GARCIA y VÍCTOR ERICE — producción de MARIA MORENO

## QUINCE TREE SUN, THE

1992 F 4.00 7.9 SPA

**Erice, Victor**

Javier Acirresarobe

Antonion Lopez Garcia, Enrique  
 Gran, Maria Moreno

The Man Who Loved Quince Trees. A film about a celebrated real-life Spanish painter, Antonio Lopez Garcia, who spends September through December each year painting a quince tree in his own courtyard in Madrid. A “documentary” that feels like a kind of dream/fable — about art, creativity, obsession, time, change, memory, death, love, friendship ... in short, life! All against a background of noise, politics, urban landscape. While the painter is at work outside his wife is painting a portrait of him as a younger man, reclining on a bed. Polish labourers are remodelling part of the house and trying to learn Spanish as they go. Antonio is visited several times by his old friend and fellow-artist, and by a visiting Japanese artist and her translator. Late in the piece a movie camera records the process of the quince tree painting which has now turned into a drawing. All the characters are real-life. Lopez paints the tree; Erice, so to speak, paints Lopez.

There's a hint of Bresson's **A Man Escaped** in the meticulous and concentrated work of the artist, and a touch of the Antonionis in the treatment of Madrid. It has little of the surreal magic of **El Sur** and **Spirit of the Beehive** but it's engrossing nevertheless. It won the Jury Prize at the 1992 Cannes Festival.

Produced by Maria Moreno (who plays the wife).



## QUO VADIS, AIDA?

2020 F 3.75 8.0 BOS

**Zbanic, Jasmila**

Maier, Christine

Jasna Djuricic, Izudin Bajrovic,  
Boris Ler, Johann Heldenberg,  
Boris Iskovic

Srebrenica, Bosnia, 1995. Aida, one-time teacher, works for the U.N. as a translator. Her home town is threatened by invading Serbian troops. She fears what is to come and makes desperate attempts to save her family. Events unfold with ever-increasing menace. Jasna Djuricic is altogether credible in the leads role, as are all the principal players. The film involves us, immerses us, in what is happening, largely through Aida's experience and pov. The destructiveness and brutality of war, the incompetence and impotence of agencies like the U.N., international indifference, families torn apart, futile and duplicitous 'negotiations', mass killings. All based on horrific true events.



## RAINING IN THE MOUNT'N

1979 F 4.25 7.3 TAI

**King Hu**

Henry Chan

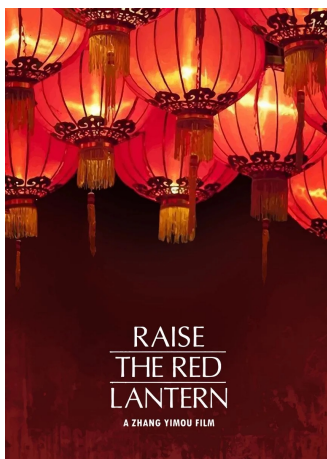
Hsu Feng, Sun Yuch, Tung Lin,  
Tien Feng, Chang Gian, Wu  
Chiang-hsiang

Remote monastery, Ming Dynasty China. The abbot is looking to appoint his successor. He invites three prominent laymen, each with his own entourage, to visit the monastery and assist him in his decision. There's a lot of skulduggery behind the scenes with several parties intent on stealing an ancient sutra manuscript. A convict appears on the scene and is soon entangled in the machinations. Greed and ambition threaten the Buddhist ethos and betray the teachings. Some flying nuns help save the day.

The storyline is engaging enough but is of comparatively marginal interest to director King Hu who is intent on a visual spectacle saturated with colour and movement – running, flying, jumping, walking, dancing, fighting, wandering with a camera to match, always on the move, tracking, panning, zooming, dollying. Busy, beautiful, balletic.

The Blu-ray has been patched together from various sources; hence the rather uneven visual quality. The best sequences are quite ravishing. Shot in Korea.

King Hu (China-born, lived and worked in Taiwan and Hong Kong) was one of the first to bridge the gap between Asian martial arts trash films and arthouse: **Dragon Inn**, **A Touch of Zen**, **The Valiant Ones** and **Raining in the Mountain** all trail-blazed the way for films such as **Crouching Tiger**, **The Grandmaster** etc.



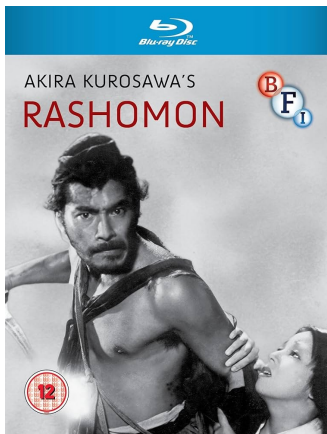
## RAISE THE RED LANTERN

1991 F 5.00 8.2 CHI

**Zhang Yimou**

Li Gong, Jingwu Ma, Saifel He,  
Cuifen Cao, Lin Kong

China, c. 1920. When her father dies and the family business goes down the gurgler beautiful nineteen-year old student, Songlian, is persuaded by her stepmother to become the “fourth mistress” of a wealthy man of high social standing. She becomes a prisoner in his extensive compound where she battles with the three other mistresses to gain the favour of the Master. Apart from the very brief prologue the entire film takes place within the labyrinthine, almost fortress-like compound. Life is largely ruled by long-honoured customs, rules and rituals, some of them quite barbaric, and by the raising of red lanterns outside the living quarters of the concubine currently in favour with the Master who takes his pleasure as the mood takes him. A rigid social hierarchy constrains everybody apart from the Master who remains an opaque and rarely seen figure. The law of “actions and concordant reactions” is very much in play. The film is shot in long, static takes (inevitable comparisons with Ozu); camera movement is extremely rare and all the more effective when, late in the piece, we momentarily have a hand-held camera (in the penultimate sequence on the rooftop), and soon after, a series of slow zooms. The use of colour is highly stylized with various red, orange, yellow, blue, grey and sepia-like washes. The pace and rhythm is deliberate, unhurried, meditative — again, subverted only at the end — and the dialogue spare. The central thematic concerns are social and sexual slavery, the erosion of personal autonomy and the psychic damage issuing from a claustrophobic domestic milieu in which petty jealousies and rivalries provide the only outlet for self-expression. Li Gong is hypnotic in the lead role while each of the characters, including several servants, the Master’s son and a doctor, are all very human and three-dimensional. “Enjoyable” isn’t the word: the narrative material is too bleak, too painful, too disturbing to make this an easy watch. But it’s a film of austere stylistic rigour, formal and visual beauty, and controlled but deeply-felt emotion. Powerful and memorable. Has to be one of the most impressive films of the early 90s. Must track down some more work by Zhang Yimou; on this evidence you would take him to be a Major Player. **Raise the Red Lantern** took the international circuit by storm but caused considerable controversy in China where it was actually banned. Based on the novel *Wives and Concubines* by Su Tong. **RRL** is only the second Chinese feature I’ve ever seen, after **Spring in a Small Town**, excluding the Hong Kong-Chinese works of Kar-Wai Wong.



## RASHOMON

1950    F    5.00    8.2    JAP

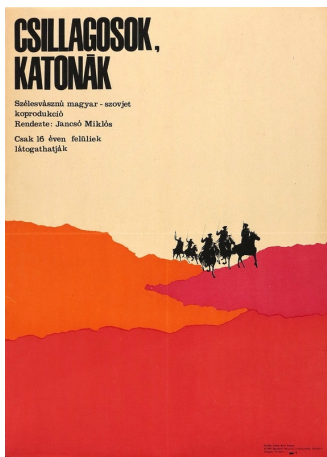
### Kurosawa, Akira

Kazuo Miyagawa

Toshirô Mifune, Machiko Kyô,  
Masayuki Mori , Takashi Shimura,  
Minoru Chiaki, Kichijirô Ueda

11th century Japan. A samurai and his bride travelling through the forest are set upon by a roaming bandit. The samurai ends up dead, the bride ravaged and distraught. What happened? A priest, a woodcutter and a scoundrel are sheltering from the storm in the ruins of Rashomon, a majestic gate on the outskirts of Kyoto. They have heard the testimony of the three protagonists, that of the dead samurai coming through a ghost/medium. The three accounts of a rape/seduction and the killing conflict. Who's telling the truth? Finally we hear the account of the woodcutter, apparently an eye-witness ... but we are still left wondering. The film is visually ravishing, bold and highly dynamic, the narrative structure complex, the drama intense, the performances full throttle. "Kinetic élan" is a phrase that comes to mind (applied by Susan Sontag to the opening sequences of **The Searchers**). The opening and closing sequences at Rashomon are riveting, as is most of what comes in between. Toshiro Mifune is always a commanding presence on the screen but all of the performances here are exceptionally fine, including that of Noriko Hanma as the medium. Machiko Kyo is extraordinary. A film which is very arresting in the way it manages to combine brute power, raw energy and dramatic intensity with grace, beauty and pathos. Then too there is the striking narrative construction with all its attendant ambiguities for which the film is justly famous. Not hard to see why the film is regarded as a major landmark in the evolution of the "art cinema"; it anticipates many of the revolutionary changes in the European cinema in the 50s and 60s. Metascore for **Rashomon** the second highest I've ever seen: 98 (**Citizen Kane** 100; **The Third Man** 97; **The Searchers** 94). Machiko Kyo's credits include **Ugetsu Monogatari**, **Street of Shame**, and **Floating Weeds**. Kazuo Miyagawa shot many Japanese classics including **Ugetsu**, **Sansho the Bailiff**, **Street of Shame**, **Floating Weeds**, **Yojimbo**, and **Tokyo Olympiad** (doco).





## RED AND THE WHITE, THE

1967 F 4.25 7.8 HUN

**Jancsó, Miklós**

József Madaras, Tibor Molnár,  
András Kozák

Set in 1919, it depicts skirmishes between the Reds (revolutionaries) and the Whites (reactionaries) for control of the Volga region, and focuses on a small group of Hungarians caught up in the civil war, fighting on the Red side. No plot, no heroes, no psychology, no resolution, minimal dialogue, only the most sketchy characterization, no relief, no fun at all. The women in the film stand as a silent rebuke to militarism. The waltz scene is extraordinary. Filmed in Jancsó's well-known style of long takes, wide screen, sweeping movement. A powerful if somewhat abstracted indictment of war. Some pre-Tarkovsky Tarkovsky-like sequences! This kind of cinema is demanding...a necessary and salutary antidote to Hollywood!

The Soviets funded this film...and then banned it! (They did the same thing with Kalatazov's **I am Cuba**, 1964.)

Jancsó died earlier this year (2014), aged 92.

Historians estimate that during the Russian Civil War of 1918-1921, 8 million people lost their lives — many through starvation and disease. There were also pogroms. About 1 million Red soldiers were killed. Asked about the loss of life in the Civil War, Trotsky (the Red's chief strategist and a brilliant organizer) replied that it was a small price to pay for the revolution. What would he say now I wonder?



## RED BALLOON, THE

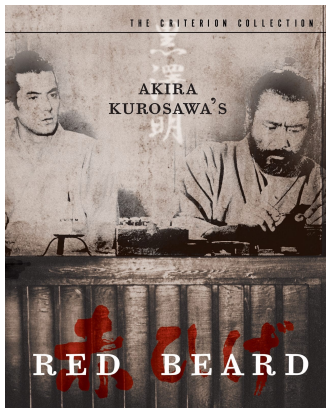
1956 F 4.50 8.1 FRA

**Lamorisse, Albert**

Edmond Séchan

Padscal Lamorisse, Sabine  
LKamorisse, Georges Sellier

Young boy and his companion, a magical red balloon, wander around in the streets of Paris, eventually encountering a group of childish ruffians. A place, a mood, a time as much as a story (the narrative elements are sparse, as is the dialogue, almost non-existent actually). An enchanting blend of documentary realism and children's fantasy, cleverly edited and with a spare but effective musical track. Amenable to an allegorical reading if one insists (unnecessarily really). The cinematic equivalent to the novella; some folk call it the 'featurette' (ugh!). ("Short" won't quite do either.) For antecedents think Vigo and Tati. It has become a classic in the proper sense of the word.



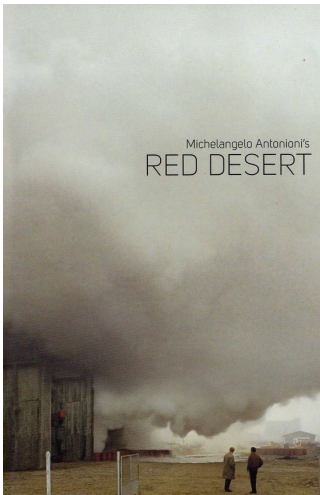
## RED BEARD

1965    F    4.75    8.3    JAP

### Kurosawa, Akira

Toshiro Mifune, Yuzo Kayama,  
Tsutomu Yamazaki

Story set in early 19thC, about a medical clinic in a poverty-stricken area of Japan and the struggles of a proud young doctor. As usual with Kurosawa, its visually dynamic and very pleasing to look at. At three hours it has room to fit in almost everything: pathos, action, farce, tension, comedy, melodrama. Mifune's "fight" with his assailants is hilarious. Too long. Too much explicit dialogue hammering home a message; quite unnecessary. The story of Otoyō is lifted from Dostoevsky's novel, **The Insulted and the Injured**. The most "Western" of the great triumvirate of Japanese masters (Ozu and Mizoguchi being the other two). A few reckless critics have accused Kurosawa of watching too much Dr Kildare and Ben Casey! Stupid really.



## RED DESERT

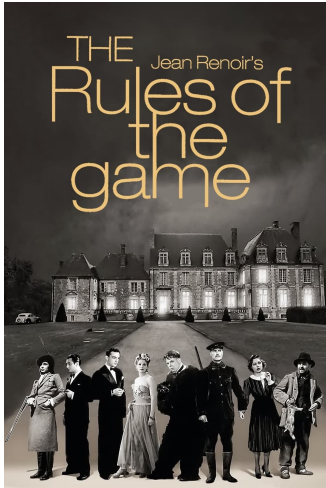
1964 F 4.25 7.7 ITA

**Antonioni,**

Carlo di Palma

Monica Vitti, Richard Harris,  
Carlo Chionetti

Figures in an industrial, psychological and spiritual wasteland. Nature blighted, machines and noise and debris everywhere, disconnected people: neurosis, apathy, fear, banality, loneliness, despair. Very little happens but the film is compelling — at least I found it so. How so? Well, firstly Antonioni's visual aesthetic as well as his formal gravity and film-making practice generally (elliptical narratives, long takes, a certain visual abstraction, the foregrounding of mood and inner turmoil rather than overt action etc); secondly, Monica Vitti; thirdly, a sense of moral seriousness — not on show, so to speak, but informing the whole exercise. (Marxism, existentialism and nihilism seem to have been the major influences; one of the few Italian directors on whom Catholicism seems to have left not the slightest imprint.) I share almost nothing of Antonioni's "philosophy", insofar as one can surmise it: his appeal is almost entirely aesthetic and "moral", by which one means his engagement with life's serious issues, even if his "answer" is bleak and possibly sterile. The joke book is not small; it doesn't exist. Richard Harris' dialogue was dubbed. He works well enough...but an odd choice. If you want coherent and motivated narrative, intelligible psychology and dramatic resolution, this film is not for you! Antonioni's manipulation of color now seems less impressive than it apparently was at the time. (But his compositional sense is as striking as it ever was.) I take back every negative thing I ever said about Monica Vitti. Sadly, she has suffered from Alzheimers for the last fifteen years. This film sits with the other major Antonioni achievements I've seen: **Story of a Love Affair**, **Le Amiche**, **Il Grido**, **L'Avventura**, **La Notte**, **L'Eclisse**, **The Passenger**. (I thought both **Blow Up** and **Zabriskie Point** terrible — but that was nearly fifty years ago! But I'm not tempted to return to them.)



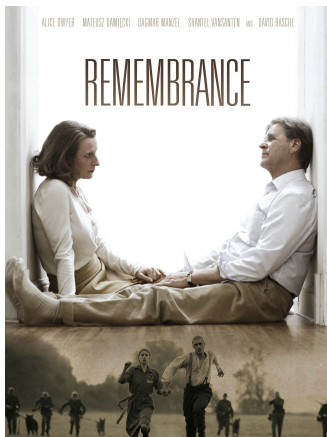
## REGLE DU JEU, LA

1939    F    4.75    8.1    FRA

### Renoir, Jean

Nora Gregor, Paulette Goddard,  
Marcel Dalio, Roland Toutain,  
Jean Renoir, Julien Carette

Everybody is in love with the wrong person! An extraordinary production and in some ways the French equivalent of **Citizen Kane**; ie., a veritable encyclopedia of the possibilities of cinema (though this film is more congenial, less bombastic and more amusing). Mixing elements of classical French comedy (Moliere et al), reportage, satire, farce, social critique and pathos, Renoir creates a portrait of a landed aristocracy which has a certain charm but which is morally moribund, frivolous and destructive. Brilliant parallelism of the aristocrats and the servants. The pivot of the film is the hunting scene in which the collective social ethos is fully exposed. The scene with the squirrel, a sort of metaphor for the cinema as a whole, is brilliant, as is so much of the film. The film also displays Renoir's genius in the use of space and movement as well as his mastery of deep-focus (well before **Citizen Kane**!). The ensemble playing is pretty well faultless. Nora Gregor (a kind of French Irene Dunne) and Mario Dalio (the Maquis) are superb, as is Renoir himself... but the film is replete with splendid performances all round. A glittering comedy of manners informed by a deeply serious moral vision and humane sensibility. Although I have to give it a very high rating as one of the landmarks of world cinema I wouldn't count it as one of my all time favourites. It's a dazzling achievement no doubt ... but for the absolute best in cinema I go to Dreyer, Bresson and Bergman, or alternatively to Ford, Hawks and Sirk, or to Ozu and Kurosawa rather than to either Renoir or Welles. But it's all a matter of taste! Renoir's introduction to the film and Doucet's analysis (only partially seen) both worth watching.



## REMEMBRANCE

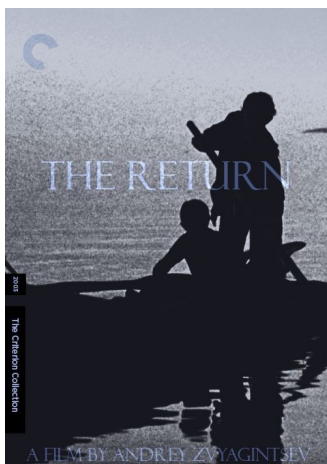
2011 F 4.50 7.2 GER

### Justice, Anne

Alice Dwyer, Dagmar Manzel,  
Mateusz Damiecki, David Rasche

**[2012]** A meditative exploration of love, pain, loss, heroism, betrayal and memory against the nightmarish backdrop of the concentration camps, wartime Poland and 1970s New York. Subtle, intelligent, visually deft and leaving the viewer to dot the i's and cross the t's, so to speak. A fine ending. Alice Dwyer (young Hannah) and older Hannah (Dagmar Manzel) don't seem like the same person, to which the film-makers might reply, "they're not!" Based on real-life events. How far is this from the current Hollywood bilge? I am somewhat puzzled by the apparent neglect of this film. It's one of the better films about WW2 and the Holocaust.

**[2020]** This time around I was not quite as impressed but it remains an ambitious film of some power and beauty. Alas, Anna Justice has since disappeared into the maw of television.



## RETURN, THE

2006 F 4.25 8.0 RUS

**Zvyagintsev, Andrei**

Mikhail Krichman

Vladimir Garin, Ivan Dobronravov,  
Konstantin Lavronenko, Nataliya  
Vdovina

Somewhere, anywhere, in Russia. The lives of two young brothers are severely disrupted when their long-absent father returns home, inexplicably, and takes them on a fishing and camping trip during which he is also attending to his own dubious business (never explained). The two boys react very differently to the return of the father. They end up on a remote island where both the brooding elements and the personal tensions become increasingly threatening. The antagonism between the father and the younger son is a symptom of severe psychic damage on both sides while the elder brother mediates and diffuses the tension; he and the mother are the positive moral forces in the story. Frugal dialogue, minimal exposition, a story carried by the visuals, disturbing atmospherics (mystery and menace), haunting music (Philip Glass), textured with oblique biblical and mythological allusions. Very long takes and tracking shots: the antithesis of TV and contemporary Hollywood. Visually striking.

The film is compelling, disquieting, a bit surreal and rich in creative ambiguities... a stunningly accomplished directorial debut which marked Zvyagintsev as a film-maker with his own radical aesthetic (much more fully realized in **The Banishment**, his second feature) and his own social, psychological and moral concerns, one whose development could be anticipated with the keenest interest. Four very arresting films have followed: **The Banishment**, **Elena**, **Leviathan**, **Loveless**. Vladimir Garin (Andrei in the film) drowned about a year after filming was completed. Very sad and a bit spooky.



## RIFIFI

1955 F 4.50 8.2 FRA

### Dassin, Jules

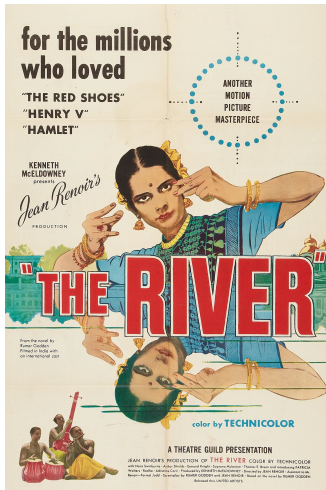
Philippe Agostini

Jean Servais, Carl Möhner,  
Robert Manuel, Jules Dassin

Paris. Bunch of crims, headed by an old pro just out of the cooler, plan an audacious jewel heist which depends on meticulous planning, perfect timing and thorough “professionalism”. The film is like the robbery in its structure, pacing and craftsmanship. There are also the issues of gang loyalty, the unspoken code (“the rules”), the two “families”. A good deal of fine location camerawork and, of course, the famous robbery sequence (twenty-plus minutes *sans* music or dialogue). Jean Servais, himself a victim of the bottle, is splendid as the world-weary con. (Dassin himself plays Cesar, the safe-cracker.) One of the classic gangster/heist/noir movies, in this case a French-American hybrid with a debt to both generic traditions. The narrative trajectory goes like this: the genesis of an idea, the formation of the gang, planning, execution, aftermath. Elegant, atmospheric, gripping, tense, a highly polished outing which never succumbs to mere “artiness”, a highpoint in the noir/gangster lineage, surpassed only by Melville. Truffaut said *Rififi* was the worst noir novel he’d ever read and the best noir film he’d ever seen.

Dassin had to leave America after being blacklisted and spent the rest of his career in France and Greece. A sample of those who ran foul of HUAC and the “Red Channels” list which identified 150 people in the entertainment field as “red fascists and their sympathizers” (most of the people named were blacklisted in one way or another): Jules Dassin, Robert Rossen, Edward Dmytryk, Lillian Hellman, Paul Robeson, Larry Adler, Dalton Trumbo, Abraham Polonski, Joseph Losey, Ring Lardner, Lee J Cobb, Howard da Silva, John Garfield, Will Geer, Dashiel Hammet, Judy Holliday, Lena Horne, Burl Ives, Sam Jaffe, Arthur Miller, Zero Mostel, Edward G Robinson, Gale Sondergaard, Lionel Stander, Orson Welles, Eddie Albert, Barbara Bel Geddes, John Cromwell, Kim Hunter, John Ireland, John Berry, Alexander Knox, Irving Pichel, Martin Ritt.





## RIVER, THE

1951 F 4.00 7.6 FRA

## Renoir, Jean

Claude Renoir

Patricia Walters, Thomas Breen,  
Radha, Adrienne Corri, Arthur  
Shields

Adolescent Harriet belongs to a large English family living in Bengal in the later days of the Raj. She is an aspiring romantic writer, on the brink of womanhood. Next door lives another Englishman, married to a Hindu woman but now a widower, with a grown-up daughter. A young American, damaged in the war, is visiting: one handsome but troubled young man surrounded by three women (echoes of **Black Narcissus**). Partly a coming-of-age/first-love story, partly a portrait of India and of a disappearing way of life. The domestic drama is not entirely successful but the evocation of India is marvellous. Beautifully shot by Claude Renoir (the director's nephew) in lush Technicolor, the film is visually seductive. A warm, gentle, compassionate, and evocative if somewhat limited film. Some serious miscasting and wooden acting. The interpersonal drama never really cranks up, and Melanie's character and predicament remains undeveloped. I felt dissatisfied with various aspects of the film until about half way through by which time I was feeling some of its enchantment; its limitations seemed to fade from view and its ambience became increasingly attractive. (Its limitations are obvious when compared with **Black Narcissus**; alternatively, imagine what Satyajit Ray might have made of this story.) An adaptation of Rumer Godden's novel (which I read and enjoyed about fifty years ago!) which pleased her greatly, unlike Powell's **Black Narcissus** which didn't (though it's a more powerful and more fully realised film). Thomas Breen (Capt John) actually lost a leg in the war! There is a must-see extra on this disc: a monologue from Renoir about the film. Wonderful stuff.



## ROCCO & HIS BROTHERS

1960 F 4.00 8.3 ITA

Visconti, Luchino

Alain Delon, Renato Salvatori,  
Annie Girardot, Katina Paxinou

Epic family drama structured around five brothers with Delon as the Main Man. The family has moved from the rural south to industrial Milan. Life is tough, and made more so by fraternal tensions. Like many Italian films in the postwar period, stylistically it admixes neorealism and Hollywood noir, abrasive social realism and operatic melodrama — and does so very effectively. The film has vitality, intensity, pathos: one gets deeply involved in the lives of the brothers. A couple of brutal and visceral scenes (the rape and murder) which audiences at the time found quite shocking (and so did the Italian censors). Annie Girardot is probably the star of the show as the enigmatic and ambiguous Nadia but Delon handles his role beautifully (even if the script's characterization is not altogether satisfactory).

Rocco is a bit too good to be true. Paxinou (as the mother) verges on overstatement. The plot has a few gaps (the original version was four hours). Visconti was infatuated with Delon who is treated (visually) like a leading lady in a 1930s Hollywood romance.

The film was heralded as a major cinematic landmark. Its reputation has somewhat declined since then — but it still has many admirers. Several critics have identified a direct line of influence between **RHB** and later American gangster films, especially **The Godfather**. (Just on the evidence of the films themselves I suspect **The Leopard** was a much more powerful influence on Coppola than **RHB**.)



## ROMA

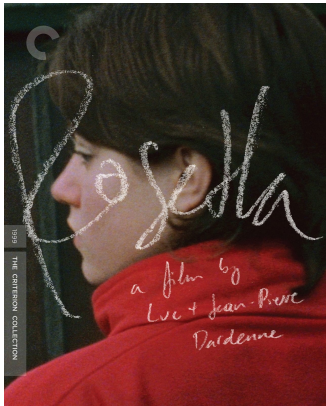
2018 F 5.00 8.1 MEX

## Cuarón, Alfonso

Yalitza Aparicio, Marina de Távira, Diego Cortina Autrey

Mexico City, 1971. A year in the life of a maid in an upperclass household: noisy children, unruly dog, marital tensions, endless chores. Alfonso jettisons many of the conventions of narrative cinema to produce a visually ravishing but low-key story about Cleo, the woman who looks after everyone but who is essentially alone. It is surprisingly intimate, tender and warm-hearted but at the same time detached, eschewing many of the easy moves of more conventional cinema: the dramatic eruptions for which one is waiting – some disaster triggered by the dog, a child gone missing, a massive husband-wife showdown – never actually eventuate, though there is drama enough in the closing phases. Apparently an exercise in memory and autobiography for Cuarón himself, not only in the reverie about family life but the references to political turmoil, urban mayhem, social and economic stratification. The episodic narrative is seemingly leisurely but crafted with meticulous care and a sharp eye for detail. Cuarón is editor and cinematographer as well as director. The hospital scene is powerful without any histrionics, as is the beach episode. Yalitza Aparicio is very appealing in her first-time acting role, a nuanced rendering of Cleo's generous nature, her vulnerability and her alone-ness. Without any polemics or rhetorical flourishes Cuarón and Aparicio manage to make us feel the yawning gulf between the classes (security, comfort, status, travel, holidays, choices on one side, their absence on the other) as well as the tensions, dislocations and latent instability in the social structure as a whole. A fully-realized film which works on many fronts. Robin Wood somewhere said that we must *simultaneously evaluate films morally, politically and aesthetically*; this one passes all three tests without making any undue fuss of itself.

I am pleasantly surprised that Netflix should sponsor such a daring “arthouse” project — may there be more of it! But I would very much like to see this on the big screen.



## ROSETTA

1998    F    4.00    7.4    BEL

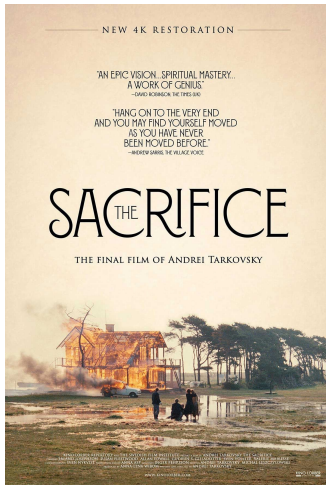
### Dardenne Bros

Alain Marcoen

Émilie Dequenne, Fabrizio Rongione, Anne Yernaux

Rosetta lives with her no-hope mother in a scungy caravan park. Struggle Street. Loses her job, and then another. A relationship of sorts goes nowhere. Meanwhile the mother is going down fast. Feel bad, feel worse and then feel really bad. Jittery hand-held camera, sharp editing, minimal dialogue, jagged sounds. I initially felt a strong resistance to this film, especially its clear intention to plunge us into a very bleak world, aided and abetted by a camera suffering from a severe case of St Vitus' dance. But gradually the power of Émilie Dequenne's abrasive but beautifully controlled performance and the close observation of both milieu and character dragged me into a painful experience. In the end I was glad to have seen it.

Moderately interesting interview on the Extras with the Dardenne brothers who were not at all what I was expecting – older, wiser, more engaging. (I had them wrongly pegged as young Film School hipster types.) I was more impressed with this than the later **The Child** (2006).



## SACRIFICE, THE

1986 F 4.25 8.1 RUS

**Tarkovsky, Andrei**

Sven Nykvist

Erland Josephson, Susan  
Fleetwood, Allan Edwall, Gudrun  
Gisladottir, Sven Wollter

A remote Swedish island. The quiet rhythms of life are disturbed by hidden and largely unspoken family tensions. Suddenly all is shattered by the sudden eruption of a total, cataclysmic war which threatens global annihilation. The main protagonist, an ageing, cultured and intellectual man who has perhaps neglected his spiritual life, strikes a bargain with God: he will sacrifice all if the pre-war state can be restored and his family saved. A dark meditation on life: love and its absence, the claims of art, alienation and ennui, the ambiguous boundaries between “inner” and “outer”, sin, faith, redemption, mortality ... and sacrifice — all those heavily freighted themes which haunted both Ingmar Bergman and Tarkovsky. And indeed, the film is, amongst other things a homage to Ingmar Bergman and Swedish cinema: produced by the Swedish Film Institute, shot by Sven Nykvist on Faro Island, starring Bergman regular Erland Josephson, stylistically and thematically reminiscent of Bergman’s work, especially from the 60s (most obviously, **Shame**). The narrative such as it is, unfolds at a slow, deliberate pace, accentuated by long takes and extended silences, moving abruptly between the quotidian and the surreal/imaginary/spiritual, and withholding the sorts of narrative satisfactions of mainstream cinema. Harrowing, difficult, visionary, disturbing — and ultimately rewarding... and made all the more poignant by the fact that Tarkovsky was dying when he made it — and knew he was dying. (He died of cancer at the age of 54.) It has a deeply Christian frame whilst also referencing pagan and Eastern outlooks, all providing an alternative to the destructive, materialistic, alienating and suicidal worldview of modernity. One can hardly imagine a more profound theme. Precisely how well Tarkovsky dramatizes and realizes these concerns leaves room for debate. Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Nietzsche, Beckett and perhaps Kafka are lurking in the shadows. Problem: the histrionic wife is an altogether opaque cipher; the first half of the film, for all its vivid imagery, is very talky.



## SALESMAN, THE

2016 F 4.00 7.9 IRA

### Fahardi, Asghar

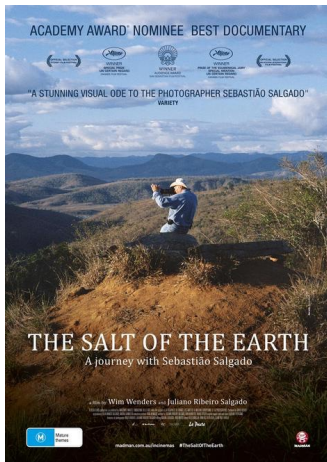
Hossein Jafarian

Shahab Hosseini, Taraneh  
Alidoosti, Babak Karimi

A Marriage Under Pressure. Middle-class Tehran couple are involved in a production of Arthur Miller's play *The Salesman*. The film opens with their frantic evacuation of the building in which they are living: a construction fault in the foundations. (A fairly blatant metaphor for what is to follow.) A violent crime leaves them in a state of severe psychic turmoil as their marriage comes under severe pressure. It's engrossing, intelligent, superbly acted and densely and suggestively ambiguous and, like all Farhadi's film, gruelling. But, for all that, a little disappointing in the light of Farhadi's preceding two films, both in the very front rank of contemporary cinema.

The whole conceit of the play within the film has me a bit baffled. It seems contrived and confuses rather than enriches the film's themes (despite the obvious parallel of Willy's failure as a husband). It's a fine film but it lacked some of the richness and depth and power of both **A Separation** and **The Past**. I also found the restless editing and jittery cinematography a bit irritating. It will be interesting to see what Farhadi does next.

Some of the critical commentary about the husband's behaviour is absurdly moralistic and ideological in the worst sense.



## SALT OF THE EARTH, THE

2014 F 4.50 8.4 GER

Wenders, Wim

Documentary about Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado put together by Wim Wenders and Salgado's son: a life story, a journey around the planet, a gallery of astonishing photographs, variously beautiful, horrific, scary, haunting, inspiring, sublime, and a meditation on life and death. A wonderful documentary. I would have made it about fifteen minutes shorter but the temptation must have been to make it longer still. (As it is, it runs to just over 100 minutes.) Some exploration of the ethics of photographing catastrophes, disasters, alien cultures etc, would have been interesting and pertinent.

For the last twenty years or more Wenders has been making docs, most recently **Pope Francis: A Man of His Word**.





## SAMI BLOOD

2016 F 4.00 7.3 SWE

**Kernell, Amanda**

Maj-Doris Rimpi, Olle Sarri,  
Åne Biret Somby

Coming-of-age story about Elle-Marja, a Sami girl breaking away from the traditional life of the reindeer herders to find her way, through education, into “normal” Swedish society in Uppsala. Hostility from her mother, condescension from her teacher in the “special school” for Sami children, friction with her sister, prejudice in various guises, a fleeting romantic interlude and an encounter with a bourgeois family. The story is bracketed by Elle-Marja, as a very old woman, attending the funeral of her estranged sister. Maj-Doris Rimpi plays the protagonist in a beautifully realized performance, full of subtlety and restraint, gradually revealing Elle-Marja’s inner turmoil, determination and courage, and the pain and perplexities of being caught between two worlds. The film never becomes either maudlin or polemical. It’s nicely done and quite affecting. Recommended.

Aka. **Northern Great Mountain**





## SAMOURAI, LE

1967 F 4.50 8.1 FRA

Melville, Jean-Pierre

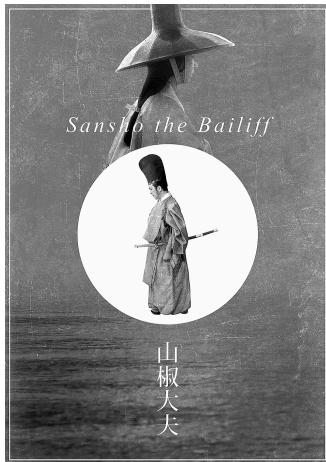
Henri Decae

Alain Delon, Nathalie Delon,  
Francois Perrier, Cathy Rosier

Bresson goes into a time-space warp, turns into a nihilistic existentialist, infatuated with the samurai ethos, intoxicated by 1930s gangster movies and mesmerized by cinematic minimalism; he assumes the name of Jean-Pierre Melville and makes **Le Samourai**. What the hell is going on? American gangster and noir genres + Nouvelle Vague + Japanese cinema aesthetics + 1960s pop art + cartoons + a hint of *Crime and Punishment* + existential nihilism + Bresson = **Le Samourai**. On the face of it a gangster/revenge plot on which level it works perfectly well, constructing an entertaining narrative which generates tension and suspense. Delon is perfect as the metallic killer, the man with an appointment with death. There are three ice-like clinicians at work here: Delon/Costello, Périer/the Commissaire, and Melville. Like a lot of 1960s European cinema it's more a matter of style than of narrative: a film of spaces and entries and exits (into/out of rooms, corridors, streets, cars, trains, apartments and most importantly the frame/screen — rivalling Bresson's **A Gentle Woman** and Herzog's **Nosferatu!**); a film of aesthetic rigour, control and austerity (eg. the extremely spare use of dialogue), of ritual, both dramatic/narrative and aesthetic. The stylistic parallels with Bresson are obvious though Melville's overt subject matter could not be more alien. (Bresson's film about crime, **Pickpocket**, despite some striking similarities, is a horse of a very different colour!)

Nathalie Delon was (temporarily) Alain's real-life wife. Delon seems to have led a pretty unsavoury life — many wives and mistresses, far right-wing politics, gangsters, shady business dealings etc etc.; his life turned into a bad noir!

A film for the eye, for puzzle-solvers, for cinephiles (or perhaps one should say cine-maniacs)...but not much nourishment for the soul. (David Thomson wrote an acute piece on the film in *Have you seen....?*)



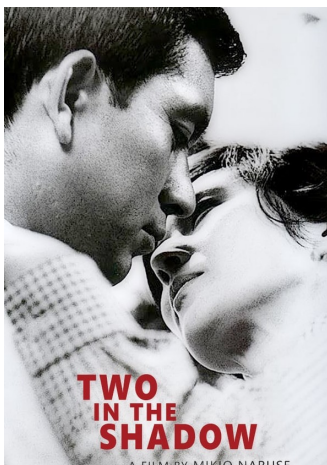
## SANSHO THE BAILIFF

1954 F 4.50 8.4 JAP

**Mizoguchi, Kenji**

Kinuyo Tanaka, Yoshiaki  
Hanayagi, Kyôko Kagawa

11thC Japan. Mizoguchi's riff on a feudal folktale/myth about the trials and tribulations of a family after the father, a local governor, falls foul of the higher authorities because of his attempts to better the lot of the peasant-slaves. The father is sent into exile and the mother, son and daughter are soon torn apart. The film focuses on the fate of the two children, covering a period of about ten years. Enslavement, brutality, torture, toil, humiliation. Late in the piece we are given some hope that a family reunion might be possible. The story has plenty of grip and transcends its historical and cultural context to ruminate on universal themes about good and evil, justice, authority, morality, self-respect, family loyalty. However, it is Mizoguchi's style rather than his humanistic treatment of the material which lifts this into the upper echelons of Japanese cinema. It is a style much analyzed and commented on and need not be here rehearsed in any detail. The key features are visual composition, camera movement, long takes, evocative music and diegetic sound, narrative foreshadowing ... and a stately beauty, formality and gravity that seems quintessentially Japanese. Despite its title this is not a film about Sansho the Bailiff! (He might be the template for some of our political leaders!) His compound may have been an allusion to Japanese prison camps during WW2.



## SCATTERED CLOUDS

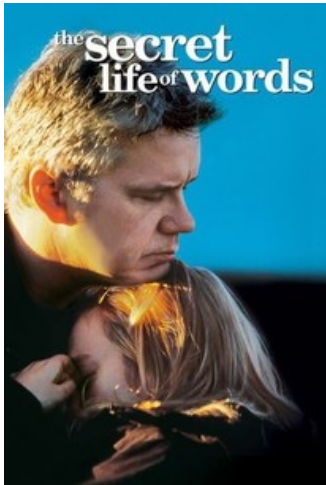
1967 F 4.50 7.9 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Yûzô Kayama, Yôko Tsukasa,  
Mitsukô Kusabue

A troubled relationship between a beautiful young woman whose husband has been killed in a car accident and the young man behind the wheel of the other vehicle. Sounds like the stuff of midday TV but being a Naruse, it's something way better. It's true that this is a somewhat atypical Narusian film in several respects: it opens with much more volatile narrative material than usual; it does not centre on the domestic/economic plight of women or on the family; it's in colour; the eruptions of the melodrama are closer to the surface and only just contained; it's less austere, in several senses. On the other hand, it is, for the most part, unmistakably Narusian in style and tone: spare, elegant, subtle, melancholic and beautiful. It caused me a good deal of worry. Yoko Tsukasa is another in the long line of adorable female protagonists and Yuzo Kayama is also very appealing. It seems to be one of Naruse's less known works; it shouldn't be. It's highly accomplished, altogether beautiful and very affecting. I liked it a whole lot. (The storyline put me in mind of **In the Mood for Love** though it doesn't have the same erotic electricity.) Naruse's last film; he died within two years, aged 63.

aka **Two in the Shadow**. Japanese title: **Midaregumo**



## SECRET LIFE OF WORDS, T

2005 F 4.00 7.4 SPA

### Coixet, Isabel

Jane-Claude Larrieu

Sarah Polley, Tim Robbins,  
Sverre Anker Ousdal, Javier  
Cámara, Daniel Mays, Eddie  
Marsan, Julie Christie

Josef (Robbins) is badly burnt in a fire on an oil rig in the North Irish Sea. A nurse (Polley) is flown in to care for him until he can be moved back to the mainland. They have both suffered deep traumas. A relationship built on hesitantly shared pain slowly develops. A slow-burn story which moves steadily, with some quiet and intermittent humour, into a dark and haunting place, a heart of darkness. Beautifully acted and with many unobtrusive but effective touches all the way through. Julie Christie, Javier Camara (**Living is Easy with Eyes Closed**) and Sverre Anker Ousdal turn in rich cameos. Polley's performance is a *tour de force*, if one can use such a term to describe a restrained performance. Her monologue about her past is riveting and deeply disturbing.

The voice-over of the ghostly child is distracting, irritating, entirely superfluous, altogether too tricky. The first phase is a bit shaky. These minor misgivings aside, this is a film of some force, a thoughtful and disquieting meditation on our impulse to deny and forget.

Now this is taking cosmopolitanism a bit far: a Spanish director and script-writer, a cast including a Canadian, a Norwegian, an American and various others, set in Denmark and Ireland with a pivotal back-story in the Balkans war. Produced by brothers Pedro and Augustin Almodóvar.



## SEPARATION, A

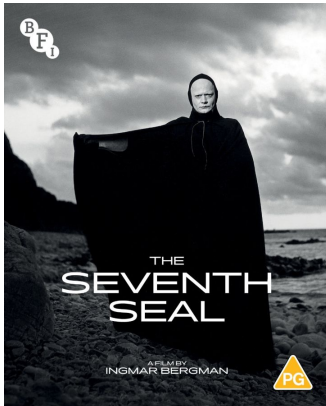
2011 F 5.00 8.3 IRA

**Farhadi, Asghar**

Mamoud Kalari

Patman Maadi, Leila Hatami,  
Sareh Bayat, Shahab Hosseini

Contemporary Tehran. Middle class couple, teenage daughter, senile grandfather, all embroiled in a family drama which intensifies after the domestic helper suffers a serious mishap, perhaps at the hands of the Nader (the leading male character). Another family gets involved in a legal-medical-bureaucratic tangle in which it is very hard to find the elusive truth. An accumulation of incidents take everyone into a dark and difficult place. Family melodrama come detective story, shot in a quasi-documentary style, briskly paced and painfully engrossing. Rich in enigmas, ambiguities and ironies of the most subtle kind. Very effective use of the children as registers of the adult conflicts. Superb performances in a story with an electric charge.



## SEVENTH SEAL, THE

1957 F 4.50 8.2 SWE

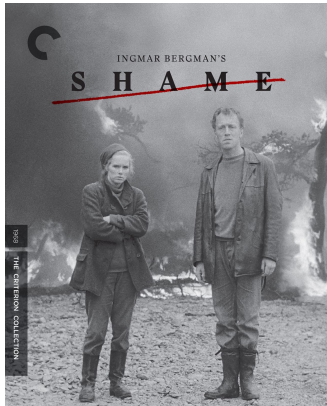
### Bergman, Ingmar

Gunnar Fischer

Max von Sydow, Gunnar  
Bjornstrand, Bengt Ekerot, Bibi  
Andersson, Nils Poppe, Inga  
Landgre

Medieval Europe. A knight and his squire are travelling through a land torn by war, violence, millenarian hysteria, the persecution of witches, flagellants, peasants, on a long and troubled journey to the knight's home. The knight is confronted on a remote beach by Death who insists on a game of chess. There's also a "holy family", a travelling theatrical troupe and various reprobates roaming the countryside. Bergman casts the film in the mould of a medieval morality play and brings to life the Dance of Death with all the macabre imagery found in medieval northern European religious iconography. The film also dramatizes Bergman's own spiritual and existential crisis of the time. A film full of horror, terrible beauty, struggle; the knight, the squire and the "holy family" representing different spiritual temperaments, different possibilities.

This was one of the very first "arthouse" films I saw, at the age of about 17 or 18 in the mid-60s: it had an effect that was both shattering and exhilarating. I still remember various scenes from that first viewing: Death's first appearance, the burning of the "witch", the knight's wife's face in the closing sequence ... and many more. I've seen it a couple of times since and, not surprisingly, have been able to take a cooler look; It remains a film of extraordinary power and intensity but I no longer think it's one of the three or four very best (**Wild Strawberries**, **Winter Light**, **Persona**, **Shame**). How did Bergman turn up *two* cinematographers of the class of Gunnar Fischer and Sven Nykvist?



## SHAME (Skammen)

1967 F 4.25 8.1 SWE

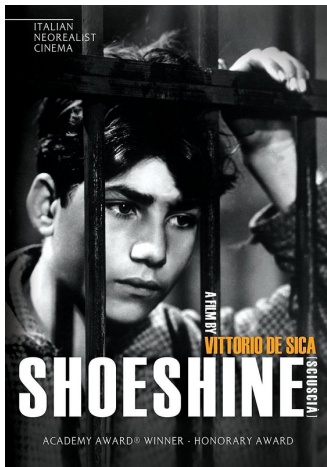
### Bergman, Ingmar

Sven Nykvist

Liv Ullman, Max von Sydow,  
Gunnar Bjornstrand

Relentlessly bleak, uncompromising and gruelling study of the moral disintegration caused by war, and of human weakness under pressure. Also: anti-ideological. The only glimmer of light in a very dark film is Eva's (Liv Ullman) compassion. Superb performances, brilliant cinematography (Nykvist) and effective use of quasi-documentary effects. In 2004 Bergman said he was depressed by his films and couldn't watch them any more. No wonder!

Bergman also said **Winter Light**, **Persona** and **Cries and Whispers** were his three personal favourites. I can go two-thirds of the way with him on this: replace **Cries and Whispers** with **Wild Strawberries**.



## SHOESHINE

1946    F    4.50    8.0    ITA

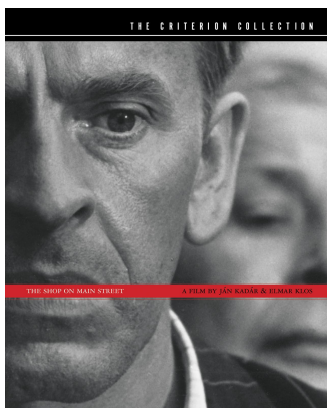
**De Sica, Vittorio**

Rinaldo Smerdoni, Franco  
Interlenghi, Bruno Ortensi

Rome, Cruel City. Street kids in Rome in the latter part of WW2, petty crime, officialdom, prison, brutalization ... and there's a horse involved as well. Scripted by one of the stalwarts of neo-realism, Cesare Zavattini. One of the earliest and best of the neo-realist school (though stylistically it's more conventional than Rossellini's great trilogy), and one of the best films about childhood/youth. Avoids demonizing the authorities and idealizing the children, and thus avoids the snare of being too schematic and too sentimental. The two young actors give as fresh and compelling a performance as I've seen since **400 Blows**. Much as I liked **Bicycle Thieves** and **Umberto D**, I think this is better. The film was a huge success everywhere except Italy!

All three of De Sica's NR films are frequently labeled by the critics as "sentimental"; they are emotionally stirring but does this make them sentimental? No, the word should refer to the manipulation (cynical or otherwise) of shallow or ersatz feeling. Whatever else one might want to say about De Sica (and he is no Rossellini!), can we doubt that these films were heartfelt and fervently sincere? Some critics are clearly discomforted by decent human feeling and by moral indignation. Of the well-known critics Dave Kehr is particularly susceptible to this kind of thing.





## SHOP ON MAIN STREET,

1967 F 5.00 8.2 CZE

### Kadár, Ján & Elmar Klos

Vladimir Novotny

Ida Kaminska, Jozef Kroner,  
Hana Slivková, Martin Holly,  
Martin Gregor, Frantisek Zvarik

Small town in Slovakia, 1942. Tono, a lazy knock-about carpenter in a provincial town, is appointed by his brother, an officer in the fascist Hlinka Guard (quasi-SS), as the Aryan controller of a haberdashery shop owned by an elderly Jewish widow. The mood, initially leisurely and humdrum, gradually darkens as the deportation of the Jews draws nearer. Tono finds himself in a bad situation...

Unmistakably Czechoslovakian in tone and approach, the film blends the humorous, the pathetic and the tragic, the quotidian and the nightmarish, in a simple but powerful story about ordinary folk caught up in the malign times. Both Kroner (Tono) and Kaminska (Mrs Lautmann) play altogether credible characters and their predicament becomes almost unbearable. Apart from the brief scene of Kuchar's humiliation the film does not explicitly depict the barbarities of the Holocaust but is nevertheless horrifying. **The Shop on Main Street** deserves its elevated reputation as one of the most impressive films to come out of the Czech "New Wave" (though Kadar in many ways predates it).

Ida Kaminska (1899-1980) was born in Odessa and lived and worked (mainly in the theatre) in Russia, Israel and USA. Jozef Kroner appeared in many Czech/Slovak films and was still working close to the time of his death in 1998.



## SIGNORA SENZA CAMELIE

1953 F 4.50 7.2 ITA

**Antonioni,**

Enzo Serafin

Lucia Bosè, Gino Cervi, Andrea  
Checchi, Ivan Desny, Laura  
Tiberti

Beautiful young florist shop assistant gets swept willy-nilly into the Italian movie business and is soon in demand as a sex-bomb in lurid movies. She is manipulated on all sides and has trouble finding herself. The plot sounds hackneyed but Antonioni's critique of the film industry was quite radical at the time, as, increasingly, were his film-making methods. One of the all-time best films about the movie industry.

Lucia Bosè has come in for some flak. Apparently Antonioni himself was dissatisfied with her. Yes, one can imagine La Lollobrigida or Queen Sophia in the role. But I thought LB was quite adequate; her lack of strong screen charisma kinda suited her part.

Antonioni is a master of cinema space of all kinds! He uses it as well as anyone. (Polanski and Herzog from the next generation of European auteurs also come to mind.)

I really like Antonioni's 1950's "Italian" period before the famous trilogy which inaugurated his international auteur-arthouse phase. Much as I love the trilogy — all astonishing films — in some ways I like the predecessors even more: **Story of a Love Affair**, this one, **L'Amiche**, **Il Grido**. After the trilogy I only really care for **Red Desert** and **The Passenger** though I think all seven previously mentioned are actually better.

The American critic (Gabe Klinger I think his name is) doing the two extras is absolutely on the ball; loved his unpretentious but insightful discussions of this film and of Antonioni in the 50s. Great print; in the "Masters of the Cinema" dual format series.



## SILENCE DE LA MER, LE

1949 F 5.00 7.7 FRA

**Melville, Jean-Pierre**

Henri Decaë

Howard Vernon, Nicole  
Stéphane, Georges Patric, Jean-  
Marie Robain, Ami Aarøe

France, 1941. The story concerns a German officer of the occupying force in a small French village, and an elderly man and his niece in whose house he is billeted. A three-hander in which one is heard only in voice-over and another speaks but one word. The officer is a highly cultured, sensitive, courteous and romantic Francophile-aesthete who dreams of the “marriage” of France and Germany. A trip to Paris (where he rehearses, perhaps unknowingly, Hitler’s tour) and a meeting with an old friend who is now a ruthless and fanatical Nazi, open his eyes to the real Nazi agenda. It’s a film of concentrated dramatic intensity, stylistic poise and formal beauty, and moral/philosophical density, shot in the most daring manner imaginable and all pervaded by a somewhat surreal claustrophobia and sense of dread. Amongst other things it is a requiem for European high culture, a tribute to the Resistance and a searching exploration of the moral dilemmas and corrosions of war. A war film with a difference! Vercors’ book and Melville’s film were produced under extraordinary circumstances, not the least of them being the wartime context and the lack of any film experience amongst the whole crew, including Melville. Howard Vernon was a Swiss actor whose speciality was horror films (yes, Boris Karloff/Nosferatu associations). The film inaugurated the extraordinary careers of both Melville and camera-man Henri Decaë whose many credits include not only several of Melville’s films but **Le Beau Serge**, **Elevator to the Gallows**, **400 Blows**, and **La Ronde**.

A pity that Melville is largely known in the West almost exclusively for his superb gangster films — but consider: **Le silence de la mer**, **Leon Morin**, **Army of Shadows**. **LSM** echoes and anticipations of the very best of European arthouse cinema — Murnau, Dreyer, Bresson, Clouzot most obviously. An extraordinary film by any measure and a truly astonishing debut. It bids fair to be Film of the Year although Naruse’s **Mideraru** has a very handy position on the rails.



## SILENCE, THE

1963    F    4.00    8.0    SWE

## Bergman, Ingmar

Sven Nykvist

Gunnell Lindblom, Ingrid Thulin,  
Jörgen Lindström, Birger  
Malmsten

Two sisters and a young boy holed-up in a hotel somewhere in war-torn central Europe. Powerful, dramatic, difficult, disturbing (ie. quintessential Bergman); fragmentary plot and little dialogue; superb visuals (Nykvist); Thulin and Lindblom both excellent; creative soundtrack; character of the old porter; a study in nihilism and existential angst. Doesn't quite match the formal beauty and limpid clarity of **Winter Light**. Some think it misogynistic – possibly. (There is almost always a case to be made on both sides in Bergman films.) Better than I remembered. Mid-50s to late 60s is Bergman's most astonishing period: this is way better, I think, than the much vaunted **Cries & Whispers** which has similar themes.



## SILENT LIGHT

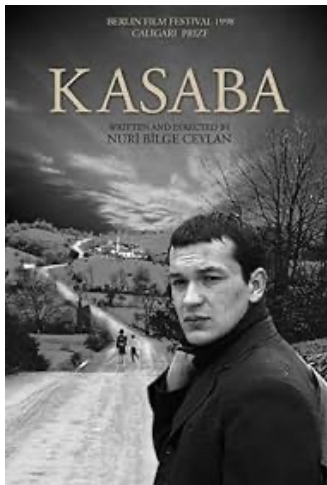
2007 F 4.25 7.3 MEX

**Reygadas, Carlos**

Cornelio Wall, Miriam Toews,  
Maria Pankratz, Peter Wall

Mennonite community in northern Mexico. Upright, loving, middle-aged farmer with a large family falls desperately in love with another woman. Family, morality, commitment, hearth and home, community, faithful wife on one side, a beautiful, sensuous and spiritual woman on the other. The divided heart. The story unfolds with a kind of Biblical solemnity and a sense of reverence for life; tenderness, passion, pain, torment, compassion amidst the rhythms of family and community life. Manages to eschew both sentimentality and cynicism, beautifully poised and controlled. Long takes, very slow zooms, wide angles, a mystical evocation of the landscape and the night sky. No music. Reygadas has more than a touch of the Terrence Malicks and there are obvious affinities with Bresson and Dreyer, both stylistic and narrative. The film will be too slow, too meditative, too studied and perhaps too enigmatic for some tastes. I liked it a lot.

There are about 100,000 Mennonites, of Dutch and German descent, living in northern Mexico. Peter and Cornelio Wall are real-life father and son. The cast is mostly drawn from the Mennonite community. IMDb lists Reygadas' 10 favourite films; directors represented include Buñuel, Mizoguchi, Bresson, Bergman, Tarkovsky, Terence Davies and Bela Tar.



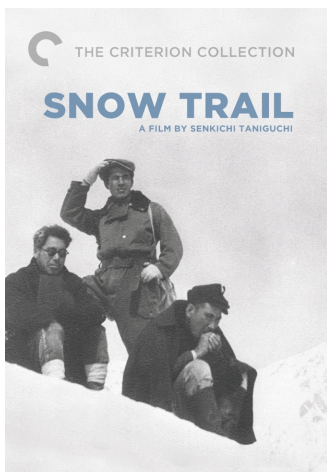
## SMALL TOWN, THE

1997 F 4.00 7.0 TUR

### Ceylan, Nuri Bilge

Mehmet Emin Toprak, Havva  
Saglam, Cihat Bütün

Remote rural village in Turkey (Ceylan's hometown); the elliptical story (written by the director's sister) of three generations of one family, told in crisp black-and-white; short on narrative exposition and long on evocative imagery, starting with the wonderful classroom scene. Much less complex and ambitious than **Once Upon a Time in Anatolia** and **Winter Sleep** but informed by the same sensibility. Some surrealist touches here and there, as well as pastoral lyricism, vaguely reminiscent of Tarkovsky. Combination of social realism, fable, and dream, fluidly moving between the inner and outer worlds. Also reminded me of Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy. Very much looking forward to Ceylan's next outing — one of the more interesting film-makers going around.



## SNOW TRAIL

1947 F 4.00 7.2 JAP

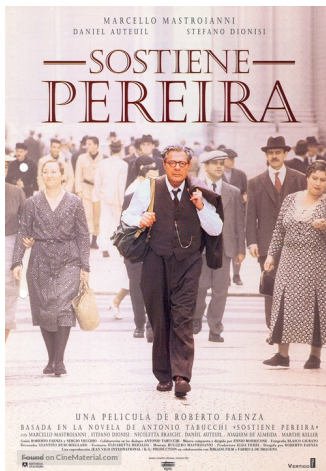
### Taniguchi, Senkichi

Junichi Segawa

Takashi Shimura, Toshiro Mifune,  
Yoshio Kosugi, Akitake Kono,  
Setsuko Wakayama, Kokuten  
Kodo

Japan. Three bank robbers escape into the mountains, pursued by the police, and hole up in a remote ski lodge with an old man, a mountain guide and a grand-daughter. So, a group of desperadoes and several “normal” people in an isolated and hermetic environment. (A narrative formula that has been used over and over — **The Petrified Forest**, **Key Largo**, **High Sierra**, **The Desperate Hours** etc). A changing web of relationships before two of the bad guys make a break for it, taking the guide at gunpoint to guide them through the wintry terrain. It takes a little while to get cooking but turns into quite an gripping and touching drama. The perilous journey over the mountains is splendid. Nicely scripted by Kurosawa. Some beautiful outdoor camera work, haunting music (“My Old Kentucky Home” would you believe!), fine performances, tension and tears. Debut feature for director Taniguchi who was also an experienced mountaineer and Mifune’s first lead role — as a bad guy; Mifune’s pretty good but Shimura steals the show. The actual storyline is perhaps a bit conventional but the treatment is excellent. This modest treasure has been buried in the permafrost for far too long and it’s a fine thing we can now see it on DVD. This is an El Cheapo copy but the quality is quite acceptable; apparently there is Criterion version now available.

aka **The End of the Silver Mountains.**



## SOSTIENE PEREIRA

1995 F 4.00 7.1 ITA

**Faenza, Roberto**

Marcello Mastroianni, Joaquim de Almeida, Daniel Auteuil, Marthe Keller, Stefano Dionisi, Nicoletta Braschi

Lisbon, 1938. Early days of the fascist Salazar regime in Portugal, Civil War in Spain. Pereira (Mastroianni) is the editor of the “cultural page” in an evening newspaper, writing articles about European novelists and poets, disdaining politics. He drinks a lot of sugary lemonades, is not very healthy and talks to the photograph of his deceased wife. Inadvertently and unwillingly he becomes involved with a couple of young radicals. He also goes on a health regime with a doctor/psychiatrist who wants him to take control of the “confederacy of egos” battling for possession of his soul. Nicely shot with a muted palette, with music by Ennio Morricone.

Mastroianni made this in the year before his death at the age of 72. He gives a charming, understated but richly textured performance as an old man troubled by the prospect of death, disturbed by contemporary developments, and flirting with political commitment. The whole film is restrained, a little off-beat and quietly effective. I liked it a lot. I especially enjoyed the train sequence with the Jewish woman and that with the priest. Daniel Auteuil was very amusing in the episode at the health spa.

I read and enjoyed the novel by Antonio Tabucchi many years ago.

Mastroianni: *They come for you in the morning in a limousine; they take you to the studio; they stick a pretty girl in your arms. They call that a profession? Come on!*





## SOUND OF THE MOUNTAIN

1954 F 4.50 8.0 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Setsuko Hara, Ken Uehara,  
Yatsuko Tanami

Three Unhappy Marriages and an Unhappy Affair. Based on Yasunari Kawabata's novel, **TSM** is a quiet and carefully modulated film about submerged family turmoil which eventually comes to the surface. Kikuko is trapped in a loveless marriage and is virtually a servant in her in-laws' household. Her no-good husband is out on the town and her sister-in-law is also suffering marital strife. The centre of the film is the relationship between Kikuko and her gentle father-in-law, marvellously played by Chisu Ryu-lookalike, So Yamamura (one of the sons in **Tokyo Story**). This is the most Ozu-like of the Naruse films I've seen so far: the stately pace; the pervasive use of music; the moody "pillow-shots"; the meticulous choreography of domestic space, if one may so put it; the fusing of the lyrical and the melancholy (perfect in the ravishing finale in the park); the subtle, understated but deeply felt (and sometimes ambiguous) treatment of the material. A sublime treatment of the what-might-have-been theme. The three minor female characters associated with Shuichi (the son) – the secretary, teacher and lover – are characterized with delicate precision and economy while their background roles in the family drama enrich and texture the story. And of course, there's Setsuko ... Oh my, I sigh to think of it all! Masterly! One of Naruse's own personal favourites. The critical neglect of this film is a scandal; only a miserable three reviews on MRQE.

A year or two back I re-read Kawabata's novel *Beauty and Sadness* and didn't much like it but would have been a great title for this film. (Many years ago I read *The Sound of the Mountain* and loved it.)



## SPRIT OF THE BEEHIVE

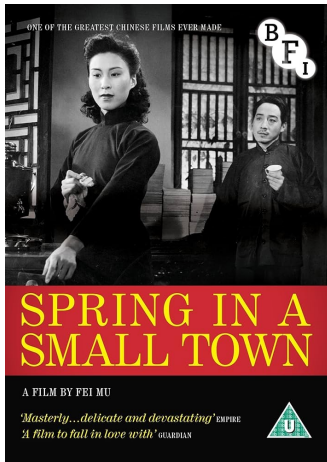
1973 F 4.75 8.0 SPA

**Erice, Victor**

Luis Cadrado

Ana Torent, Isabel Tellaria,  
Fernan Gomez, Teresa Gimpera

Frankenstein's Monster and the Spanish Girl. Spanish village, 1940. A young girl from a family which has been brought down in the world by the Civil War is haunted by strange spirits and presences, embodied in Frankenstein's monster (Boris Karloff in the James Whale film) and in a partisan soldier fleeing the authorities. The girl is isolated from her estranged parents (the father a bee-keeper and scholar), and has an ambivalent relationship with her older sister. The rhythms of school, village life and the vast Castilian plateau provide the backdrop against which the internal drama plays out. It's almost Ozu-like in its reticence and sparseness, its slow, deliberate pace, and its delicacy — but there's also a dimension of strangeness, disturbance and trauma, a brooding sense of foreboding which mark Erice's films. (Ozu crossed with Werner Herzog perhaps?) While the film pivots on Ana, like *El Sur* it is also concerned with the consequences of the Civil War, and with the possibilities of cinema. Allusive, elusive, enigmatic, disturbing, strangely beautiful. My earlier notes on *El Sur* apply equally well to **Spirit of the Beehive**: "A meditative and melancholy film constructed around a young woman's recollection of her childhood and her enchantment with her mysterious father. Meticulously and patiently constructed with beautiful use of light, imagery and composition, often painterly. Evokes the puzzles, secret sorrows and half-understood mysteries of childhood, adolescence and adulthood in a way which is never didactic and expository but rather poetic, suggestive, allusive — and elusive. The voice-over (a device which is so often irritating) is used to great effect. The rumination on both the Civil War and the cinema itself is seamlessly woven into the fabric of the story. Childhood, the clouding of innocence, love, loss, estrangement, memory, hope and despair. Altogether wonderful." **Spirit of the Beehive** is clearly a major work but I found *El Sur* more profoundly moving, more interesting, more fully realized (even though they only filmed half of the intended story!). The actors all keep their own names in the film. Cinematographer Luis Cadrado went blind and committed suicide in 1980. Ana Torent has been haunted by the experience of making the film.



## SPRING IN A SMALL TOWN

1948 F 4.50 7.6 CHI

**Mu Fei**

Wei Wei, Wei Li, Yu Shi,  
Chaoming Cui, Hongmei Zhang

Fairly Brief Encounter in a Chinese Village. Immediate postwar China. Five characters: a sickly man and his estranged, beautiful and long-suffering wife; a faithful servant; the husband's vivacious young sister approaching marriageable age; an old friend who comes to visit the husband, unsuspecting that a former lover is now the man's wife. So, all sorts of possibilities. But it's a case of one thing not leading to another. It has something of the feel of a traditional play or ballet, and even a dream. We see no one else in the village. All the action (more interior than external) takes place in the ruined family home and on the crumbling wall of the town. The wife provides an unsettling and apparently omniscient voice-over which disrupts the naturalism. A film of great delicacy, restraint and suppressed eroticism. Desire, duty, guilt, hope, memory, dream, yearning. A film of looks and gestures, of spaces, of small movements and fleeting moments. Yes, some inevitable comparisons: Ozu, Mizoguchi, Naruse and Wong Kar-Wai; It also has something of the feel Franju's **Therese Desqueyroux**. And yes, it does belong in such exalted company. Wong Kai-Wai has acknowledged a considerable debt to Mu Fei, obvious in his **In the Mood for Love**.

The communists deemed this masterly film "reactionary"; it more or less disappeared for several decades. Thank goodness we now have a restored version. Many people seem to think it's the "best" Chinese film ever. (They may well be right!)



## SPRING, SUMMER, FALL...

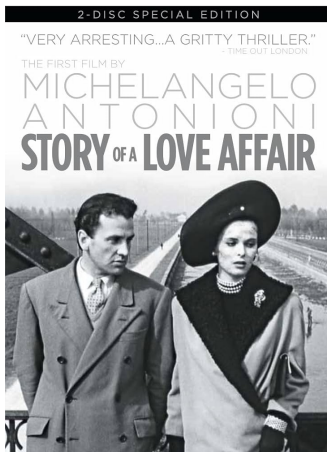
2004 F 4.00 8.0 KOR

**Ki-duk Kim**

Ki-duk Kim, Yeong-su Oh, Jong-ho Kim

### **Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter ... and Spring**

Somewhere in the mountains of Korea. Old monk, young boy on a floating temple in a remote and beautiful alpine lake, covering four episodes in the life of the boy. Minimalist action, fragmentary dialogue, meditative mood, graceful cinematography. A quasi-Buddhist morality play about faith, growth, awareness, desire, jealousy, violence, compassion, discipline and impermanence; it sounds heavy and didactic but it isn't; the moral lessons are understated and nicely inflected. The storyline involves a young woman, a baby, several animals and a couple of detectives. Director Ki-duk Kim has a leading role. It's slow and many folk will find their patience tested. But if you allow yourself to surrender to the film's gentle rhythms and seductive imagery you'll enjoy it.



## STORY OF A LOVE AFFAIR

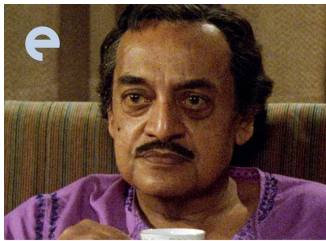
1950 F 4.00 7.2 ITA

### Antonioni, Michel.

Lucia Bosé, Massimo Girotti,  
Fernando Sarmi, Gino Rossi

*Everybody Loses.* Unhappy figures in a lonely urban landscape...and some cars too. Wealthy tycoon employs PI to dig into his beautiful young wife's mysterious past; there are some ugly critters under the stone. Wealth, empty sophistication, ennui, adultery, jealousy, loneliness. Big Surprise: it's all pretty desolate and there ain't a lot of laughs. But it is beautifully put together with Antonioni's cool and distinctive aesthetic. It also merges elements of American film noir, neo-realism and arthouse cinema in interesting ways. Plenty of concrete, glass and steel, industrial debris, empty city blocks and polluted byways.

Antonioni's first feature film. Not as accomplished as some of his later work but impressive. There is a kind of moral seriousness as well as aesthetic sensibility in Antonioni which is quite appealing. *Slant* magazine called it "existential poetry": you can see what they mean. Not many directors have made a better debut.



THE STRANGER  
DIRECTED BY SATYAJIT RAY



## STRANGER, THE

1991 F 4.00 8.1 IND

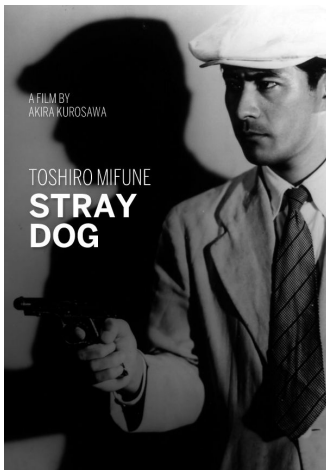
Ray, Satyajit

Utpal Dutt, Dipankar Dey,  
Mamata Shankar

Contemporary India. Well-to-do Calcutta family are discomforted by the unexpected appearance of a man claiming to be the wife's lifelong uncle? Is he an impostor? What does he want? Who is this mystery man? Suspicion, disruption, intrigue, speculation.

The film is deceptively simple: a small cast, a modest budget, mostly shot in a domestic interior, and dialogue-heavy. As we expect, excellent performances all round, particularly from Utpal Dutt as the uncle. And yes, there is a musical interlude. As usual, scripted, scored, produced and directed by Ray.

Turns out to be an extended rumination on some of Ray's recurrent themes – bourgeois complacency, marriage, social change, the nature of "civilization", East and West, tradition and change... I think we can take the uncle as Ray's alter ego and voice-piece. For a film almost entirely devoid of overt dramatic action it's strangely compelling. Shot in a minimalist style favouring camera movement, long takes and the expressive use of interior spaces. This is second-tier Ray, not reaching the exhilarating heights of his best films but a good deal better than some of his other later stuff. What a pleasure to come across this very satisfying last work.



## STRAY DOG

1949    F    4.50    7.8    JAP

**Kurosawa, Akira**

Asakaza Nakai

Toshiro Mifune, Takashi Shimura,  
Keiko Awaji, Eiko Mioshi

Postwar Tokyo in a heatwave. Rookie detective (Mifune) has his gun pickpocketed. Tracking down the culprit turns out to be a quite a business but an older cop (Shimura) is on hand to help out. Our main man has to plunge into the back streets and and more menacing quarters of the city. **Stray Dog** is a police procedural thriller, a psychological study and social critique. Visually dynamic, dramatically intense, thematically rich (a fair description of Kurosawa's oeuvre at large). Well played by all concerned, especially Mifune and Shimura (soon to appear in **Ikiru**). Kurosawa really found his groove in the late 40s with films such as **Drunken Angel** (48), **The Quiet Duel** (49) (one of my personal favourites), **Stray Dog** (49) and **Scandal** (50), paving the way for Kurosawa's many masterpieces in the 50s and 60s. (**Rashomon**, **Ikiru** and **The Seven Samurai** were just around the corner.) **Stray Dog** is not the best of Kurosawa's several very fine contributions to the Japanese crime/gangster genre (**The Bad Sleep Well**, 60, **High and Low**, 63) but that's not to say very much.



## STROMBOLI

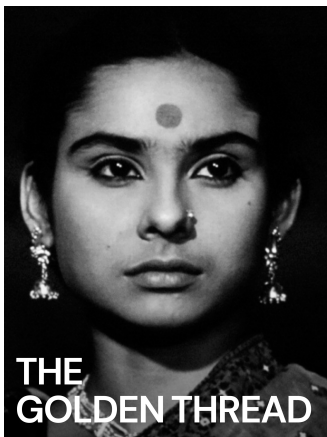
1950 F 4.75 7.4 ITA

### Rossellini, Roberto

Ingrid Bergman, Mario Vitale,  
Renzo Cesana, Mario Sponzo

Rossellini breaks all the rules. An astounding film about emotional/spiritual impoverishment, egotism, imprisonment and, ultimately, the workings of Grace. Also a cinematic love-song to Ingrid Bergman and a bitter-sweet portrait of a way of life. The film is intensely interesting and involving from the start but really revs up about half way through: the extraordinary scene with the priest, the mesmerizing fishing sequence and the volcanic finale. Rossellini's magic is hard to explain: he was not a rigorous stylist (in the manner of, say, Dreyer/Ozu/Bresson), not really an experimentalist with a rigorous aesthetic (Antonioni), not a master storyteller-come-craftsman-artist-extraordinaire (Ford, Hawks), not an avant-garde *enfant terrible* (Welles). A remarkably intuitive and daring director who constantly improvised to find the image, the sequence, the effect which "felt" right. He was, despite his later denials, also a film-maker with a sense for the religious, the spiritual, the transcendent – altogether too rare in the cinema. He was also a humanist in the least restrictive sense. Bergman's first film with Rossellini: *Life and Art* once again engaged in mysterious intercourse. The film utterly confounded most of the critics at the time, certainly in the English-speaking world. Here's a fair sample from the *Variety* review: *Cut or not cut, the film reflects no credit on [Rossellini]. Given elementary-school dialog to recite and impossible scenes to act, Ingrid Bergman's never able to make the lines real nor the emotion sufficiently motivated to seem more than an exercise.* The 82m American version, complete with happy ending (Karin returns to her husband!), is a travesty. The Bergman-Rossellini scandal killed the film in the USA. **Stromboli** is surely one of the great works of the cinema despite its critical neglect (not included in the widely-read *1001 Films You Must See*; if there are a 1001 films more worth seeing I'll eat my DVD player!) Re the Rossellini-Bergman trilogy: *In each case, a married woman in a foreign land becomes disenchanted with her current lifestyle and embarks on an instinctual, soul-cleansing mission to ameliorate her discomfort. In a conventional sense, little transpires in these films, each woman simply—and in some cases inexplicably—relinquishing her grasp on her carefully controlled persona in an effort to find meaning and, hopefully, inner happiness. By stylistically stripping these films of traditionally dynamic storytelling attributes, yet without sacrificing the tumultuous undercurrents which motivate these women, Rossellini happened upon an entirely fresh methodology.* (Slant)





## SUBARNAREKHA

1965 F 4.75 7.4 IND

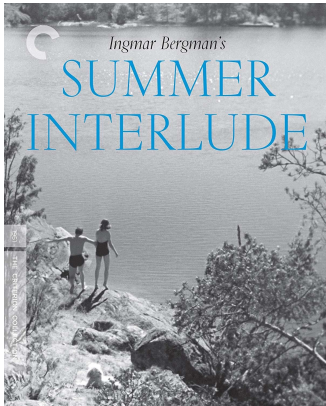
### Ghatak, Ritwik

Dilip R Mukhopadhyay

Madhavi Mukherjee, Bijon  
Battacharya, Abhi Bahttacharya,  
Jahar Roy

Bengal, late 40s to mid-60s. A wrenching family drama set against the background of the collapse of the Raj, the Partition of India with its accompanying violence, social turbulence and disruption. The story is bracketed, so to speak, by two symbolically suggestive events, the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi and Yuri Gagarin's space flight. It concerns a dislocated man, a refugee from what has become East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) who must now leave Calcutta to take up low-level employment in a village on the Subarnarekha River (an over-aching symbol of division). He has assumed responsibility for his much younger sister and a small orphan boy. Social pressures, caste divisions and temperamental differences lead to a violent and tragic turn of events. There is a great deal to admire in this film: a group of individuals exceptionally well characterized by Ghatak, driving an engrossing and eventually heart-breaking narrative; a milieu (both domestic and public) ever so skilfully and economically depicted; a slow-burn narrative which gradually accumulates its escalating force and impact; themes (again, both personal and political) which are finely elaborated and textured with all sorts of resonances, both psychological and social; the ravishing imagery and hypnotic, haunting music, so evocative and moving. At the centre of it all are the several all-too-human characters about whom we come to care deeply. The violent climatic scene is explosive and devastating while the epilogue is as sad as can be. Ghatak died in Calcutta in 1976, aged fifty after suffering from alcoholism for some time. His best-known film is **The Cloud-Capped Star** (1960) which deals more overtly with the social crisis triggered by Partition. Ghatak might well be India's foremost director after Satyajit Ray. Certainly **TC-CS** and **Subarnarekha** are films of extraordinary dynamism, power and beauty, and should be much more widely known in the West. **Subarnarekha** is a contender for the best film I have seen this year (2023). Madhavi Mukherjee (b1942) has by now appeared in 90-odd films including several by Satyajit Ray: **The Big City**, **Charulata** (in which she turned in an exquisite performance in the lead role) and **The Coward**.

Aka **The Golden Thread**



## SUMMER INTERLUDE

1951     F    4.00    7.7    SWE

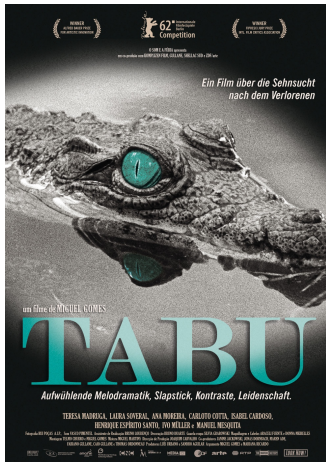
### Bergman, Ingmar

Gunnar Fischer

Maj-Britt Nilsson, Birger  
Malmsten, George Funkquist,  
Stig Olin

A lyrical summer romance with some menacing clouds, 13 years ago, unfolded through a series of flashbacks. Not as fluent, self-assured and daring as the later masterworks but showing emergent signs of Bergman's aesthetic, his outlook and his enduring concerns: love, art, death, transience, memory, corruption, innocence & experience, artifice and reality. Birger Malmsten (Henrik) is fine, George Funkquist is impressive as the corrupt uncle, and the minor characters are well sketched. The dog is good too. But Maj-Britt Nilsson is astonishingly good, totally convincing as both the 15 year old innocent and as the world-weary 28 year old dancer. Gunnar Fischer's cinematography is ravishing (though I think even GF was later outdone by Sven Nykvist).

There's very little wrong with this film; it's just not as subtle, as powerful, as challenging, as moving, as the best of Bergman's later work. But that's a harsh comparison. Considered on its own merits it's a film of some distinction, the earliest of the films for which Bergman himself retained any respect. The literal translation of the title is "Summer Games", not without some ironical resonance. Some similarities to **Smiles of a Summer Night** although this is by no means a comedy. Is there an endless river of intelligent, accomplished, beautiful actresses in Sweden, as there seems to be in Japan, India and Italy? The treatment of sexuality and sensuality is not far from the surface of the film but much more restrained, some might even say constricted, than in his later work. Jean-Luc Godard thought it "the most beautiful of Bergman's films".



## TABU

2012 F 4.50 7.3 POL

## Gomes, Miguel

Rui Poças

Teresa Madgruder, Ana Moreira,  
Isabel Cardoso, Laura Soveral,  
Henrique Espírito Santo, Carlotto  
Cotta

Mozambique: shadows on the wall: dreamworld: present-day  
Lisbon: memory/flashback. The film weaves together the inner lives of three women (Aurora, Pilar and Santa) and one man (Aurora's lover) with various other characters drawn into the web. Always watching and rarely speaking are the black folk, mainly servants, and in the background there is the anti-colonial struggle. The first half (mainly in Lisbon) presents various enigmas which make it difficult to put together a coherent narrative; the second half, mainly in Mozambique is a "silent movie" (ie. no dialogue) with a voice-over narration and a complex soundscape, which resolves some of the puzzles and introduces more. Obsession, desire, passion, transgression, nostalgia, remorse, memory and the ravages of time. Much has been made of the reflexive effect but I'm inclined to agree with the *Slant* reviewer: *The pangs of romance, eroticism, anguish and longing (both for moments of private passion and for the sense-making schematics of Empire) transcend any period of cinema Tabu may evoke.* Ana Moreira and Carlotto Cotta (move over Johnny Depp) are engaging as the young lovers while Isabel Cardoso (the black maid), Teresa Madgruder (Pilar) and Laura Soveral (the old Aurora) all deliver fine performances. The visuals are stunning throughout. Intermittently reminiscent of **Embrace of the Serpent** and **Roma** with a few flashes of early Herzog (remember the band in **Fata Morgana**? Or maybe the band wandered in from a Kaurismäki film!) ... not bad company in which to find oneself. A strange, difficult and ultimately enchanting film. (Doubtless some viewers will find it too artificial, contrived, "difficult", "arty", tedious. I loved it!)



## TANGERINES

2013 F 4.25 8.2 GEO

### Urushadze, Zaza

Lembit Ulfsak, Elmo Nüganen,  
Giorgi Nakashidze, Misha Meski

Ivo is an old Estonian tangerine farmer in Abkhazia, a remote part of Georgia where war between Georgians and Russians/Chechens has violently intruded into his quiet life. He and his neighbour want to harvest their crops before returning to Estonia to be reunited with their families. Following a military skirmish nearby two wounded soldiers – Ahmed, a Chechen and Nika, a Georgian – end up in Ivo's hut: the war comes into hearth and home. Essentially a four-hander about the ravages and futility of war, cruelty and ethnic hatreds, about loss and about personal honour. Although there is very little by way of back story the characters and their conflicts are altogether credible. The film is held together by an understated but well-crafted performance from Lembit Ulfsak as Ivo. The film is spare, economical, touching, powerful. Loved the use of the portrait of the grand-daughter as a counterpoint: the possibilities of life and love in the midst of hatred and death. An Estonian-Georgian production. (How many of those have you seen?) Director Zaza Urushadze died of a heart attack in Tbilisi in 2019, aged 54. Ulfsak, a veteran actor, died in 2017, aged 69.



## TEACHER, THE

2016 F 4.00 7.8 CZE

Hrebejk, Jan

Zuzana Mauréry, Zuzana Konečná, Csongor Kassai

Bratislava. A teacher at a suburban school is running a massive scam by bribing students' parents with the promise of good scores for their children in return for all sorts of favours. She is also the Communist Party heavy on the staff. A handful of parents become concerned about discrimination against their children, leading to a parents' meeting and a petition. Many of the parents are aware of the teacher's corrupt practices but are intimidated by the teacher's position and by the threat of reprisals.

A cleverly constructed allegory, or parable, about the Soviet Union's treatment of its vassal states and about the tyranny of power and a nominally egalitarian ideology. Touted as a black comedy – and there are elements of that – but it's really a blistering if ironic critique of the inevitable gap between communist theory and practice. Zuzana Mauréry is devastatingly convincing in the lead role. In tone and approach it is reminiscent of some of the best films from the brief flowering of Czech cinema in the 1960s. Kaurismäki also comes to mind. An assured and accomplished film of some subtlety.

Hrebejk also gave us **Divided We Fall** (2000).



## TESTAMENT OF DR

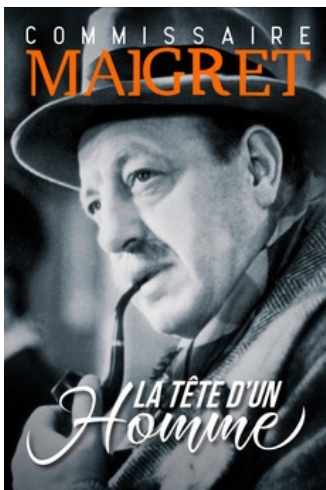
1933    F    4.50    8.0    GER

### Lang, Fritz

Károly Vass

Jim Gérald, Rudolf Klein-Rogge,  
Otto Wernicke, Thomy Bourdelle,  
Monique Rolland

Fritz Lang's eerily prescient film about a mesmeric "scientist"/master criminal who wants to inaugurate a reign of chaos and terror, and to establish "the empire of crime" — from a scenario by Thea von Harbou, Lang's one-time wife. Dr Mabuse is interred in a lunatic asylum but he writes detailed plans about crimes and acts of terrorism which are transferred by hypnosis into the mind of his psychiatrist who in turn runs a ramshackle bunch of desperados and low-lives who counterfeit money, manipulate the financial system, commit robberies and acts of mindless destruction, and create mayhem. Mabuse's mad schemes live on after his death through Professor Baum (the psychiatrist). Inspector Lohmann, a cigar-chomping, down-to-earth detective is on the case. On one level a creepy and effective thriller shot in an expressionistic style, on another level an irresistible fable about the rise of mass manipulation, demagoguery, the power of technology and the media, hysteria, obsession, terrorism, profound psychological disturbances — all soon to find their most sinister and destructive expression in Nazism. On yet another level it can be seen as an exercise exploring the creative possibilities of the sound cinema and of the "scopic regime" (the opening sequence, pure Lang, is a knock-out). All in all it's a work of remarkable force. The extent to which Lang was consciously constructing a film about emergent fascism is an interesting question but whatever the deliberate intentions of Lang (and von Harbou) the film, inseparable from its immediate historical context, remains one of the cinema's abiding documents about the peculiar political pathologies of the 20th century. The film is not without its problems but these are of a trivial order next to its commanding themes and its overall impact; I mean, who really cares about this or that piece of clunky dialogue, or inept acting, or a hole in the plot, all forgotten by the day after tomorrow. But Dr Mabuse lives on! **Metropolis**, **M** and **Dr Mabuse** established Lang as a towering figure of that rich era.



## TÊTE D'UN HOMME, LA

1933    F    4.00    7.2    FRA

**Duvivier, Julian**

Armand Thirard

Harry Baur, Valery Inkjinoff, Gina  
Manes, Alexandre Rignaut,  
Gaston Jacquet

Paris. A tubercular Czech exile masterminds a crime in which a wealthy American woman is murdered at the behest of her nephew whose mistress also becomes entangled in a game of bluff and deceit. Inspector Maigret knows early on who the killer is, as we do, but he has no proof. A triangular game of cat-and-mouse ensues. Based on a Simenon novel, on one level the film is a police procedural, but also a complex psychological study in which we feel some sympathy for Radek, the Czech criminal who doesn't have long to live. Harry Baur makes a splendid Maigret, and the Russian actor, Valerie Inkjinoff (channeling Peter Lorre?) plays Radek with a twisted and unnerving intensity.

Style: an inventive admixture of some of the visual techniques of the silent cinema, Expressionism, a focus on the visages of the players, and highly mobile and elegant camera work. The story has a vaguely Dostoevskian theme as well as mood with some reminiscences of **M** and the early horror films. It's not as stylish, as engaging, as amusing as Duvivier's masterwork from later in the decade, **Pépé le Moko** (1937), but it's an interesting and entertaining (and apparently neglected) transitional work between Duvivier's prolific output in both the silent and the sound eras. Well worth a look!





## TETTO, IL (The Roof)

1956 F 3.75 7.3 ITA

**De Sica, Vittorio**

Carlo Montuori

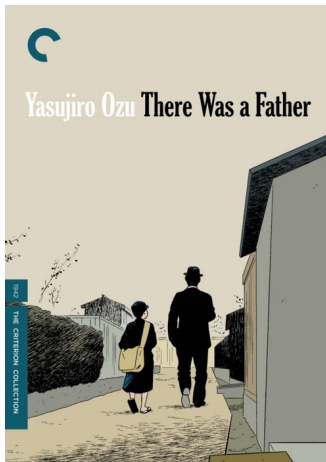
Gabriella Pallotta, Giorgio  
Listuzzi, Gastone Renzelli

Postwar Italy. Young couple struggling to make a life in depressed times seek to escape the claustrophobic confines of an overcrowded family home by building an illegal shack; they have to avoid the local cops by building something overnight. Work mates pitch in. The title derives from the quaint by-law of the time that no one can be evicted from a dwelling which has a roof and a door.

De Sica captures the working class milieu and the period very effectively, depicting the everyday trials of ordinary people. But the main attraction of the film is the engaging young couple and the suspenseful anticipation of how things will work out.

Came at the tail-end of De Sica's neorealist period and is much less well-known than his signature works — **Shoeshine, Bicycle Thieves, Umberto D** et al. Script by Cesare Zavattini. A modest, sweet, charming and touching film which I enjoyed hugely. Should be much better known. (Pity about De Sica's later career.)





## THERE WAS A FATHER

1942 F 4.25 7.7 JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

Chisu Ryu, Shuji Sano, Takeshi  
Sakamoto, Mitsuko Mito

A widowed father makes sacrifices for his son's education in pre-war-time Japan. The story is as simple as one could imagine with an insistent theme about doing one's duty, doing the best one can, sacrificing one's personal interests — all of which are clearly pertinent to the period in which it was made. The original film included some more overtly patriotic material which was later removed. What we are left with is a film which attracted the approval of the national censors of the day but which actually escapes its propaganda straitjacket. It does so by telling a story which transcends its historical moment. Chisu Ryu is altogether admirable in his first lead role, one of many for Ozu. Shuji Sano is not completely comfortable or convincing in his role as the grown-up son which is perhaps the only significant flaw in this melancholy and touching film. One of Ozu's achievements is to make a film which has only one overtly dramatic incident, occurring in the first few minutes, but which never loosens in its grip on our attention and involvement.

The print quality is pretty awful. Had this been anything other than an Ozu film I probably would have thrown the sponge in after 15 minutes. I'm glad I didn't.



## THERESE DESQUEYROUX

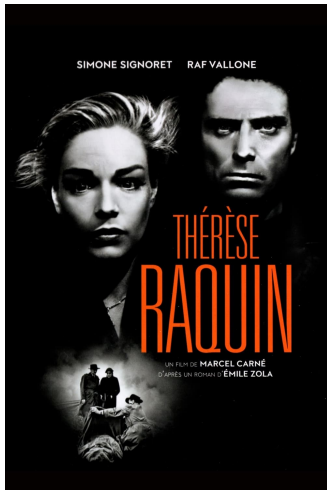
1962 F 5.00 7.4 FRA

**Franju, Georges**

Christian Matras

Emmanuelle Riva, Philippe Noiret,  
Edith Scob, Sami Frey, Jeanne  
Pérez

Based on Francois Mauriac's novel about the emotional and spiritual desolation of a woman who has persuaded herself into a disastrous marriage with the pompous scion of a wealthy family of the local gentry. The stifling provincial atmosphere, the narrow horizons and petty hypocrisies of the "respectable" family, the austere beauty of the landscape, the inarticulate yearnings, and contradictory and self-destructive impulses of Therese are all blended in a tragic story which is all the more effective for being muted (the allusions to Chekhov are suggestive, with some faint echoes of *Madame Bovary* as well)). Wonderful score by Maurice Jarre. Riva (intensity, restraint and nuance all at once) and Noiret (who not only depicts the brutish complacencies of the character but allows us to glimpse his better nature) are both top shelf. Franju's direction is, as usual, poetic... and this time there is only a hint of surreal horror. The film was shot (beautifully, by Christian Matras) on Francois Mauriac's estate. (Mauriac wrote the screenplay as well as the novel which is the original source.) The relationship with Anne (Scob) just fizzles out; this makes narrative sense but a potentially interesting layer to the story is left undeveloped. One critic reproached the film for its lack of humour — but the story hardly calls for a lot of laughs! You can count on Bozza (*NY Times* film critic for many years, Bosley Crowther): *Therese is daft. And so is Mr Franju to think that such a fatuous expectation [ie. sympathy for her] can be made plausible to anyone....* Dear oh dear Boz! Part of the pathos derives from the fact that the situation is largely of Therese's own making, as she so painfully and clearly understands, as do we. (And no, we are not invited to feel contempt for Bernard, only for the shallow values which he so perfectly embodies.) Vastly superior to the 2012 version with Audrey Tatou. A neglected masterpiece (one finds only two English-language reviews on IMDB, both short, obtuse and unsympathetic). It is lamentable that it has fallen into almost complete obscurity. One of the gems of the French cinema.



## THÉRÈSE RAQUIN

1953 F 4.00 7.4 FRA

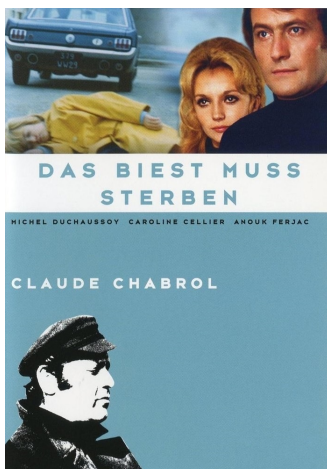
### Carné, Marcel

Simone Signoret, Raf Valone,  
Sylvie, Jacques Dubuy, Roland  
Lesaffre

*Stranger on a Train*. Taken from a story by Zola. Thérèse is orphaned, taken in by an aunt (a malicious old bossy boots) and then manoeuvred into a loveless marriage with her cousin who is a hypochondriacal and selfish wimp. Thérèse works in the family haberdashery in Lyons. Eventually she crosses path with an Italian truck driver... and, well, things move on from their to their fateful conclusion. Train journeys, a death, investigations, blackmail...

Marcel Carné was one of the “establishment” directors derided by the New Wave/*Cahiers* set as “old-fashioned”. But this sometimes blinded them to what was actually in front of them. **TR** is a case in point. It’s well crafted, elegantly shot and not short on claustrophobia, tension and some pathos. As David Thomson observed, Simone is a ticking time (sex) bomb which never actually detonates, and the latter stage of the film is rather overtaken by the blackmailer. Raf is an Italianized Burt Lancaster. But it’s a fine film, and very French; one can easily imagine this story being written by Gide or Mauriac.

Released in USA as **The Adulteress**.



## THIS MAN MUST DIE

1969 F 4.50 7.9 FRA

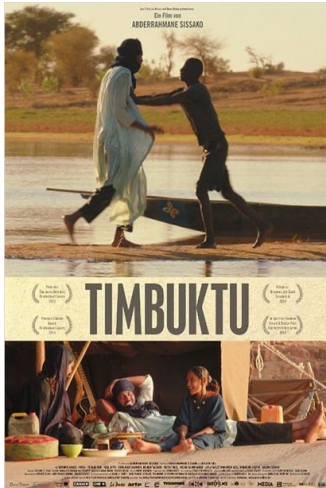
**Chabrol, Claude**

Michel Duchaussoy, Jean Yanne,  
Caroline Cellier, Anouk Ferjac,  
Narc Di Napoli

Hit 'n run car crash; young boy killed; father seeks revenge. An ice-cold Hitchcockian thriller constructed with laser precision. Like many Hitch films, this is not a who-dun-it but a howzit-all-gonna-end? As usual, along the way Chabrol anatomizes the mores and foibles of the French bourgeoisie, often with food on hand. Masterly use of sound and very evocative theme music (Bach). The revenge-guilt-transference motif, so pervasive in Hitchcock, is elaborated with a very cool eye. Duchaussoy and Yanne are both compelling, the female performers less so. Not as macabre as some others in the late-60s Chabrol cycle but all the more chilling for it.

The contrived coincidence of the car getting bogged, meeting the farmer etc is a bit much. And if the police are to believe that Charles killed Paul, how is Philippe's possession of the poison bottle to be explained?

Based on the novel by Nicholas Blake which I read nearly fifty years ago. NB was a pseudonym of Cecil Day-Lewis, the Anglo-Irish Poet-Laureate and father of Daniel D-L. He wrote excellent thrillers. Having now seen this, **Le Boucher** and **La Femme Infidèle** at least twice each I think the latter just edges out **TMMD** as the best of Chabrol's golden run in the late 60s-early 70s.



## TIMBUKTU

2014 F 4.00 7.2 MAU

**Sissako, Abderrahmane**

Ibrahim Ahmed, Pino Desperado,  
Abel Jafri

A group of Taliban-like jihadists take over Timbuktu, disrupting the lives of the local people. The story centres on a young herdsman and his family. The jihadists are misguided, sometimes brutal and sometimes really stupid; among other things they ban dancing, music and soccer. The film concerns the conflict between ordinary, pious Muslims trying to lead their traditional lifestyle and the destructive, arbitrary and haphazard regime of the fundamentalists. It's not an easy watch but it's a powerful indictment of religious fanaticism, disturbing and all too real. Visually beautiful and very competently put together. Impressive in the way it denounces fundamentalists without making the jihadists inhuman monsters.

Abderahmane Sissako was born in Mauritania.



## TIME FOR DRUNKEN

2000 F 4.25 7.7 IRA

**Ghobadi, Bahman**

Ayoub Ahmadi, Rojin Younessi,  
Amaneh Ekhtiar-dini

1999, winter time, small village on the Iran-Iraq border. Kurdish orphans struggle to survive and to find money for medical treatment for their brother, a crippled dwarf. The principal means of livelihood in the village is the hazardous business of smuggling stuff over the border on mules (often doped with alcohol to help them survive the cold, hence the title). The story also involves marriage negotiations and the hopes of Ameneh, the young narrator.

The film was shot in the village where Ghobadi was born, in a neo-realist style (on location, non-professional actors, "real life"), somewhat in the vein of **The Weeping Camel** and **Cave of the Yellow Dog**. Some striking use of the snow-covered landscape. A compassionate, sad and disquieting film which achieves its powerful effects without resorting to sentimental manipulation (to which the story might easily have lent itself). An assured debut feature. It's a salutary reminder not only of the plight of the Kurds and the ravages of war but of the fate of countless children in that part of the world. (There are 20 million Kurds living in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey; they have a very hard time of it in all of these countries.)

Some critics found it boring — probably the sort who like Arnold Schwarzenegger films.



## TOKYO STORY

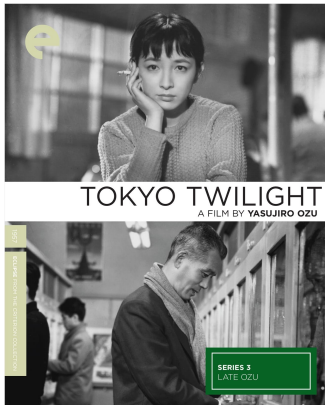
1953 F 5.00 8.2 JAP

### Ozu, Yasujiro

Yuhara Atsuta

Chisu Ryu, Setsuko Gara,  
Haruko Sgimura, Chieko  
Higasiyama, So Yamamura,  
Nabuo Nakamura

Post-war Japan. An elderly couple visit Tokyo from their distant home, hoping to reconnect with several of their grown-up children and other family members. They get a somewhat muted reception. Ozu's thematic preoccupations (tradition/modernity; marriage and family; position of women; economic and social dislocation; the ephemerality and fragility of life) his apparently simple narrative material (family tensions) and his refined style achieve a perfect match in a film of extraordinary subtlety, complexity and emotional power. Following **Late Spring** (49) and **Early Summer** (51), **Tokyo Story** is the third in Ozu's astonishing "Noriko trilogy". The divine Setsuko Hara appears in each as Noriko but she is a different character in each film; Chisu Ryu also appears in all three. This is perhaps the greatest "trilogy" in the history of cinema, rivalled only by not one but two from Rossellini (**Open City-Paisan-Germany Year Zero** and **Stromboli-Europa 51-Voyage to Italy**). Whichever of the Noriko trilogy I have seen most recently strikes me at the time as the supreme example of Ozu's art — and so it was this time, although I must say that the fact that **Tokyo Story** has long since established itself as the Ozu film *par excellence* is an historical accident. I'm sure it's no better than **Late Spring** or **Early Summer**. Its early pre-eminence derives from extra-textual factors. (There are only three Japanese films which have figured in the *Sight and Sound* ten-yearly polls in the 10 Greatest Films: **Tokyo Story** and **Ugetsu Monogatari**, each twice, and **Seven Samurai**.) There is a great deal that might be said about **Tokyo Story**. Chuck Bowen says most of it in his *Slant* review: <https://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/tokyo-story/> For more from me on Ozu see the notes on **Late Spring** and **Early Summer**. Noël Burch: "Ozu's body of work is incommensurable with that of any other Japanese filmmaker except perhaps Kurosawa ... As a contribution to Japanese culture, however, it is comparable only to that of the great poets, painters or sculptors of the past."



## TOKYO TWILIGHT

1957    F    4.25    8.2    JAP

**Ozu, Yasujiro**

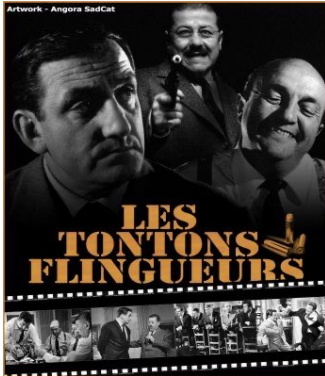
Setsuko Hara, Ineko Arima,  
Chishû Ryû, Haruko Sugimura

Postwar Japan. A father is regretful about the unhappy marriage into which he had pushed his elder daughter and bewildered by his rebellious younger daughter, the mother long since gone for obscure but apparently shameful reasons. The quiet surfaces and rhythms of daily life conceal deep-seated tensions, family secrets, regrets and resentments, inter-generational incomprehensions. The story raises issues about family, identity, loyalty, gender, morality ... Ozu's sombre and wintry melodrama, the last of his BW films, plays out against the backdrop of changing and difficult times in Japan. Trains, bridges, power lines, street signs, lights abound. Cafes, offices, mahjong parlours, police stations, ginza bars. Much of the action is nocturnal and the visual style is often noirish. (Hello Robert Mitchum.) Superb soundtrack (much of it muted and distant).

One of Ozu's bleakest films: no lyricism, no humour, not much relief in the storyline although the ending is perhaps more hopeful than might have been expected, the last of his BW's and the penultimate film with the adorable Setsuko Hara. Commercially it was one of his least successful but the critical consensus seems to be that it's one of Ozu's better films. I'd say it's near the top of the second tier in the Ozu hierarchy. It's a work of some density and power as well as formal grace; the performances are impressive and the story has plenty of bite.

Does anyone in the history of cinema smoke a cigarette more deliberately than Chisu Ryu?





## TONTONS FLINGUEURS,

1963    F    4.00    7.9    FRA

**Lautner, George**

Maurice Fellous

Lino Ventura, Francis Blanche,  
Bernard Blier, Robert Dalban,  
Sabine Sinjen, Claude Rich

Our Man Lino, now a straight businessman in the tractor business, inherits the crime empire of his old friend The Mexican, and his daughter as well. Theo the Kraut, the Volponi Bros and The Tomato have other ideas but Pascal is on side! Melvillean gangster film + Nouvelle Vague + a dose of delicious satirical vinegar + just a suggestion of Tati = **Les Tontons Flingueurs**. Some of it is very funny but overall I found it more fun than funny. Apparently much of the humour and wit lies in the use of the French language, mostly lost in the subtitles. In any event it's very enjoyable and pleasing on the eye. Lino V shows his comic side as well as doing his gangster turn. Beautiful print with slightly grainy cinematography: lovely!

French-Italian-German production. The critics dismissed it; the public loved it. It's easy to see why it has become a cult film in France.



## TOUCHEZ PAS AU GRISBI

1954 F 4.50 7.9 FRA

**Becker, Jacques**

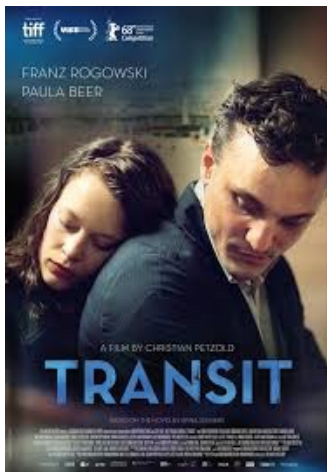
Jean Gabin, Dora Doll, René Dry,  
Vittorio Sanipolli, Jeanne Moreau,  
Lino Ventura

A bunch of French gangsters get themselves all tangled up over dames, chumps and gold bullion. Two absolute highlights of this very entertaining film: the performance and commanding screen presence of veteran actor Jean Gabin, and the smooth, spare and sardonic direction of Jacques Becker. It's one of a long lineage of films testifying to the French cinephiles' obsession with the American crime/gangster/noir films of the classical period. This is often funny, sometimes tense, a little sad, always interesting. The apparently effortless and elegant organization of space and movement is just one of the film's impressive aspects. Loved the doors, locks, stairways, elevators, garages and cars... and toothbrushes. Jeanne Moreau has a small role and Lino Ventura plays the hood Angelo. The retrograde representation of women (endemic in the genre) is somewhat mitigated by a couple of sympathetic characters who are not merely decorative sex toys for the hoods, and a couple of tender moments. A French poll voted Gabin "the actor of the century". Becker was for a time an assistant to Jean Renoir.

Anticipates Melville's gangster films, the high-point of this sub-genre. But Becker's world is not as bleak as Melville's. The appeal of this film lies largely in the fact that not only does Max lose his gold stash to save his friend Rinot, a real dope, but he doesn't seem to much mind. In the end he loses Rinot as well, which he does mind — at least somewhat.

Truffaut on Becker: *He loved fast cars and long meals.*

Terence Rafferty on **Touchez Pas Au Grisbi**: *Real men eat pâté.*



## TRANSIT

2018 F 4.50 7.0 GER

### Petzold, Christian

Hans Fromm

Franz Rogowski, Paula Beer,  
Godehard Giese, Maryam Zaree,  
Lilien Batman

Nazi-occupied France (mostly Marseille) and, simultaneously, present day Europe: malign ideologies, war, persecution, refugees, bureaucracy – a destabilized and menacing world in which nothing is certain. Through a series of misadventures and mishaps, young man fleeing the fascists assumes the identity of a dead writer, seeks a way to flee the country and becomes entangled with the dead man's wife and her lover. He also strikes up a problematic relationship with a small African boy and his deaf-mute mother, and encounters several other traumatized people trying to escape the country (obvious allusions to present-day refugees and asylum-seekers). Everything is played out against the backdrop of the encroaching fascist tyranny. A story about identity, survival, the psychic and moral cost of war/persecution/exile/homelessness — people “in transit”. It's based on a 1942 novel by Anna Seghers, adapted by Petzold.

Some temporal dislocations, minimal narrative exposition, a mysterious narrator and the dark material make this a challenging and disquieting watch. But as we expect from Petzold (**Barbara**, **Phoenix**) this is accomplished, highly charged, heavily freighted and intelligent cinema for an adult audience, confronting disturbing themes in a way which refuses easy answers and reassuring resolutions — how often can we say that? The cast is uniformly impressive, especially Joaquin Phoenix look-alike Franz Rogowski (Georg).

Petzold has called **Barbara**, **Phoenix** and **Transit** “a loose trilogy named Love in a Time of Oppressive Systems” which, indeed, signals the unifying theme in these three commanding films (of which **Barbara** is still, I think, the best, but all three are must-see). Disappointing that this one doesn't seem to have attracted nearly as much attention as its two predecessors. Along with **Roma** and **Cold War** this is the most impressive recent film I've seen so far this year.



## TREE OF LOVE

1938 F 4.00 6.8 JAP

### Hiromasa Nomura

Mikio Takahashi

Kinuyo Tanaka, Ken Uehara,  
Hideo Fujino, Michiko Kuwana,  
Fumiko Okamura, Takeshi  
Sakamoto

Widowed young nurse with a small daughter falls for a newly-arrived doctor but he has family problems. The way forward is littered with obstacles. Early Japanese melodrama in which the focus is very much on the nurses – a women-centric film which, I imagine, must have been unusual at the time. The storyline is developed with some sensitivity. As well as the usual staples of the romantic melodrama we have quite an interesting treatment of the world of the nurses and the hospital. Michiko Kuwana (Michiko) plays a character-type not often seen in the genre. It is also something of a relief to see a Japanese melodrama in which there are no real villains (the dragon-lady head nurse is no more than a small two-dimensional piece in the narrative machinery). The film foreshadows much of Mizoguchi, Ozu and Naruse although it lacks the style and grace we expect from those masters. Kinuyo Tanaka and Ken Uehara are both excellent in these early roles. The print is a bit of a patchwork but not bad considering. It's a measure of my involvement with the story that I did a good deal of worrying.

Japanese title **Aizen katsura** (remade in the 1950s). Aka **Yearning Laurel**

KANETO SHINDO'S  
*TREE WITHOUT  
LEAVES*



## TREE WITHOUT LEAVES

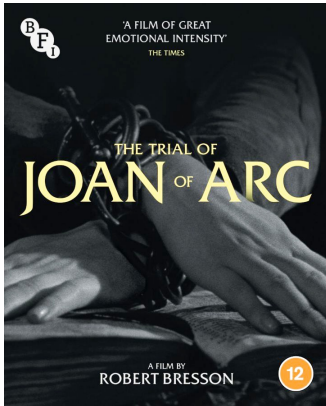
1986 F 3.75 7.8 JAP

**Shindo, Kaneto**

Keiju Kobayashi, Nobuko Otowa,  
Ichirô Zaitzu

Rural Japan. Ageing novelist and scriptwriter is holed up in the winter woods, reflecting on his childhood, the patrician family's declining fortunes, the loss of their estate and the dispersal of his siblings. The focus is on his relationship with his indulgent and over-protective mother (played by the legendary Nobuko Otowa) and her love for the little "hanger-on" (still breastfeeding years beyond the norm). Shindo revisits the theme of maternal love and sacrifice which he explored in the somewhat gruelling **Mother** (1963) with his much younger wife (Otowa) in the lead in that film as well. (She was also in the only other Shindo film I've seen, **The Naked Island**.) The story moves back and forwards between past and present, presenting a slightly dreamlike world and the rhythms of everyday life, overlaid with the poignant voice-over. Apparently the film has strong autobiographical elements. Melancholic, ruminative, elegaic. Kaneto Shindo is a director of considerable technical sophistication with a visual aesthetic that prizes beautiful and elegant compositions and deep space cinematography. But what's lacking here is any real emotional grip; my interest was captured by the film's aesthetics but the story itself generated little more than cerebral interest. Who was the young woman who brought the writer his supplies? Wife, mistress, Girl Friday? Can a middle aged man (the father) spend all his waking hours, sitting like a Buddha and smoking his pipe? Apparently he can!

"Motherhood" is a subject thoroughly explored in the Japanese cinema. I prefer Ozu and Naruse's working of this particular terrain.



## TRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC

1962 F 4.50 7.6 FRA

**Bresson, Robert**

Florenca Carréz, Jean-Claude Fournéa

Based *entirely* on trial transcripts and shot in Bresson's ascetic style, this is all the more powerful for the absence of editorializing and audience manipulation. It is also all the more chilling that the ecclesiastical authorities are not depicted as evil or corrupt but rather as cowards and opportunists. Perhaps Bresson's most extreme "experiment" in "non-expressive" cinema.

Would need to see Dreyer's film again to make any intelligent comparisons; both astonishing works. I found Dreyer's more dramatic and expressionistic treatment of the story more harrowing and traumatic ... but this is bad enough!

Susan Sontag, an early champion of Bresson, dismisses **TJA**: *Bresson has experimented with the limits of the unexpressive...It could have worked. But it doesn't — because she [Florence Carrez] is the least luminous of all [Bresson's] presences....* Well, it's nice to know that Sontag was sometimes wrong!

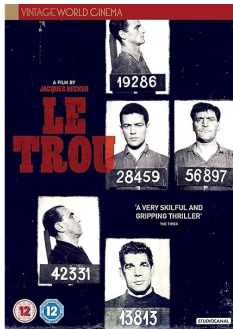
## TROU, LE

1960 F 4.25 8.5 FRA

**Becker, Jacques**

Ghislain Cloquet

Michel Constantin, Raymond  
Meunier, André Bervil, Jean  
Keraudy, Philippe Leroy, Marc  
Michel



Paris, 1947. Four prison inmates planning an escape are joined by a fifth man who is something of an outsider. Together they implement an ingenious escape plan which involves a lot of problem-solving and hard work (blisters, bruises, aching backs, broken nails and lots of sweat). Reminiscent of Bresson's **A Man Escaped** (without the spiritual dimension), made in a quasi-documentary, intensely realistic fashion with no music, natural sound, non-professional actors (apart from the one playing Gaspard), no gimmicks or special effects. Based on a true story and featuring one of the real-life criminals involved, Jean Keraudy (named Roland in the film). A picture of prison life, a character study, an escape thriller. Clearly the work of a very accomplished film-maker and a fine cinematographer. Marvellous underground scenes. One of the great prison films. Perhaps a little too long. There seems to be an 83-minute American version which must have been drastically deformed; this full version is 126 minutes. (Ideally, it would have been about 115.) Nice to see a prison film in which the prison is not an utter hell-hole and the guards are not sadistic monsters! Three influences on Becker: Renoir (with whom he worked), Melville and Bresson. Apparently Melville thought this, Becker's last film, the greatest of all French films ... it's very good, but I liked **A Man Escaped** better. And it's not as enjoyable as **Touchez Pas au Grisbi**. I didn't find this film as riveting as most of the critics did. For all that, it's impressive. Becker died at the young age of 54, soon after this film was completed. Cloquet's DoP credits include **Mouchette**, **Au Hasard Balthazar** and **The Young Girls of Rochefort**.



## TURTLES CAN FLY

2004 F 4.00 8.1 IRA

**Ghobadi, Bahman**

Soran Ebrahim, Avaz Latif,  
Saddam Hossein Feysal

Brink of the American invasion of Iraq on the Iran-Turkey border, small village and refugee camp. A thirteen year old boy has organized the refugee children into cleaning up the minefields in the area. The children include an adolescent boy, his sister and a blind and orphaned toddler. Like Ghobadi's earlier **A Time for Drunken Horses** (2000), the film gives a vivid and painful sense of life in these war-torn communities and the hideous physical and psychological traumas that come in the wake of any war — largely conveyed through the experiences of children and adolescents. Ghobadi has an extraordinary talent for eliciting wonderful performances from children. The whole thing feels like an authentic depiction of life as it is lived in this time and place. It is not concerned with political analysis or polemic but with the human realities. Ghobadi makes good use of the landscape, and manages a fine balance of a wry humour and deeply felt pathos. No Hollywood glitter or gloss here! Ghobadi is one of several interesting and creative film-makers in the contemporary Middle East — Nuri Bilge Ceylan, Asghar Farhadi, Nadine Labaki, Hany Abu-Assad to mention a few.





## TWENTY-FOUR EYES

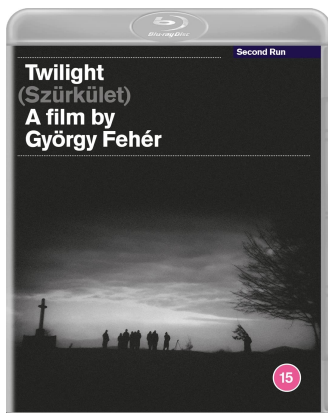
1954 F 4.25 8.1 JAP

**Kinoshita, Keisuke**

Hiroshi Kasuda

Hideko Takamine, Hideyo  
Amamoto, Hideki Goko, Itsuo  
Watanabe, Chisu Ryu

Shodo Island, Inland Sea, Japan, 1928-1946. In three acts (late 20s, early 30s, WWII), **24E** tells the story of a school teacher, in all its joys, sorrows and perplexities. Through her story we experience the passing of time and social change (mainly destructive) on the island, and ultimately the story of Japan from the vantage point of the ordinary folks who make up the rich gallery of characters in this long, slow-burn film. There is much in the film to admire and enjoy: stylistically, Kinoshita's sense of composition, the use of screen space (he loves the screen entries and exits!), the long shots and leisurely takes; dramatically, the vicissitudes in the lives of the teacher, the pupils and the villagers; thematically, the waste and the ravages caused by a conformist/militarist/nationalist ethos as well as the well-rehearsed theme about the slow and painful emancipation of Japanese women. The film has been criticized on ideological grounds as being far too soft on the Japanese public, too facile in shifting the burden of responsibility onto an absent and distant government, too timid in allowing Hisako's retreat into domesticity. I must say this aspect of the film didn't trouble me but what was more discomforting was the overkill on sentiment — not quite the same thing as sentimentality but a related malady. As one critic remarked, it's relentlessly wet-eyed. The sentiment is real enough but it needed a restraining hand. Still, I suppose that one might reply that the traumatic experiences of the Japanese people in the period depicted — Depression, social dislocation, poverty, war with China, militarism-nationalism-fascism, WW2, defeat — are hardly the stuff of comedy and that a fair amount of crying is altogether appropriate! Kinoshita's film shares a good deal with the work of the great Japanese masters, and while it's not in the same league, it's a deeply-felt and beautiful film that deserves our respect and admiration, various misgivings notwithstanding. It goes without saying that Hideko Takamine turns in yet another heart-wrenching performance. **Goodbye Mr Chips** + **The Edge of the World** + Rossellini + Naruse + more Kleenex.



## TWILIGHT

1990 F 4.50 7.4 HUN

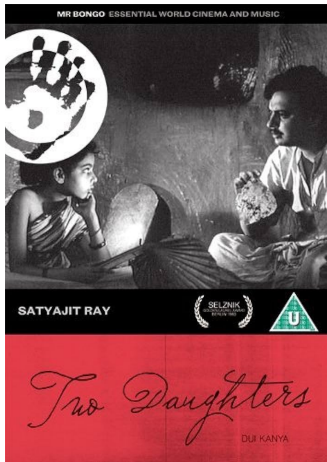
### Fehér, György

Miklós Gurbán

Péter Haumann, Janos Derzsi,  
Gyula Pauer

Remote Hungarian village. Murdered girl is found in the forest. Police inspector is perplexed. Noir goes extreme Euro arthouse. Based on the novella *The Pledge* (1958) by a master of the philosophical crime story, Friedrich Durrenmatth whose novels I devoured in earlier days. I remember being hugely impressed by *The Pledge* but don't remember it being quite this minimalist, opaque and enigmatic. Someone called the film 'an existential horror story'. Well yes, amongst other things. A carefully crafted film which frustrates the viewer's expectations (exposition, identification, narrative resolution) but rather plunges him/her into a dream world full of bewilderment, dread, despair, and evil. Long takes, slow camera movement, low contrast, angular perspectives and POV shots, slightly weird soundtrack. The narrative moves along like a Béla Tarr film when it's not completely static – as slow as cold molasses – and at various points is reminiscent of the work of Herzog as well as Tarr (with whom Fehér collaborated). Following the "slow-cinema" developed by Jansco and Tarr, **Twilight** comprises only 40 shots (roughly). The film also brought to mind Tarkovsky, Haneke and Franju. Quite a mix from which you might easily surmise that there isn't much sweetness and light, and nary a glimmer of humour. Relentless, bleak, mystifying, mesmeric ... one ends up feeling that one has seen (and heard) something remarkable. The town's police budget certainly isn't being wasted on new cars; the rumbling, groaning sound of the inspector's beat-up old car is a kind of motif, along with some haunting music — was it that used by Herzog in the final sequence of *Nosferatu*?) A film for hardcore cinephiles. Well worth the effort.

The very apt sub-title of Durrenmatth's novella, also adapted for the screen and directed by Sean Penn (*The Pledge*, 2001, with Jack Nicholson in one of his best roles) is *Requiem for the Detective Story*. For a helpful review which I only read after scribbling out these notes, see David Brook, June 2023 @ [blueprintreview.co.uk/2023/06/twilight-szurkulet-1990-second-run/](https://blueprintreview.co.uk/2023/06/twilight-szurkulet-1990-second-run/) Here I discover that it was indeed the same piece of music, somewhat modified, with which Herzog concluded **Nosferatu**. Would love to see **Twilight** on Blu-Ray (recently released).



## TWO DAUGHTERS

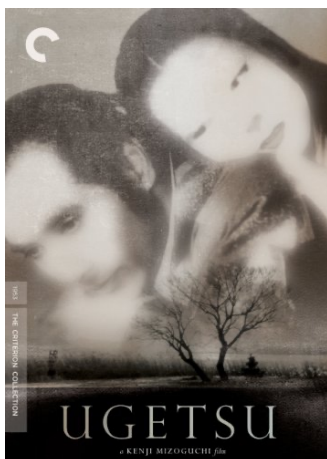
1961 F 4.50 8.1 IND

**Ray, Satyajit**

Anil Chatterjee, Chandana  
Bannerjee, Somuitra Chatterjee,  
Sita Devi, Aparna Das Gupta

Two tales concerning the changing position of girls/women in late 19th century Bengal. The first, "Postmaster", is a very simple story about an urban postal clerk posted to a small village where an orphan girl becomes his servant. The second, "The Conclusion", concerns an unconventional marriage. The first is simple, modest, beautiful, tender and touching; the second is more ironic, bitter-sweet and ambiguous. Both very fine, but I preferred the former. The girl is astonishing and deeply moving. The whole thing is done with the most delicate touch. Both present a gentle but sharply observed picture of village life.

Was originally a trilogy of three Tagore stories but the export version had one excised. This was the Ray project which followed the Apu trilogy.



## UGETSU MONOGATARI

1953    F    4.75    8.2    JAP

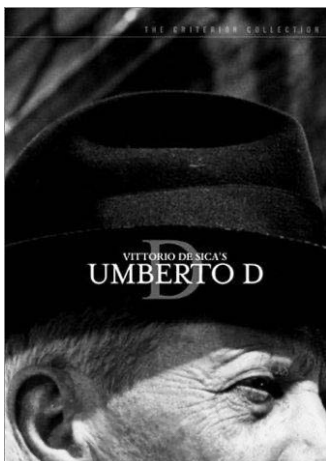
**Mizoguchi, Kenji**

Masyuki Mori, Sakae Okawa,  
Kinuyo Tanaka, Machiko Kyu

Ghost story, fable, allegory, human drama... Mizoguchi's extraordinary adaptation of two stories by 18th century writer Akinari Ueda to make a film about everything — love, family, war, militarism, illusion and reality, greed, ambition, betrayal, the old world and the new, the power of art, not to mention Mizoguchi's recurrent preoccupation with the position of women. And, of course, it takes on all sorts of layers of meaning in the shadow of WW2 to which the film so obliquely but insistently alludes. The treatment is a haunting and hypnotic blend of the realistic, the surreal and the fantastic with an extraordinary soundtrack interweaving the graceful, fluid and balletic (but generally unobtrusive) camera work. Full of poetic, lyrical and evocative scenes whose power derives from Mizoguchi's quiet and meditative approach to the material, often achieved through very long takes. The lake sequence, Genjuro's entry to the manor and his homecoming are just three of many such sequences. A masterwork by a master director.

Cinematographer Kazuo Miyagawa also worked with Kurosawa and Ozu. Has anyone ever made better use of the tracking shot?

The Hindu tradition teaches that it is foolish to be preoccupied with attaining wealth, sensual gratification, status, or power: Genjuro is in pursuit of the first two, Tobei the other two. In showing their folly we might almost say that **Ugetsu** is a very "dharmic" film!



## UMBERTO D

1952 F 4.25 8.2 ITA

**De Sica, Vittorio**

Carlo Batisti, Maria Pia Casilio,  
Lena Gennari

A wrenching story about a near-destitute retired civil servant facing eviction and penury, and without any friends except a young maid and a dog. De Sica doesn't spare the viewer but does avoid undue sentimentality. Told in the observational and muted style of neorealism, with remarkably little dialogue, but generating some powerful and affecting sequences, most notably in the dog pound (echoes of the gas chambers) and the final railway-crossing episode. The implicit fate of Maria gives the social critique added resonance. One of the major (and last) landmarks of the neo-realist movement and perhaps De Sica's masterwork.

Comparable in many ways to **Ikiru** but with a more documentary feel. Sad to see Rome in its decrepit post-war state. Batisti (in the lead role) was not an actor (he was 70 when the film was made, and was a university lecturer).

André Bazin captured perfectly the essence of Italian neorealism when he described it as "an ideal synthesis between the rigor of tragic necessity and the accidental fluidity of everyday reality." Hard to find a better summation of **UD!**



## UMBRELLAS OF CH'BOURG

1964 F 4.25 7.8 FRA

**Demy, Jacques**

Jean Rabier

Catherine Deneuve, Nino Castelnuovo, Anne Vernon, Marc Michel, Ellen Farner, Mireille Perrey

Geneviève is young, naive, beautiful. She helps her widowed mother in her Cherbourg umbrella shop. G falls in love with a young mechanic but their plans for an early marriage are torpedoed by his military call-up. He is sent to fight in the Algerian war. Meanwhile, a new suitor turns up, wealthy, handsome, charming...

But here's the thing: *All* of the dialogue is *sung* and the whole thing is seeped in beguiling music (Michel Legrand) while the décor is an extravaganza of pastel colours. One also notices from the outset Rabier's fluid and elegant camerawork. **UC** is a swirling, captivating celebration of colour and movement, of life and love. But there is a sad undercurrent in Demy's bitter-sweet exploration of hope, fidelity and compromise. Looked at from outside with a cold and clinical eye the whole shebang might be an embarrassment, a tacky confection of marshmallow and fairy floss. But it's actually a film of seductive charm and grace, wonderfully well played. It deserves its exalted reputation amongst cinephiles.

This was Castelnuovo's first major role after working as a mechanic. He died just ten days ago at the age of 84 (Sept 21). His part in the film was entirely re-dubbed. Rabier was one of the ace DoP's of the *Nouvelle Vague*, working with Chabrol, Malle, Truffaut, Agnès Varda and the like.



## UNCLE VANYA

1971 F 4.00 7.4 RUS

### Konchalovsky, Andrei

Evgeniy Guslinskiy

Sergei Bondarchuk, Irina  
Miroshnichenko, Irina  
Kupchenko, Innokenty  
Smoktunovsky

Chekhov's melancholy play was first staged in 1898, here adapted for the screen by Andrei Konchalovsky. It's quintessential Chekhov terrain: landed gentry on the downward slide, a crumbling estate; thwarted desires and unfulfilled dreams, unhappy lives; boredom, ennui, despair, spiritual paralysis and self-loathing; a stifling milieu in which, at least for a while, nothing much is happening. *Dramatis personae*: an elderly, ill, pompous estate owner and would-be intellectual; his beautiful young wife and his (but not her) daughter; the family managing the estate (including the eponymous uncle); a few servants; a world-weary doctor (played by Sergei Bondarchuk who directed the 7-hour epic 1966 **War and Peace** in which he played Pierre). The camera is like a stealthy and unwelcome guest. Plenty of long takes. A few obtrusive "arty" effects. Over-use of the sepia effect.

The doctor is far more interesting than Uncle Vanya (is this so in Chekhov's play?) Of the several Chekhov screen adaptations I've seen this is clearly the best (**The Cherry Orchard, The Duel, The Seagull, The Three Sisters**; the last, Olivier's 1970 version, was next best). Chekhov, so attuned to interior drama, to mood and atmosphere, and so little interested in outer action, is always difficult to film.



**UZAK**

2002 F 3.75 7.6 TUR

## **Ceylan, Nuri Bilge**

Nuri Bilge Ceylan

Muzaffer Özdemir, Mehmet Emin Toprak, Zuhal Gencer

Young man has lost his job in a small provincial town; goes to Istanbul looking for work, crashes at a relative's place, an older divorced man who has been a more or less successful photographer, now on the downhill slide. It's a story about "men without women", without deep relationships, without any real meaning in their lives — endless TV, porn movies, drinking and eating alone, chain-smoking, problems with family relationships, such as they are. A study of cramped lives, alienation, loneliness and ennui, slightly relieved by some quirky humour (sometimes reminiscent of Kaurismäki). The narrative is slow and sparse, the dialogue minimal and thin, the mood and imagery all-important. Bleak but engrossing and clearly the work of a film-maker with his own way of doing things. Ceylan scripted, shot and directed. (He has since moved on to a larger, more ambitious projects which have established him in the front rank of contemporary film-makers.)

The two male leads shared the Grand Jury Prize at Cannes in 2003. Yes, they deliver fine performances but I wouldn't have thought this film was really a showcase for great acting. Funny things, film awards! (Just recall the 2019 Oscars: **Green Book** beat **Roma** for Best Picture. How bizarre can it get?)





## VIE DE BOHÈME, LA

1992 F 4.00 7.7 FIN

### Kaurismäki, Aki

André Wilms, Matti Pellonpää,  
Evelyn Didi, Karl Väänänen,  
Sam Fuller, Jean-Pierre Leaud

Based on the 1851 Henri Murger novel which inspired Puccini's opera and its subsequent iterations and off shoots — Zefferelli's 1965 film, *Moulin Rouge* et al. Three down-n-just-about-out aspiring artists in Paris — writer, painter, composer — are looking about to scrounge up ways of keeping body and soul together. They launch a ludicrous publishing venture, get entangled with a couple of wealthy patrons, and are inspired by a consumptive young woman. There's also a dog named Baudelaire.

Heavily imprinted with Kaurismäki's insignia: quirky, off-beat, deadpan humour; the sympathetic portrayal of losers, drifters, wannabes and others on the social margins; the concern with refugees, exiles and runaways. **LVB** also delivers a sometimes back-handed homage to the French cinema; Louis Malle, Leau and Sam Fuller in the cast, visual allusions to Renoir, Vigo, French gangster movies, the starving artist in the garret. It's also an amusing take on the whole French cultural tradition. Funny, absurd, deft and quietly affecting. I liked it a lot.



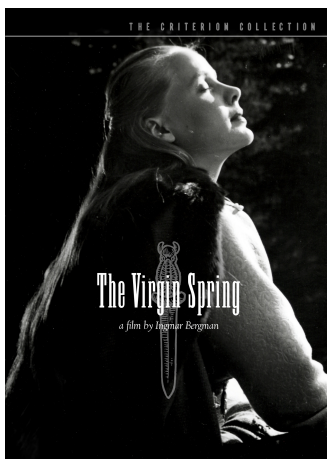
## VINCERE

2009 F 4.25 6.9 ITA

**Bellochio, Marco**

Giovanna Mezzogiorno, Filippo  
Timi, Russo Alesi, Fabrizio  
Costella

The narrative concerns Mussolini, the young woman whom he marries and with whom he has a son, and her subsequent fate — all against the vividly evoked backdrop of Italian politics, war, the rise of fascism etc. Stylistically it's an admixture of Viscontian operatics, interwar agitprop and postmodern mélange; thematically it explores lust, power, obsession, and despair on the personal level, and on the political level, demagoguery, fascism, the collusion of church and state, and the political dimension of psychiatry, seeking to integrate these two levels largely through its two protagonists, superbly played by Mezzogiorno and Timi. This last aspect of the project is less successfully managed than in **The Conformist** which is one of the film's obvious antecedents, both films also being highly reflexive and concerned with representation, spectatorship, voyeurism etc, ie. with cinema itself. Although it is often visually powerful **Vincere** doesn't have quite the stylistic élan or coherence of Bertolucci's masterwork. But it remains a dramatic, visceral and powerful film of considerable substance. The second half, apart from a few scenes, is less accomplished and less compelling than the first. The depiction of Ida's plight is perhaps a little labored, and the film might profitably have been cut by about ten minutes. The film might easily have been called *Ida*. Her plight is made all the more painful by the fact that, in several significant senses, she is deluded and obsessed. I was slightly less impressed with this the second time around, though I still find it forceful, interesting and generally admirable. It's certainly a long way better than Bellochio's earlier **My Mother's Smile** (seen recently). Someone suggested, quite plausibly, that Timi was channeling Klaus Kinski. Interesting treatment of Mussolini as a charismatic and intense young "revolutionary" — a useful counterbalance to the image of pompous buffoon we know from the much later newsreels. Worth watching a few minutes of the interview with Timi in the extras, just because of the remarkable gap between the person/actor and the character.



## **VIRGIN SPRING, THE**

1960    F    4.00    8.1    SWE

**Bergman, Ingmar**

Sven Nykvist

Max von Sydow, Gunnell  
Lindblom, Birgitta Valberg,  
Brigitta Petersson

A brutal but redemptive medieval legend alchemically transmuted into cinema by the combined talents of Bergman and Sven Nykvist (working together for the first time) who counter-balance the rather gut-churning material with beautifully poised images and deft editing. It goes without saying in a Bergman film that the director elicits powerful and complex performances from all the players. Nonetheless, this isn't one of my favourite Bergman films.



## VISIT, THE

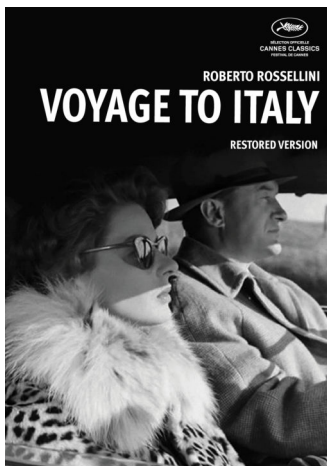
1964 F 4.00 7.5 GER

## Wicki, Bernhard

Armando Nannuzzi

Ingrid Bergman, Anthony Quinn,  
Romolo Valli, Hans Christian  
Blech, Ernst Schröder, Valentina  
Cortesa

Karla Zachanassian (Bergman), a fabulously wealthy woman, returns to the (fictional) independent city-state of Guellen (a Pan-European mix of Italian, Austrian, Swiss and Slavic components!) where she seeks to avenge her humiliation as a teenage girl. She is seeking “justice” against Serge Miller (Quinn), now a man of some substance, who did her a profound injustice twenty years earlier. She’s prepared to pay. She brings her pet panther with her. The drama unfolds through the reactions of various town dignitaries, Serge, his wife and friends, and a young woman who echoes the young Karla. The film has a slightly surreal air of menace and nightmare, something of the atmosphere of a Kafka novel blended with an Ionesco play or perhaps a noir revenge story. It sometimes tilts towards a kind of theatrical artificiality and showiness. There’s also a problem with the strange mélange of accents. But there’s plenty here that is powerful and effective. The themes concern the nature of justice, the moral corrosions of poverty and greed, the power of the mob, revenge and atonement, the irretrievable loss of youth, innocence and love. It all takes place in a somewhat bizarre world — one entirely free of children and animals. I suppose if one worked at it one could construct an allegorical reading about the war, collaboration etc. But it works well enough on its own level. I had no idea what I was in for when I slipped this into the DVD player, having been attracted only by Ingrid Bergman’s presence. I knew nothing of the film’s provenance or its subject matter. I imagined it was a romantic drama about an autumnal love affair. Emphatically not so! However, Ingrid was on full voltage in her atypical role. She is a powerhouse presence throughout, easily commanding the screen. An interesting and absorbing film, something a little out of the ordinary run. An Italian-German co-production filmed in Rome, directed by an Austrian, based on a play by a Swiss writer, starring a Swede and a Mexican-American. That’s cosmopolitan! Based on a play by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921-1990), a writer of judicial-philosophical thrillers, most notably *The Judge and His Hangman* (1950), *A Dangerous Game* (1956) and *The Pledge* (1958). I was enthralled by his novels in my student days but haven’t returned to them since. Maybe I should. Wicki directed **The Bridge** (59, his best film) and **Morituri** (1965). Romollo Valli was the hotel manager in **Death in Venice**.



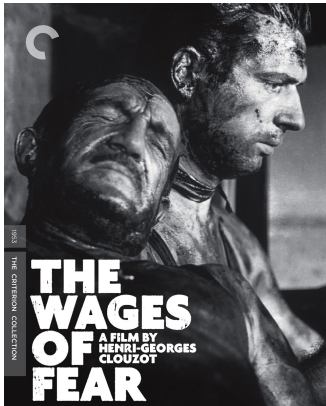
## VOYAGE TO ITALY

1954    F    5.00    7.4    ITA

### Rossellini, Roberto

Ingrid Bergman, George Sanders, Maria Mauban,

The last of Rossellini's "Italian trilogy" with wife Ingrid Bergman, made at a time when their marriage was under severe duress; and indeed, the tenuous narrative of the film concerns the collapse of a marriage. One of the extraordinary aspects of the film is the way it blurs the distinction between "art" and "reality" by implicating Bergman and Sanders – as persons not just as actors – in what is happening in front of the camera and on screen. On the surface a simple story but the film is actually very complex with all sorts of structural and thematic subtleties and resonances. It offers few of the satisfactions of the classical cinema (spectacle, exposition, psychological causation, coherent narrative, identification, tension, resolution): its riches are of a different kind. Some of its motifs: England/Sweden/Italy; death-and-life, time, rebirth; cynicism-sterility-coldness/faith-fertility-warmth; analysis/vision. The film is also a love-song to southern Italy. Rossellini's film-making practice was at least ten years ahead of his time: he anticipates the cinema of Antonioni et al. in striking fashion. Bergman is wonderful; her nervous tension, pain and fretful confusion is nerve-jangling. A strange, mysterious film which might well stand as a vindication of Susan Sontag's famous essay "Against Interpretation" and as a testament to the strange magic of the cinema. The "reconciliation", if that's what it is, is problematic, neither altogether convincing nor completely improbable. Or is it Rossellini's squib at the Hollywood "happy ending"? I doubt it: Rossellini is not one for the cheap trick. A more plausible explanation, perhaps, is that the reconciliation is as much an effect of the environment (the religious festival and parade) as it is of psychological motivations; it is only when we see it as the latter (as we almost always "read" narrative cinema) that it becomes "unconvincing". Rossellini infuriated both Bergman and Sanders by refusing to provide a script, only showing them a few scraps just before each shoot. Sanders teetered on the edge of a nervous breakdown and publicly bad-mouthed Rossellini as having no idea of what he was doing; nothing could have been further from the truth, even if Rossellini's intentions and purposes remained somewhat opaque to almost everyone involved (and the critics too!). The film was almost universally lambasted – Bazin and the *Cahiers* critics being amongst its very few advocates – but is now celebrated as one of the key works of the modernist cinema. I loved it. (I'm a massive enthusiast of Bergman and Rossellini, together and apart.)



## WAGES OF FEAR

1953    F    4.25    8.2    FRA

### Clouzot, Henri

Yves Montand, Peter van Eyck,  
Folco Lulli, Charles Vanel, Vera  
Clouzot

Four desperadoes (Corsican, Italian, French and Dutch) in an out of the way region of South America are hired by an American oil company, at lucrative wages, to carry out a diabolically dangerous mission: driving two trucks loaded with high explosives 300 miles over very bad roads to reach a remote mine. High-octane suspense with more than a touch of horror. Cross-cutting used to superb effect, ratcheting up serious tension. (Forget modern day Hollywood blockbuster action and FX: this is the real stuff!)

The first hour, establishing the milieu, the mood and the characters, is a little too long, too slow. What is the point of the female character and the humiliating way she is treated by both the characters and the film itself? The second half of the film is immensely impressive — but it's cold, brutal and bleak. The anti-capitalist message is not sufficiently developed to have any real bite (though this did not stop the American distributors from deleting the early scenes showing the cynicism of the oil company, clearly standing for Standard Oil.) There are several versions, running at 115, 148 and 155 minutes; this is the 148.

On the basis of this film and **Diabolique** one surmises that Clouzot had a rather nihilistic and acrid view of life. Not a lot of laughs, no room for heroism or valour, no place for love. Life is existential ennui, a cruel joke: "What's on the other side of the fence? Nothing." (Note also the opening scene with the bugs, perhaps the inspiration for Peckinpah's opening to **The Wild Bunch**?)



## WAITING F T BARBARIANS

2019 F 3.75 5.8 COL

### Guerra, Ciro

Chris Menges

Mark Rylance, Johnny Depp,  
Robert Pattinson, Gangya  
Bayarasaikan, Greta Scacchi

Madness in the desert. Somewhere in the North African Sahara, some time back. (Could just as easily be in Latin America or somewhere in Asia, as the mix of ethnic peoples suggests, just as the regime might be that of any European power.) At a remote frontier outpost a police colonel brutalizes the local population, subjecting them to torture and humiliation. The local magistrate (Mark Rylance: marvellous!) finds himself stranded between the vicious colonial regime and the local nomadic peoples, the so-called barbarians. He lands in a bad place after he has helped a young woman who has been crippled by the sinister colonel (played, appropriately enough, by the awful Johnny Depp). I was enormously impressed by two of Guerra's previous films: **Embrace of the Serpent** and **Birds of Passage**, both of which dealt with the ravages of imperialism on indigenous peoples, as this film does also. Guerra has a feel for epic landscapes which he endows with a somewhat surreal aura, and for a kind of visual poetry which is beautiful, mystical, disturbing. But this adaptation of Coetzee's novel is only partially successful: its moral and ideological didacticism is heavy-handed and, despite the fine-grained performances of Rylance and Bayarasaikan (the tortured girl), the rhetorical intent of the film is too insistent. It's aiming for a kind of allegorical critique of imperialism which might recall Conrad (*Heart of Darkness*, *Nostromo*) or Sven Lindqvist's horrifying *Desert Divers* or Herzog's **Aquiritre**, **Wrath of God**. But it falls short. It's certainly worth seeing but somewhat disappointing after Guerra's earlier work. Coetzee adapted his own novel, not entirely successfully it has to be said! (I've read most of Coetzee but not this one.) The IMDb score of 5.8 is just plain silly. One must suppose that the film is just too challenging for the average punter.





## WHILE AT WAR

2019 F 3.75 6.9 SPA

**Amenábar, Almdro**

Álex Cataláne

Karra Elejaide, Eduard  
Fernández, Santi Prego, Luis  
Bemejo, Luis Zahera, Mireira Rey

Spain, 1936, early days of the Civil War. The rector of Salamanca University, former socialist, renowned author and intellectual, Miguel de Unamuno, initially supports the rebellion against the the leftist Republican government. Meanwhile, General Franco is manoeuvring his way to the top of the military junta. Unamuno is slow to realize the nature of the fascist threat and must eventually face a severe reckoning with his own conscience. Even when his fellow-writer Gabriel Garcia Lorca is executed and several of his friends, a Protestant pastor and some young leftists are imprisoned, he is reluctant to confront the truth about Franco and the junta. Interesting aspects of the film include the layered treatment of Franco and the fascist junta, including the dictator's bombastic henchman Millan-Astray (played with plenty of verve by Eduard Fernández), and the role of the Church/Christianity in the moral-philosophical-ideological mix. )Most of the liberal-left filmic treatments of the Civil War evade the anti-ecclesiastical atrocities are at least acknowledged in this film). The flashbacks to the alpine idyll with Miguel's young wife don't add anything beyond a kind of empty and sentimental nostalgia. The film is a thoughtful, even-handed treatment of the moral and political complexities of the historical moment, a meditation on the barbarities that issue from ideological fanaticism (be it of left or right) and belligerent nationalism, and a portrait of a cultured but arrogant intellectual. It's handsomely mounted, steadily paced and well acted. The climactic speech remains all too pertinent in our own contemporary world. Shares some ground with Roberto Faenza's **According to Pereira** (95).





## WHITE NIGHTS

1957 F 4.25 7.8 ITA

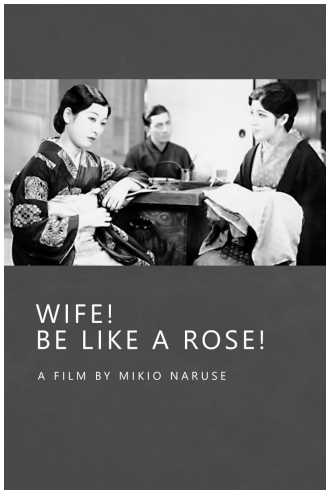
### Visconti, Luchino

Marcello Mastroianni, Maria Schell, Jean Marais

The perplexities and perversities of romantic love. Dostoevsky's melancholy and claustrophobic story is here rendered by Visconti's visionary style as a fairy tale in which the ordinary night-life of an Italian city (remnants of Visconti's neorealist preoccupations) is seen through the veil of a doomed romance in a dreamscape setting reminiscent of both 19thC St Petersburg and Venice (but which, more mundanely, is Livorno). Told as a kind of ironic fable, it's more romantic, more tender, than Bresson's strange adaptation of the same story in **Four Nights of a Dreamer**. Maria Schell is beguiling and Mastroianni does well in an uncharacteristic role. The dream/fairy tale is ruptured by a nightclub scene which could have come straight out of Fellini, managing to be sensual, comic and sinister all at once. The theatrical and highly artificial sets are vaguely reminiscent of early German Expressionism...but the tone and style are inescapably Italian. Filmed entirely in the studio. Visually ravishing and a beautiful print.

A pivotal point in Visconti's trajectory, turning from neorealism towards his more opulent operatic works of later years. This is actually heavily stylized but restrained, quite austere, even minimalist. The film is really a quite extraordinary synthesis of seeming incompatibles — in narrative, tone, style. I liked it a lot.

Maria Schell didn't know Italian but learnt her lines phonetically in two weeks. Amazing!



## WIFE! BE LIKE A ROSE!

1935 F 4.50 7.5 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Schiko Chiba, Tomoko Ito, Yuriko  
Hanabusa, Dadao Maruyama

Tokyo. Kimiko lives with her mother, a refined poet who yearns for the return of her long-gone husband, now living in the mountains with a former geisha and their two children. K. decides to find her father and persuade him to return home. The film has a clean and simple narrative which allows Naruse to develop the most delicate effects. It put me in mind of the artful and achieved “simplicity” of a Willa Cather novel or an early film by Satyajit Ray. Schiko Chiba is another heavenly creature – sweet, loving, sensitive, a little feisty – foreshadowing Hideko Takamine in Naruse’s later work. It would be some years before Naruse’s distinctive talents were to blossom in a run of films of astonishing “beauty and sadness”, starting with **Late Chrysanthemums** (1954) through to his last film, **Scattered Clouds** (1967). In the interim between Naruse married Schiko but the marriage collapsed during the war, precipitating deep trauma and severe depression. Most likely this experience, along with wartime dislocations, helps to explain why this accomplished and hugely promising work remained unmatched for so many years. It is not at all difficult to discern the portents of Naruse’s later achievements. But it’s more than a portent; it’s a striking and beautiful film in its own right, and in some respects quite audacious. This, Naruse’s first major feature, established his reputation in Japan as a master director of *Shomingeki*, dramas about the common people, in Naruse’s case focusing primarily on the place of women within Japan’s changing social structures and mores. This was also the first Japanese sound film to be commercially released in the West. It didn’t go gangbusters at the Box Office! Frank Nugent wrote a damaging review in *NYT* and the *Variety* reviewer was unenthusiastic. For recent, sympathetic and insightful reviews see Ian Johnston at: <http://www.notcoming.com/reviews/wifelikearose/>, and Keith Ulich at: <https://www.slantmagazine.com/film/wifebe-like-a-rose/> One can only hope that sooner or later the critical literati will realize that Naruse belongs in the Japanese pantheon alongside his far more widely heralded compatriots Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Ozu.



## WIFE'S HEART, A

1956 F 4.75 7.2 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Hideko Takamine, Keiju  
Kobayashi, Toshiro Mifune

Family Troubles (again!). The marriage of a young couple, living with his mother, is put under pressure with the unexpected arrival of his no-good brother and family. The central protagonist is the young wife, beautifully played by the altogether wonderful Hideko Takamine (who was in many of Naruse's films, his Setsuko Hara so to speak). Mifune has a comparatively small role but, as always, he demands attention whenever he's on screen. The story is unfolded with the tact and delicacy we expect from Ozu and Mizoguchi. Naruse shares a lot of their concerns: the post-war malaise, the changing position of women, pressures on the family, tradition and modernity. Stylistically it's about half way between. Like Ozu, little camera movement and an interest in space, but with much shorter takes and more editing. Like a mountain stream next to Ozu's perfectly still lake. Naruse, seemingly, is also more interested in material and economic realities than Ozu — note the central place of money. Naruse's visual aesthetic is less striking. (It's hardly fair comparing anyone with Ozu and Mizoguchi; who can measure up?)

No one seems to have taken any notice of this film. It might not attain quite the elevated reaches of Ozu but Naruse is obviously a director very much worth further exploration. Fortunately some of his films seem to be coming back into circulation — if you're prepared to pay the price! In any event, this one takes an honourable place in the extensive gallery of really impressive postwar Japanese films.



## WILD GEESE, THE (Gan)

1953 F 4.50 7.4 JAP

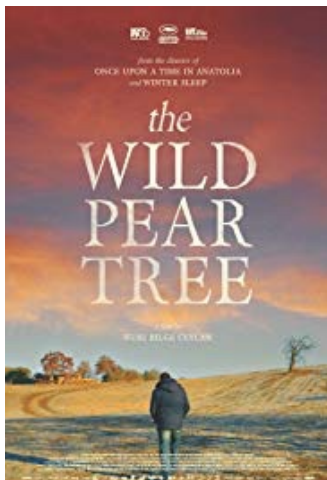
**Toyoda, Shiro**

Hideko Takamine, Hiroshi  
Akutagawa, Jûkichi Uno, Eijiro  
Tono

1880s, Meiji Japan. Otama (Hideko Takamine) is “damaged goods” after leaving her abusive husband. Under false pretences, and in order to protect her poverty-stricken father, she is lured into becoming the mistress of an unpopular money-lender. Disillusionment and a possible romance with a young medical student follow. Like so much post-war Japanese cinema this one focuses on the predicament of a young woman trapped by the social conventions and moral codes of the time, threatened by abject poverty and poorly treated by those around her. The words which so often come to mind in watching Japanese cinema from this period: “Beauty and Sadness”, the evocative title of one of Kawabata’s poignant novels. This film is based on a novel by Ogai Mori who also wrote the story on which Mizoguchi’s **Sansho the Bailiff** (1954) was based.

Hideko Takamine gives yet another beautifully inflected performance, comparable with the best of her work under Mikio Naruse. The whole cast is highly accomplished. One of the most impressive aspects of the film is the shifting point of view and complex pattern of sympathy and identification. We understand the predicaments and feelings of all the significant players in this domestic melodrama. The film is gracefully shot, beautifully composed, often lyrical, and makes the most of a series of contrasts and alternations: beauty and squalor, day and night, wealth and poverty, city and country, and so on.

**The Wild Geese** deserves to be much more widely known. It can stand comparison with the best films of this very fertile period; the twenty-five years immediately following WW2 are the Golden Age of Japanese Cinema which many Western film scholars and critics were slow to recognize. For the symptomatic contemporary Western condescension to both Japanese cinema and to the “women’s film” see Boz Crowther’s sneering review in the *NYT*. Aka **The Mistress**



## WILD PEAR TREE, THE

2018 F 4.75 8.1 TUR

**Ceylan, Nuri Bilge**

Gökhan Tiryaki

Dogu Demirkol, Murat Cemcir,  
Bennu Yıldırım, Hazar Ergüçlü

In and around Cannakkale in Turkey, near the Gallipoli battleground and the ancient site of Troy. The Coming and Going of Prodigal Fathers and Prodigal Sons. The not altogether happy homecoming of Sinan – unemployed teacher, aspiring writer, and somewhat arrogant young man – and his difficult relationship with his father who has some serious issues. Like its immediate predecessors, *The Wild Pear Tree* is a slow-burn narrative full of beautiful and brooding landscapes and a lot of talk – long, fragmented “conversations” about philosophy, religion, art, family relationships – rarely reaching any resolution or conclusion (as is so often the case in real life!); for a director with a stunning visual aesthetic Ceylan is very fond of words! There are rich rewards for the patient viewer who goes with the slow, meandering flow of the narrative. One of the many attainments of Ceylan’s film is the way in which it engages our shifting sympathies with the characters, all flawed, all very human. The film crew includes regular collaborators Gökhan Tiryaki (cinematography), Akin Aksu (scriptwriter and actor who plays the iman), and wife Ebru Ceylan (script). **The Wild Pear Tree** confirms that Ceylan is one of the most interesting and accomplished of contemporary filmmakers, almost none of whom are working in Hollywood! (Names? Well, Pawilkowski, Petzold, Zygantsev, Kaurismäki, Cuarón and Fahardi will do for starters.)



## WINGS

1966 F 5.00 7.7 RUS

### Shepitkov, Larisa

Mayya Bulgakova, Sergey  
Nikonenko, Zhanna Bolotova

Nadya is a middle-aged school headmistress with bumbling colleagues, surly students, a friend and a sort-of lukewarm lover, and a difficult daughter. She is also a respected people's deputy on the city council and her wartime feats as a fighter pilot are celebrated in the local museum. Despite her status and authority Nadya is lonely and unfulfilled, haunted by memories of her flying days. Things build to a powerful climax.

This is a fine specimen of 1960s art cinema: the dislocations of time and space, the ambiguities of exposition and narration, the interest in the inner world, the lack of closure, the foregrounding of style with its own distinctive Russian inflections. Mayya Bulgakova's performance is understated and subtle but quite riveting and the story has emotional depth and resonance. A daring feat of imagination and sensitive human empathy, and done with a lighter hand than many "serious" Russian films. I liked it heaps.

First feature by Ukrainian director Larisa Shepitkov who went through film school with Tarkovsky and was mentored by Aleksandr Dovzhenko. She only completed four features before dying in a car accident in 1979, aged 40. Mayya Bulgakova also died in a car accident in 1992, aged about 62.

2023: even better the second time around. Bulgakova's touching performance is seriously good. One of the finest films of the postwar Soviet cinema. Deserves to be much more widely known and celebrated.

Russian title: **Krylya**



## WINGS OF DESIRE

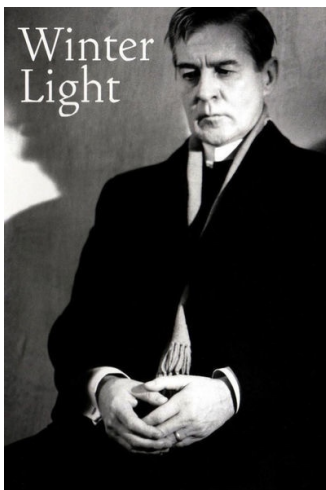
1987 F 4.00 8.1 GER

### Wenders, Wim

Henri Alekan

Bruno Ganz, Solveig Dommartin,  
Otto Sander, Peter Falk, Curt Bois

Angels (gentle middle-aged men with ponytails, dressed in overcoats!) hover over Berlin, observing and “listening” to the thoughts and feelings of individuals – in the streets, and buses, and shelters, and food stalls. Peter Falk is in Berlin making a film. He’s a “fallen” angel. One of the angels, Damiel, mesmerized by the grace and beauty and vulnerability of a circus gymnast, descends into the human condition in search of time, love and corporeality. A film of extravagant ambition and untrammelled romanticism (childhood as privileged and innocent state; the mysteries of subjectivity; the alchemy of creativity and self-transformation etc), somewhat in the vein of Herzog but without the deeper mystical strains. The angels are really a device only in Wenders; in Herzog they would have been for real, so to speak. This is a deeply humanistic film; its central concerns are with time, mortality, love, life and so on. It’s also a film about poetry in the widest sense, the poetry of the body, the poetry of story-telling, the poetry of film and music. And, of course, it’s a film about Berlin, past, present and future, and thereby a film about Germany and being German. Silent-era cinematographer Henri Alekan (whose name is conferred on the circus) came out of retirement to do the filming which is sublime. In its best sequences it has something of the magic of the great silents and early sound films (*L’Atalante* for one). The voice-over, particularly when reciting the poem about the child (written by Wenders’ collaborator and co-scripter, Peter Handke) gets irritating; it’s too portentous, too self-consciously “poetic”, too distracting. The film deteriorated just at the moment when it wanted to take off, when the angel becomes human. I loved the first two-thirds but felt some discomfort with the last third... and it wasn’t just Bruno’s appalling jacket which was throwing down a serious challenge to Frank’s yellow skivy (**Tony Rome**) in the Bad Taste stakes! Am I being obtuse or was the beautiful gymnast talking complete mumbo-jumbo in the last sequence?



## WINTER LIGHT

1962 F 5.00 8.1 SWE

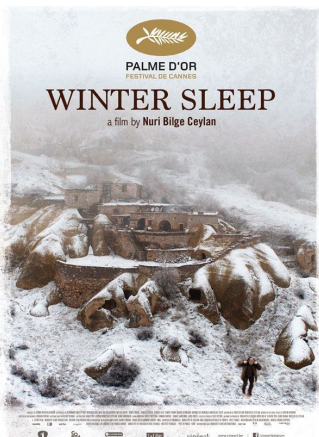
### Bergman, Ingmar

Sven Nykvist

Gunnar Björnstrand, Ingrid Thulin, Gunnel Linblom, Max von Sydow, Allan Edwall

Swedish village, Winter. A middle-aged pastor has lost his wife, his congregation, his lover and now his religious faith: an existential/spiritual crisis with a vengeance one might say. He also has the flu! He is unable to help a fisherman who seeks his help because of an overwhelming sense of dread about a nuclear apocalypse; the man shoots himself, leaving behind wife and children. The former lover hopes to recuperate their relationship but the fisherman's death triggers a savage outburst from the pastor. Staged in an austere beautiful style most of the film takes place inside two churches with chilly interludes by the river and in the schoolhouse. A film of painful intensity dramatizing several of Bergman's signature themes with stark and uncompromising clarity: the tension between faith and doubt; the pathologies of love, both spiritual and worldly; the darkness of life without love; the spectre of death and destruction; the hell of meaninglessness. Björnstrand found his role deeply traumatic. The more facile critics see **WL** simply as Bergman's repudiation of his father's oppressive religious faith — certainly one part of the film; but it's rather more complex than that! Streets ahead of the likes of **Cries and Whispers** and **Fanny and Alexander** which seem to be the more universally admired. (Both strike me as pretty awful.) Of course, **WL**, like almost all of Bergman's films, has its fervent admirers, me included. Part of Bergman's genius was to attract the very best producers, actors, cinematographers, editors and the like: their talents are fully evident in this disturbing and strangely beautiful chamber piece, a film which is intensely personal and which clearly embodies Bergman's own disturbances but which also transcends them. Result: a cinematic masterpiece. The second and best of the "God's Silence" trilogy with **Through a Glass Darkly** and **The Silence** on either side. Bergman: *I think I have made just one picture that I really like, and that is **Winter Light**. That is my only picture about which I feel that I have started here and ended there and that everything along the way has obeyed me. Everything is exactly as I wanted to have it, in every second of this picture.*





## WINTER SLEEP

2014 F 5.00 8.2 TUR

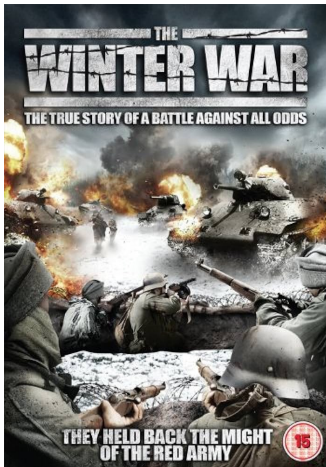
### Ceylan, Nuri Bilge

Gökhan Tiryake

Haluk Bilginer, Melisa Sözen,  
Demet Akbag , Ayberk Pekcan,  
Serhat Ciliç, Nejat İslar

Winter, remote village in the geologically surreal Cappadocia. Retired actor (or, as he prefers, “thespian”), hotel owner, landlord and writer is messing about with newspaper columns and a book on the Turkish theatre, and half-heartedly attending to legal/financial problems with his tenants; his much younger and beautiful wife is engaged in some sort of charity work but is bored, listless and resentful; his divorced sister who lives with them is also a bit of a problem. The mood reflects the dark and wintry landscape, the pace is slow, and there is a current of tension between the principal characters, sometimes surfacing in lengthy and heavily-freighted conversations (which occasionally teeter on the edge of didacticism). We know that Ceylan is a Chekhov and Dostoevsky enthusiast and once again it shows, as it did in **Once Upon a Time in Anatolia**: the Chekhovian ennui and sense of futility, of lives wasting away; and the moral preoccupations of Dostoevsky, the melodramatic intensity, the strange commerce of idealism and self-interest, the painful journey of self-discovery. The scene in the tenants’ house might have come directly from a Dostoevsky novel while the general narrative is inspired by several Chekhov stories. Like Dostoevsky, Ceylan generates interest in and sympathy for all the characters, each with their own flaws and foibles, their own wounds and sorrows, their own impenetrable inner lives. Both the characterisation and the performances are rich and deep. Once again cinematography by Gökhan Tiryaki, quite splendid. It’s long but our interest never flags. This one also did very well on the international arthouse circuit. I think I like **Winter Sleep** even better than **Once Upon a Time in Anatolia**.

Some of the reviewers were quite spiteful and not a little obtuse about the protagonist, Aydin, who is surely much more complex (and contradictory) than such critics allow. Manhola Dargis’ review in the *NY Times* (accessible through IMDb) might be adduced as an irritating case in point.



## WINTER WAR, THE

1989 F 4.00 7.6 FIN

**Parrika, Pekka**

Karl Sohlberg

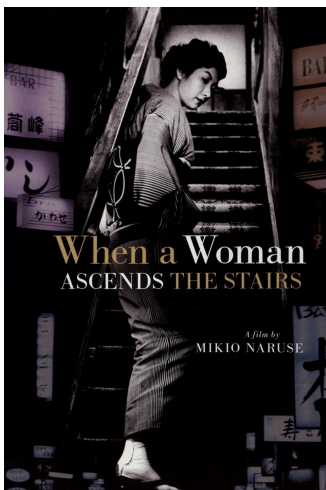
Taneli Mäkelä, Vesa Vierikko,  
Timo Torfikka

Squad of Finnish soldiers fighting in the Russo-Finnish War of 1939 in which an invasion by a numerically overwhelming Russian force was repelled by an inexperienced and ill-equipped army. The fighting lasted 105 days before the Russians capitulated. Ferocious wartime carnage interrupted by small domestic scenes from the home front. The best sequence is a short but tender love scene between a soldier on leave and his wife.

This brutal, bloody and “immersive”, certainly not for the faint of heart or the squeamish. Makes most Hollywood combat movies of the classical period look sentimental and silly. (More recent Hollywood combat movies are very heavy on gore but the sentimentality, of various sorts, usually remains: **Saving Private Ryan** is one of the more embarrassing exemplars.) **The Winter War** is both a homage to the Finnish soldiers and an excoriating depiction of the horrors of war, shot in a lively, sometimes jittery style, with night scenes predominating. The production values are on the low-rent side but these are largely overcome by the force of the gut-wrenching story. The murky colour and somewhat fuzzy visuals may simply be a function of a poor print. You would be best advised to seek out the Blu-ray.

Based on a novel by Antti Tuuri. The original film was 199 minutes. This cut was 122 — quite long enough!

Finnish title: **Talvisota**



## WOMAN ASCENDS STAIRS

1960 F 5.00 8.2 JAP

**Naruse, Mikio**

Hideko Takamine, Tatsuya  
Nakadai, Masayuki Mori

Story of a modern-day “mama-san”/hostess in a cocktail bar for wealthy businessmen, trying to preserve her dignity and her moral and emotional integrity in a world where everything is for sale, and where youth and beauty are at a premium. Problems – professional, financial, familial and emotional. The adorable Hideko Takamine is quite heart-breaking in the central role; and with what subtlety Naruse exploits her quiet expressive power! Hideko Takamine is one of the few actors who can be mentioned in the same breath as the sublime Setsuko Hara.

Sombre, melancholy, nuanced, deft, delicate, graceful, restrained, powerful. Quite a different feel from **A Wife's Heart**: less like Ozu, more like Antonioni (the difference is more in tone and look than in the actual cinematography/editing). Right at the minute this is my favourite Naruse film, along with **Yearning**.

Hideko Takamine died in 2010, aged 86. Naruse only became a well-known and respected director after his death. He should have been up there with Ozu, Mizoguchi and Kurosawa all along; he's every bit as good.

The full title is **When a Woman Ascends the Stairs**. Great title, great film!



## WOMAN IN THE TYPHOON

1948 F 3.75 7.3 JAP

**Oba, Hideo**

Setsuko Hara, Takashi Kanda,  
Kamon Kawamura

Claustrophobic, breathless and slightly hysterical Japanese drama with noir/gangster overtones and a story similar to that of **Key Largo**. Nurse/gangster's moll (Setsuko!) and a bunch of desperado pirates are stranded on a remote island meteorological station after their ship founders. They hold captive (well, sort of) a bunch of clean-skin meteorologists. A typhoon is approaching and so too, perhaps, the coastguard. Trouble for the Bad Guys and the "Bad" Girl too! The pirates not only face imminent capture, they have their own rivalries, neuroses and fears to deal with. The film has three narrative dynamics: the intra-gang tensions; the slowly shifting balance of power between the pirates and their captives; and Setsuko's internal struggle to come to terms with her own moral trajectory and with the bleak situation in which she now finds herself. Setsuko like we've never seen her before! (She became known as "The Eternal Virgin"; none of that here!) It also has a perfunctory theme about selfishness and the "common good".

It's rough around the edges with some heavy-handed effects. You can only show waves crashing into rocks so many times! And it has none of the subtlety and poise we associate with high-end Japanese cinema. But the thing does have some grip and makes for a lively 68 minutes of entertainment.

One of the great film titles!



## WOMAN'S PLACE, A

1962 F 4.25 7.4 JAP

Naruse, Mikio

Hideko Takamine, Yôko Tsukasa,  
Yuriko Hoshi, Haruko Sugimura,  
Chisu Ryu, Daisuke Kato

Ensemble family drama in which Naruse maintains a poised control over the large gallery of characters and the subtle tensions and currents in a post-war Tokyo family. (Some reminiscences of **Tokyo Story** but in less tragic register.) A quiet, mellow film, not as bleak as some of Naruse's early offerings nor as melodramatic as some of his later work. Hideko is wonderful, as always, but is only one of a fine cast. She's not really stretched in this role and her predicament is much less painfully dramatized than in other Naruse films with the same themes. Nice to see Haruko Sugimura in one her gentler and more benign roles, and Chisu Ryu does pretty well without any teeth. Yôko Tsukasa (Natsuko) is yet another heavenly creature who recalls a younger Hideko. Many Narusian themes and motifs reappear here: postwar Westernization, economic pressures, the predicament of women and changing mores about marriage, family tensions, the highly competitive educational system. The film is in a minor key, less powerful than Naruse's best but a very accomplished film by a director who has nothing to prove. However, in some ways **A Woman's Place** can be seen as a warm-up for the two masterpieces yet to come, **Yearning** (64) where we see one of Hideko's most compelling performances and **Scattered Clouds** (67) in which Yôko Tsukasa really comes into her own. **A Woman's Place** is often situated in a loose trilogy with **As a Wife, as a Woman** (61) and **A Woman's Story** (63), all featuring Hideko and all generally dismissed as "minor work". But given that we're talking Naruse, "minor" is a very relative term. I think this is the best of this trilogy. Aka **A Woman's Status**.



## ZAMA

2017 F 4.00 8.7 ARG

### Martel, Lucrecia

Rui Poças

Daneil Giménez Cacho, Lola  
Dudeñas, Mariana Nunes

Late 18thC. Diego de Zama, a Spanish officer and magistrate in the remote colony of Asunción, has been waiting for years for a transfer back to Buenos Aires to rejoin his family. He is a small cog in the vast, unwieldy imperial machine bringing its malign legacy to the land and its indigenous peoples. Zama is a cultured and essentially decent involved in the oppression of the native people and in the corrupt administration of 'justice'. Over a period of time he is overcome by the lassitude and venality of the colonial administration, the avarice and complacency of the governor, the unspoken reproaches of the subjected peoples, many of whom move through his somewhat surreal world as ghostly presences. Matters are made worse by a plague of cholera. Zama is both perpetrator and victim of a profoundly unjust colonial system.

Zama creates an extraordinary fusion of past and present, and perhaps future as well, in a deeply resonant, disturbing, hallucinatory and poetic work in which beauty, yearning, terror, violence and ennui all play a part. It has elements of the 'madness-in-the-jungle' story and recalls the work of various filmmakers, most notably perhaps Werner Herzog and Ciro Guerra. But it stakes out its own ground. Based on the celebrated novel of Antonio De Benedetto, published in 1956. The Almodovar brothers had a hand in the production. The interview with director Lucrecia Martel on the Extras (on the Blu-ray release) is worth a look. **Zama** didn't break any records at the Box Office but most of the critics liked a lot, as I did.



## ZERO DE CONDUITE

1933    F    4.00    7.5    FRA

### Vigo, Jean

Louis Lefebvre, Jean Daste, Leon  
Larive

Boarding School Anarchy. Bunch of knockabout French schoolboys get up to all sorts of hi-jinx and bring about mayhem. Forty minutes of chaos. Take 4 parts of Jean Vigo, three of Boris Kaufman (cameraman), one of Charlie Chaplin, and garnish with a dash of early Buñuel and you get this surreal, absurdist, visually inventive comedy.

I preferred Vigo's **À Propos de Nice (1930)** which I saw at the same time, but this was good fun and no doubt a significant film in the history of French cinema. **ZC** was one of the inspirations for Lindsay Anderson's *If...* (68), a film which caused a big splash at the time but is now, deservedly, pretty much forgotten. **ZC** isn't.